

Why people go to foodbanks



A year of
advice-giving
at Glasgow
South East
Foodbank

**CASTLEMILK LAW AND
MONEY ADVICE CENTRE**



Why people go to foodbanks

Foreword

In the past four years in south east Glasgow there has been a step change in the demand for Law Centre services. We have been acting for clients with social welfare problems since 1979. Nearly all of our clients have been on very low incomes but until recently it was extremely unusual to see anyone without any income at all.

It is now quite common for clients to be completely destitute. This has happened at the same time as quite radical changes in social security and local housing.

We have worked to address this problem along with other local agencies. In particular we have worked with Glasgow South East Foodbank, which did not start up until 2012. We have taken on hundreds of cases at the foodbank, providing basic advice and more detailed casework.

We have looked at the reasons why our clients attended the foodbank. This was nearly always due to a particular event and not just lack of money in general. We also looked at the legal aspects of their problems. This enabled us to provide appropriate legal services, and also to start to build a picture of the new conditions emerging in south east Glasgow.

This report illustrates the problems of the people who attended the foodbank between October 2014 and September 2015. In some ways it is surprising and in some ways predictable. For example, we saw few people with benefit sanctions or on low pay. But we did find that the majority of people were sick or disabled. Also, as many as 90% of those attending had social security or housing problems.

Perhaps most surprisingly, we found that improvements in local social security and housing provision could have substantially reduced the need for the foodbank. These improvements could have been achieved at little or no cost, and often a better standard of decision-making was all that was necessary to prevent a visit to the foodbank. The dramatic increase in foodbank use was not simply caused by deterioration in the economy.

This report sets out the detail of what we found and proposes measures to alleviate the problems which lead to people using foodbanks.

We are very grateful to all those who made comments and contributed to this report. The author is however responsible for any omissions or inaccuracies.

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Summary

Over the course of a year, from October 2014 to September 2015, solicitors from Castlemilk Law and Money Advice Centre took on 246 cases at the Glasgow South East Foodbank at Govanhill. This is by far the largest foodbank in this area of Glasgow.

We found that the foodbank was used by three groups – those with benefit problems, those with housing problems and migrant workers. All of the people we represented were either destitute or in severe poverty.

Very few of our clients were migrant workers. Other agencies specialise in helping migrant workers and we work alongside them. During the period, **2,638 vouchers** were presented to the foodbank with **552 from migrant workers** and **2,086 from others**. Some people attended more than once and we estimate that these numbers represent around **1,500 individuals**. Most of those attending the foodbank were single adults.

Accordingly, the **246 individuals** we acted for represent around one in six of those attending. Most of those who did not seek our help informed us that they were getting advice from other agencies in the area.

Some of our findings were particularly notable:

- 547 of the 2,086 vouchers were issued by officials at local Job Centres,
- over 70% of all those attending had benefit problems (175 out of 246), and
- over 70% of the cases we took on were from clients who were sick or had disabilities (87 out of 124).

These figures do not include migrant workers. It was quite clear that those from the migrant communities using the foodbank suffered a much higher level of destitution, and were even worse off than other sections of the community.

Of the **124 clients** who came to see us, **90, or 72%**, had benefit problems and **25, or 20%**, had housing problems (though these included **11 Housing Benefit** and **5 rent arrears** cases).

There was no single over-riding benefit issue. It was not the case for example that the Department of Work and Pensions (the "DWP") had imposed benefit sanctions on a majority of the people we saw. Rather there was a much more comprehensive failure in the benefit system. Problems were caused by sanctions, but also by clearly incorrect decisions by DWP officials which were reversed on review or appeal. Claimants had also received inappropriate benefit advice, and there were excessive deductions from their benefits. Some claimants had failed to claim their full benefit entitlements.

Those with housing problems were mostly either homeless, or private sector tenants who did not have enough money for both food and high private sector rents.

Other people had a range of miscellaneous problems, but low wages did not feature highly. Only **3 out of the 246 clients** mentioned employment problems as a reason for foodbank attendance.

Over **90% of our clients** had justiciable problems. This means they could be resolved by negotiation or by an application to the appropriate tribunal or court. This finding was consistent with the experience of other advisers in the area. It was also consistent with the foodbank's statistics for those attending who did not seek our assistance.

Our conclusion is therefore that administration problems in regard to social security and homelessness provision are contributing to the increased use of foodbanks. If these problems could be solved then reliance on foodbanks could be substantially reduced.



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We believe that recognition of the following 12 objectives would be helpful:

- 1 The need for foodbanks should be reduced – everybody should have enough to eat
- 2 Stringent benefit conditions should not be the cause of increased levels of destitution
- 3 Payment of benefits should be a primary method of preventing destitution
- 4 ESA claimants should not be forced on to JSA – further protections are needed
- 5 Where a claimant has a significant health problem, benefit should not be withdrawn. There should be greater liaison between the DWP and the NHS
- 6 There should be payment of benefits during mandatory reconsideration
- 7 Hardship payments should be automatic
- 8 Sanctions should be abolished
- 9 There should be an income floor for everyone
- 10 Private tenancies should be better regulated
- 11 Either private rents should be limited or Housing Benefit increased
- 12 Councils should have greater powers to prevent homelessness

1 Introduction – Glasgow SE Foodbank and Law Centre services

Glasgow South East Foodbank is one of four major foodbanks supported by the Trussell Trust in Glasgow. It operates in the Govanhill area of the city and has been doing so since 2012. In the past four years it has seen demand for its services increase dramatically, going from feeding **600** foodbank clients in 2012 to **over 7,000** in 2016.

By the beginning of 2014 there were around **12 foodbanks** in south east Glasgow. There were **almost 50** throughout Glasgow as a whole. The Law Centre made contact with around half of the foodbanks in the area. There was a wide range of provision. Many of the foodbanks were provided by local churches. Some foodbanks involved an open café in a church hall with the added provision of free clothing provided by local parishioners. Some amounted to foodstuffs located in a cupboard which were available to particular sections of the community as and when required. Some were run from community centres by individuals who wished to help those in need.

These smaller foodbanks were very valuable for local people but often helped only a handful, or at most dozens, of individuals.

The Trussell Trust foodbanks tend to be larger in scale. Each one works with local agencies. Local participating agencies determine whether the problems of someone using their services are serious enough for a referral to the foodbank. If so, the agency gives the individual a voucher and asks them to present this at the foodbank, which is open three days per week for one and a half hours each day.

Castlemilk Law & Money Advice Centre is one of the foodbank's referring agencies. We concentrate on social welfare law problems often representing clients at benefit or employment tribunals, or at court on housing or debt issues.

The Law Centre started to provide an advice service at the Glasgow South East Foodbank from September 2014. One of our solicitors still attends each foodbank session.

Over the course of the year, a Law Centre solicitor was in attendance at the Glasgow South East Trussell Trust Foodbank on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Posters and leaflets produced by the Law Centre were clearly displayed in the foodbank premises. Those attending the foodbank were alerted to the presence of the Law Centre solicitor and asked if they required advice on any issues. The majority of individuals indicated that they were already receiving advice. Some people said that they did not need advice.

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Apart from those presented by migrant workers, foodbank volunteers received **2,086 vouchers**. It is difficult to assess how many of these were repeat attenders. It is possible for an individual to attend the foodbank on six occasions throughout the year in terms of the stated policy. In exceptional circumstances this might be extended. However, from the Law Centre's experience most people will come in once or twice and it is unusual for individuals to have as many as six vouchers, although not unknown.

The Law Centre took on **190 individuals** from the foodbank. All were offered basic advice there and then and an appointment arranged at one of the local Law Centre offices. **68** of the **190 clients** attended their appointment and the case proceeded as a normal Law Centre case. Basic advice was given to **122 clients** who did not keep the appointment made for them. In addition to this we referred **56 existing clients** to the foodbank.

In our estimation, this amounts to between one-sixth and one-eighth of the individuals attending the foodbank. This does not include those referred by immigration services. Some foodbank clients attend the foodbank on a handful of occasions, but the vast majority only attend once or twice. Of the other five-sixths to seven-eighths, a number had already been referred by other advisers in the area such as those working for Money Advice Agencies or Housing Associations.

2 Who is using the foodbank?

In the short term there is clearly an urgent need for emergency food aid provided by local foodbanks. Demand has increased dramatically since 2008. In that period Trussell Trust foodbanks alone have gone from providing **25,000 food parcels** per year to providing over **1.1 million** last year. The figure has been around 1 million in each of the last three years.

Longer term however there are great risks in allowing foodbanks to become accepted and standard components of social welfare provision. People go to foodbanks for emergency aid, but this is limited and normally lasts only three days. Foodbanks are volunteer-based charities and cannot be expected to solve deep-rooted problems of poverty and destitution. After a foodbank client leaves the foodbank with a food parcel, that individual is still destitute and will still be facing problems on the fourth day. Many people have similar problems and do not or cannot access a foodbank. Trussell Trust foodbanks should only issue three parcels to any one client in a six month period.

It is therefore very important to identify the needs of the individuals who attend in order to work out how to address the underlying problems leading to increased foodbank use. The Law Centre advised the clients we saw at the foodbank and we also gathered some general statistics on clients' backgrounds. This allowed us to collate the information and draw the following conclusions.

Foodbank clients had many characteristics in common:

- Many attending were migrant workers with little income and limited English
- Of the remainder, many were signposted to the foodbank by the DWP
- Most people attending had justiciable problems. (That is, they were not simply there because they were too poor to afford food, but because they had been affected by a decision or event which was legally challengeable, and resolvable by a tribunal or a court.)
- Over two-thirds of non-migrants were unfit to work or had a disability.

Those attending were clearly the most vulnerable members of the community.

Many of those attending the foodbank had difficulties following up on basic advice despite the fact their problem could have been resolved by further action. There was a noticeable resistance to challenging bureaucratic decisions. This was a common observation among advisers from a number of local advice agencies, and is discussed in more detail below.

The Law Centre saw **246 clients** who attended the foodbank during the course of the year. In many cases only basic advice was given, and in other cases foodbank clients followed this up with attendance at the Law Centre. **122 clients** were given basic advice at the foodbank. An additional **68 clients** attended the Law Centre. We ourselves referred **56 existing clients** who had not previously attended the foodbank.

It was difficult to assess the detail of clients' problems from a brief interview at the foodbank. Of the **122 clients** we saw only briefly at the foodbank, **85** had benefit problems with an additional **27** having housing problems.

We saw the other **124 clients** at the Law Centre and their cases proceeded as normal. We were of course able to glean much more information and provide more extensive advice to the clients who attended the Law Centre. The following table gives a breakdown of all **246** cases.



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Table 1 - Total cases

	Basic advice	Cases	Cases referred from LC	Total
Benefits - total	85	45	45	175
Benefits - disability-related		28	35	
Benefits - non-disability-related		17	10	
Housing	27	16	9	52
Debt	6	4	2	12
Employment	1	2	0	3
Immigration	1	0	0	1
Misc	2	0	0	2
Negl/consumer	0	1	0	1
Total	122	68	56	246

We were able to create a profile of the **68 clients** we first saw at the foodbank and the **56** we referred there. The following table gives a breakdown of these **124 clients** by household and gender.

Table 2 - Foodbank clients by household type and gender

		Male	Female
Single adult	78	49	29
Lone parent	19	3	16
Couple with dependents	10		
Couple without dependents	5		
Other	4	4	0
Not known	8	4	4
Total	124	60	49

It is notable that **78** of the **124 clients** were single adults. Indeed **97 clients**, that is **almost 80%**, were either single adults or lone parents, with single men forming by far the largest single group.

We were also able to profile clients by age. **Nearly 85%** were between the ages of **30** and **60** as shown in table 3.

Table 3 - Foodbank clients by age and gender


Age		Male	Female
21 - 30	7	4	3
31 - 40	30	11	19
41 - 50	40	18	22
51 - 60	34	21	13
61 - 70	7	4	3
Not known	6		
Total	124	58	60

The most striking statistic to emerge from the study related to disability. **87 clients** out of the **total of 124** had a disability. This amounts to **over 70%** of those whose cases we took on. A further **6** had an illness at the time they attended the foodbank.

Almost half of the clients we saw at the Law Centre had mental health problems.

Table 4 - Foodbank clients by disability type

Disability / illness	
None	27
Mental health problems	61
Mobility problems	10
Learning disability other impairment	3
Long term illness	13
Short term illness	6
Not known	4
Total	124



Over 70% of the cases we took on were from clients who were sick or disabled

The high number of clients with disabilities was reflected in the legal problems reported. **90** of the **124 cases** involved benefit problems and **63 involved** disability-related benefits.

Unsurprisingly, a detailed analysis of all of this indicates that it is the most vulnerable members of the community who need to be referred to foodbanks. People attending the foodbank usually had health problems, and usually had to contend with unlawful benefit or housing decisions, problems which were perfectly capable of being resolved.

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3 Reasons for attendance

All Trussell Trust foodbanks operate a referral service. This means an external referral agency has to assess an individual's circumstances before issuing a foodbank voucher. The agency vouches that the individual needs the service. Trussell Trust Foodbank clients do not get a food parcel without a voucher.

There will be a wide variety of approaches amongst agencies. An advice agency might go over a client's income and realise that the person cannot afford to buy food. A Housing Association may have an adviser who notices a tenant's rent arrears going up and realises that the tenant has reduced income. The Job Centre may reduce a claimant's benefit and send them to the foodbank because they know the individual is going to struggle to pay for food.

In our sample of **246** foodbank and Law Centre clients, **175**, that is, **over 70%**, had benefit problems. Often clients had been taken off disability-related benefits and either left with nothing or forced to claim other benefits which were entirely inappropriate for them. Many foodbank clients had serious disabilities. Some clients had been sanctioned. Others were the victims of maladministration or had started a claim and the payments had not yet come through.

We challenged the DWP's decision on behalf of the client or tried to negotiate a resolution, but in the meantime the client was still left with insufficient income. Even when proceeding to a review or an appeal, a benefit claimant can remain on a much lower income for weeks or months.

This is particularly galling when clients have a good case. They can be left to tolerate months of privation then receive a back-dated payment of thousands of pounds when they are successful. The DWP is no worse off, but the claimant has to endure great stress and financial difficulties which often includes attendance at the foodbank.

The next biggest problem was housing. Of the **25 clients** for which we had detailed information, **6 were homeless, 5 had rent arrears** and **11 had mainly private sector housing benefit problems**. It is difficult to be clear about the **27 clients** who only received basic advice, but **21** of these stated they were homeless.

Very few were tenants of social landlords. Many of the cases involved private sector tenants with local housing allowance problems. Local housing allowance is a form of housing benefit for the private sector. There is likely to be a shortfall between a private sector rent and the local housing allowance. The tenant, who is often on a very low income, has to make this up. This pushes tenants deeper into poverty making it difficult to afford to buy food. This is also of course a benefit problem.



Many people attending the foodbank had nowhere to live. Some people were living in bed and breakfast accommodation, some people were living with friends, and some people were in temporary homeless accommodation. Whatever the circumstances, clients' lives were critically unstable and this made it impossible to cope with ordinary domestic activities.

Of the other reasons given by those attending the foodbank, **12 had debt problems** and other issues such as employment or consumer problems amounted to less than half of this. It was notable that only **3 people attended with employment problems** and these involved low pay, the loss of a job or a delay in payment of wages.

Of the **124 individuals** whose cases were dealt with in detail, **87, or nearly 70%, had a health problem** or a **disability**. **61 of the 87 had a mental health problem**.

It was particularly noticeable that those attending the foodbank already had problems coping with day to day life and the additional problem of reduced benefits or insecure housing made things intolerable.


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4 Who refers people to the Foodbank?

Between October 2014 and September 2015, **2,638 vouchers** were presented to the Glasgow South East Foodbank. **552** of these were from agencies helping migrant workers and **2,086** were from other types of agency. Of the 2,086, **1,900 came from five types of agency** and the **other 186 were from a range of organisations**. The 1,900 vouchers were issued by the following types of agency:-

Table 5 - Foodbank voucher fulfilled Oct 14 to Sep 15

Organisation	
Job Centres	547
Advice agencies	438
Housing Associations	382
Churches	276
Social Work Dept	257
	1,900
Others	186
Total	2,086



In total, foodbank clients presented **2,638 vouchers** to the foodbank. This does not mean that 2,638 individuals attended at or were fed by the foodbank. Some individuals may have attended on more than one occasion. Also, although the majority of foodbank vouchers were for individuals, a substantial number of vouchers were for families and many of these were large families. The 2,638 vouchers as a whole **fed nearly 7,000 people**, many of them children.

These figures show that **547** of the **2,086 referrals** were made by the five **Job Centres** in the area. The next largest type of referrer was advice organisations. These included Law Centres, Money Advice Centres and other types of adviser. Ten **housing associations** made **382 referrals**. A large number of church groups made referrals and the Social Work Department was in regular contact.

Each type of organisation made referrals in different ways.

a Advice agencies

After immigration services and Job Centres, advice agencies were the most common type of referral agency. **438 vouchers** were presented to the foodbank from **advice agencies**. Referrals were made by Money Advice Centres, Law Centres and other advisers. Advisers or solicitors

identified clients who were unable to afford food and completed a voucher for them. The vast majority of clients were referred due to benefit problems. Some clients were referred on a number of occasions.

b Housing Associations

There are fifteen housing associations in south east Glasgow and ten of them made referrals to the foodbank throughout the year. The foodbank received **382 vouchers** from people **referred by housing associations**.

Housing associations used a range of methods to refer individuals. All housing associations have housing officers who provide a service to tenants and their families in their locality. Housing officers will be aware of many of the problems experienced by their tenants and will try to help where they can.

Most of the housing associations in the area have advisers who can help tenants with a range of particular problems. These might include maximising their income by helping them apply for benefits or advising on debt problems. Housing associations and their advisers will ensure that a claim is made for a discretionary housing payment if bedroom tax is imposed, for example.

Some of the local housing associations identified tenants in extreme poverty and arranged for them to go to the foodbank with a voucher. Some housing associations even arranged for their workers to attend the foodbank on behalf of tenants. The workers picked up food parcels for tenants and brought them back. This was especially helpful if tenants had disabilities and lived some distance away from the foodbank.

c Social Work Department

City of Glasgow Council Social Work Department has a number of offices in south east Glasgow. Their basic statutory duties involve providing services to ensure the safety and protection of vulnerable adults, young people and children and to ensure that children have appropriate levels of care. They can provide help, for example, to prevent children being taken into care.

As part of their day to day activities, social workers regularly come into contact with individuals or families who have to contend with a sudden crisis or an emergency. Families with these severe problems often need emergency food aid. The Social Work Department has "duty workers" who are on call to deal with such problems. The Department has established arrangements with the foodbank to provide food parcels to social work service users through the voucher system.

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d Immigration services

Many migrant workers have only recently arrived in the country. They often experience difficulty getting well-paid employment and secure and adequate accommodation. This means that migrant workers can be some of the poorest and most insecure members of the community. In south east Glasgow specific agencies provide a great deal of help to people in these circumstances. The Law Centre works alongside the agencies which provide these direct services. Specific agencies in the area provide help to migrant workers. The issues arising for this group go beyond the scope of this report.

The foodbank is an essential component in the overall mix of services. Low pay often results in migrant workers being unable to afford food. Local agencies help with the provision of food where necessary and issue foodbank vouchers to those who need emergency food aid. There is a very great local need - the foodbank receives the highest number of vouchers from local immigration services.

In Govanhill there is a large population of Roma people who have a history of exclusion from society in general. Many Roma are exploited and do not even receive the minimum wage. They rely on private sector accommodation and need to use the foodbank and local services for food.

e Department of Work and Pensions

The DWP do not formally refer benefit claimants to the foodbank, they merely signpost claimants who they think might need the service. They do still complete a voucher for each of the individuals they send over and in 2014-15 the foodbank received a total of **547 vouchers** issued by **local Job Centres**. This was the highest number of vouchers received from any agency or group of agencies apart from The Space, who deal with migrant workers. It appeared that all of the individuals who were directed to the foodbank by the DWP had benefit problems. In addition we estimated that **almost 70%** of those who attended from all agencies were **experiencing benefit problems** and this was the reason for their attendance.

There are local Job Centres at Laurieston, Newlands, Castlemilk, Langside and Partick and the foodbank received vouchers from all of them. It was particularly notable that, leaving aside migrant workers, **Job Centres** were responsible for **26% of vouchers received**. The vast majority of problems experienced by clients seen by ourselves related to benefit problems. These are described in more detail below.

Of the benefit problems we encountered, there were a wide range of issues which threw up problems across the benefit system. It was not simply the case that benefit claimants were sanctioned, left with no income and then had to go to the foodbank. Clients experienced problems in regard to appeals and reviews, deductions from benefit, delays in payment, and being wrongfully taken off benefit.

5 Specific needs – benefit and housing cases

The most striking characteristic of Law Centre foodbank clients was illness or disability. Most clients had a significant or serious health problem, usually a mental health problem, often a physical problem, or both. We therefore often encountered disability-related benefit problems although many clients with health problems also had a housing dispute.

a Benefit Cases


In nearly all cases, benefit problems resulted in client's income reducing sometimes to zero. Benefit claimants faced different procedural problems and these are categorised as follows:-

- i Mandatory Reconsideration and Tribunal Appeals
- ii Sanctions
- iii Deductions
- iv Delays in payment
- v General benefit problems

The following table shows the types of benefit problems experienced by clients who were seen at the foodbank and then attended the Law Centre for follow-up work. These cases are analysed in terms of the procedural problems affecting the client. Often the case involved asking the DWP to reconsider a decision they had made which reduced the client's benefit. Sometimes it was necessary for the client to claim the correct benefit.

Table 6 - Benefit cases by procedure

Procedure	
Mandatory reconsideration or appeal	14
Sanction	4
Delay	2
Suspension	1
Termination	1
Deduction	3
New claim or benefit check	14
Miscellaneous	6
Total	45



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i Mandatory Reconsideration and Tribunal Appeals

Benefit claimants who have been adversely affected by a DWP decision have to apply for a review of that decision. If the review is still adverse, the claimant can appeal in writing to a benefit tribunal within one month of the review. It has only been compulsory to apply for a review since October 2013, before then you could go straight to a tribunal. The additional step in procedure, known as "mandatory reconsideration", can often cause serious problems.

The following illustrates types of procedural problems experienced by clients.

In one case a client's income had reduced due to their Personal Independence Payment stopping. This had the knock-on effect that their Employment and Support Allowance reduced and deductions were made to their Housing Benefit. We had to seek a review of this decision but in the meantime the client lost £50 to £60 per week and needed foodbank help due to this sudden loss of income.

Another client had their Employment and Support Allowance ("ESA") stopped. When this happens clients are faced with the dilemma of doing without benefit completely or claiming Jobseeker's Allowance ("JSA"). In cases like this clients are often not physically capable of meeting the requirements of JSA. This benefit involves agreeing to "claimant commitments" which might mean going to a series of meetings or attending interviews. Claimants with serious health problems find this very difficult and often cannot cope with the DWP's expectations. The DWP can then take the individual off JSA and leave them destitute. In this case the benefit tribunal reinstated the client's ESA but in the meantime the client had substantially reduced income and used the foodbank for this reason.

A third client suffered from psychosis, depression and paranoia. The DWP decision to terminate ESA had been made at a hearing many miles away. The client's case had been dealt with entirely inappropriately. We were able to reapply successfully for ESA for the client but in the meantime they had to use the foodbank.

Another client had physical and mental health problems and was taken off ESA until we applied for a mandatory reconsideration. In another case a client suffering from asthma, sciatica and other ailments was refused Personal Independence Payment and their income was reduced while the family's benefits were reconfigured.

In all of these cases the individuals concerned needed help from the foodbank due to a sudden reduction in benefit. Nearly all of these clients suffered from serious health problem and were on Employment and Support Allowance, Personal Independence Payment ("PIP") or both.

These problems often have a knock-on effect for other benefits. One client whose ESA was eventually reinstated and backdated was also taken off Housing Benefit.

A client who suffered from high blood pressure, depression and anxiety and other conditions successfully appealed against being taken off ESA but had to apply for JSA in the meantime. A client with serious mental health problems was only put back on ESA after appeal. A client with severe depression was refused PIP but this was overturned after a successful appeal.

In all these cases, clients had substantially less income than they were entitled to and they had to use the foodbank for emergency food aid.



Many clients' difficulties are exacerbated by bureaucratic mismanagement. One client who had successfully appealed against refusal of ESA continued on a low income because the DWP said they were not aware of the successful appeal. Another client did not receive ESA when the DWP claimed they had not received a questionnaire.

Clients face particular difficulty during the review and appeal process while benefit is reduced. Sometimes this is particularly problematic. In one case a client who had children with disabilities had substantially reduced income until she won her appeal.

Even clients whose disabilities are patently obvious are taken off ESA. One client could only walk with the aid of walking sticks and another had serious physical disabilities. Both were taken off ESA. It can take many months to have a client's benefit reinstated and in the meantime they are left with substantially reduced income.

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ii Sanctions

Sanctions occur when a DWP official thinks a claimant has not been co-operating properly. They typically affect JSA claimants but there are also substantial sanctions affecting ESA claimants. Sanctions were a significant problem for those attending the foodbank, but they did not affect a majority. Attendance was caused by a range of benefit problems and being sanctioned was only one of these.

There were however some serious problems. In one case a client had severe sensory problems and generally found it very difficult to cope with day to day activities. He had been put on JSA which was inappropriate in itself and then had been sanctioned due to failing to attend meetings with DWP staff. We were able to have his JSA sanctions reinstated and then arranged for him to claim ESA.

Another client with fairly obvious mental health problems had also been put on JSA and due to his condition his relationship with the DWP had broken down. He had also been sanctioned and we arranged a more appropriate benefit provision for him.

iii Deductions

There are around a dozen or more types of deduction which can be made from benefits, usually JSA or ESA. These might be for Social Fund loans, Council Tax arrears, rent arrears, electricity or gas arrears or other common types of debt. Although there are limits to the amount of the deductions, even a comparatively small deduction can have a serious effect on a claimant's income.

One client had deductions for a Social Fund loan and Council Tax arrears and this resulted in a significant reduction in JSA. We were able to reduce these deductions and also arrange for the client to claim ESA.

In another case a client who was on the support group for ESA, which indicates that he had substantial disabilities, had his benefit significantly reduced to cover outstanding Social Fund loans, Council Tax arrears and rent arrears. This client suffered from anxiety, panic attacks and physical disabilities. He could not afford to buy food and had to use the foodbank.

The DWP frequently make deductions from current benefit for amounts they claim have previously been overpaid. This continues while the claimant is challenging a DWP decision. In one case the DWP mistakenly paid more than the client's basic entitlement. This was entirely due to the DWP's own error. They then sought the return of the overpayment by deductions from the client's benefit. The client challenged this and was successful on appeal, but the DWP continued to make deductions in the meantime. During this period the client had to use the foodbank.

iv Delays in Payment

There are a number of reasons for benefit payments being delayed. Some delays are the fault of the DWP, and some have other causes.

One of our clients had benefits suspended for a substantial part of the year after an allegation of fraud. It turned out that although there had been a problem, this had nothing to do with our client but his benefit had been suspended while investigations took place. This resulted in an offer by the DWP of a backdated payment, but in the meantime the client had been taken off benefits.

In another case a client had been taken off ESA because he had not attended a meeting. The letter from the DWP requesting the meeting had gone astray. Another client needed a Scottish Welfare Fund grant when the employer delayed sending the DWP confirmation of employment details.

v General benefit problems

In many cases claimants are receiving substantially less benefit than they are entitled to. This frequently happens at the same time as other problems.

For example, a client who should have been receiving Personal Independence Payments due to poor mental health was having problems staying at home and needed to claim housing as a homeless person. He needed legal advice on both of these issues. Another client was left destitute when her husband left and she needed substantial help in reorganising her income.

In another case, a client, an EU national, was being exploited by her employer. She was receiving less than the minimum wage and was not receiving benefits to which she was entitled. A client with a disabled son attended the foodbank. This client was destitute but was entitled to substantial sums due to her son's disability.

A client suffering from depression, seizures and substantial mental health problems was only on minimum level ESA but should have been entitled to PIP as well. We had a case where a client was on reduced ESA due to previous problems with tax credits. The client should have been on PIP and we helped him with this. In the meantime he required emergency food aid from the foodbank. Another client with mental health problems needed help with migration from DLA to PIP and benefit was reduced in the meantime. A client who should have been on PIP due to mental health problems was being substantially underpaid and we required to help him with a Scottish Welfare Fund claim.

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b Housing Cases

Foodbank clients presenting with housing problems fell into two categories - those experiencing difficulties with local housing allowance (that is Housing Benefit for private sector tenants), and those who were homeless. While social security benefits are generally administered by the Department of Work and Pensions as part of central government, Housing Benefit is administered by local Councils.

i Local Housing Allowance and the private sector

There are substantial differences between Housing Benefit in the private sector and Housing Benefit in the social sector. Social landlords typically try to set modest rents and as long as tenants are financially eligible, all of their rent may be covered by Housing Benefit.

In the private sector, Housing Benefit is known as a "local housing allowance" (LHA) and strict limits are placed on the level of rent covered by the benefit. Tenants on benefit will only be able to afford properties with low rents. A private sector tenant may not be able to continue with a tenancy after loss of employment. In many cases there will be a shortfall between rent and benefit even though a tenant is on a minimal income. The local housing allowance will not even cover average rents. Maximum LHA is limited to "the 30th percentile on a list of rents for the appropriate category of dwelling" in an area. In most cases tenants will be entitled to less than maximum LHA.

The operation of the local housing allowance system leads to a variety of problems for tenants.

For example, one client who attended the foodbank had been judged as being self-employed by the DWP. This was completely inappropriate and the client had very few hours of work at all. When the client came to claim a local housing allowance, the Council official dealing with the claim made an assessment which completely overestimated the client's "profits" from his self-employment and this resulted in a very low level of local housing allowance. The client was trying to pay as much rent as he could and this resulted in his having no income for food.

In another case a client's employer did not give him a wage slip and this prevented an assessment of local housing allowance. He still had to pay the rent and he had no money for food.

Many clients presenting with these sorts of problems have substantial medical problems and cannot cope with day to day life. One client with very low local housing allowance also suffered from a personality disorder and depression. He had to use some of his benefit for the shortfall in rent and needed the foodbank to get by.

Clients facing particular housing difficulties can apply to the Council for a "Discretionary Housing Payment". This is supposed to cover unexpected problems or difficulties when circumstances change. It is paid at the discretion of the local Council. There is no specific entitlement to the payment but it is fast becoming a necessity for many tenants.

The refusal of a DHP can cause severe problems. In one case a client who was seeing a psychiatrist due to serious mental health problems had gained additional benefits and DHP was refused because of this. This approach is contrary to the guidance given to Councils. Another client who was married and had two children was able to obtain additional benefit and this was again used as a reason for refusing a Discretionary Housing Payment. The officials refusing the DHPs in these cases had not taken into account the current rules as to which benefits should be counted as income and which should not.

In comparison with tenants in the social sector, tenants in the private sector are much more likely to come up against disreputable landlords. Some clients attending the foodbank reported to us that their landlords tried to dissuade them from claiming local housing allowance, presumably because they did not want the authorities making investigations into their background. In some cases this even went so far as the landlord reducing the rent in order to prevent any official involvement in their activities.

The main problem however is the shortfall between the LHA granted and the rent claimed by the landlord. Many tenants choose to pay the rent and are left short of money to pay for food.

This is not a choice that anyone should have to make, least of all those with serious health problems.

In other cases we had a couple who separated, leading to a reduction in income. The tenant remaining could not afford the rent and had to use the foodbank. Another client managed to move from the private sector to the social sector, but during the transition period her housing benefit was substantially reduced and the client did not have sufficient funds to cover both rent and food. Another client was illegally evicted by his private sector landlord and this instability resulted in him needing emergency food aid.

ii Homelessness

Many people who attended the foodbank were undergoing a severe crisis. It was notable that nearly all the clients at the foodbank with housing related problems were either in the private sector and experiencing difficulties with rent or local housing allowance, or they were homeless. Clients who were homeless had very precarious lifestyles and badly needed emergency food aid.

Many clients were living in temporary accommodation. One homeless client had been given bed and breakfast accommodation at an hotel and had to attend the foodbank when the little money she had ran out. Two more clients from outwith Glasgow had fled violence before coming here and were having problems finding permanent accommodation. They needed emergency food aid while their homelessness applications were dealt with.

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Other clients were challenging unlawful attempts to remove them from their houses. Their dependence on private sector tenancies left them isolated and vulnerable.

A number of people who attended the foodbank had been released from prison and had very little support. They had no accommodation and virtually no money. They had little choice but to attend the foodbank. At least one client in this situation was sleeping rough and others were depending on the help of friends for accommodation.

At least two clients were still living with their parents but finding it so difficult that they had to move out.

All of these clients were clearly entitled to permanent accommodation. The inability of the Council to grant them permanent housing as homeless persons resulted in their having no stability in their lives and they needed emergency food aid urgently.

Many of the clients we represented had substantial temporary problems. One client had mental health problems and found it difficult to maintain his tenancy. His landlords took action to remove him from the house and he had to go to the foodbank during this period. Another client became very unwell and was unable to continue with his job. He did not claim benefits and the resulting rent arrears caused his tenancy to become extremely insecure. Another client with a family was also a student and her low level of income and benefits resulted in rent arrears increasing rapidly. Her landlord helped her to access the foodbank until her income from benefits increased.

c Problems in challenging benefit decisions

We provided advice to 175 individuals who had been adversely affected by benefit decisions during our first year at the foodbank. However, as many as 85 of the 175 clients did not continue with their benefit case following our basic advice. This is consistent with an overall reduction in challenges to DWP decisions and is reflected in the experience of other advisors and advice agencies.

This general trend has led to a sharp reduction in the number of benefit tribunal hearings. Four years ago there were over 80 tribunal hearings per day in Glasgow with a backlog of 60,000 cases waiting to be heard. Now there is no backlog at all and the number of tribunal hearings has nearly halved.

There are a number of reasons for this. For a period fewer individuals were being denied or taken off ESA and this meant there were fewer adverse decisions to appeal. This was obviously very positive for people who were sick or disabled and depended on the benefit, but it does appear that the number of negative ESA decisions is now increasing again.

More controversially, from October 2013, the government brought in a new procedure - "mandatory reconsideration". This introduced a two stage process. Now claimants have to firstly apply to a DWP official for review, then secondly go to a benefit tribunal. The DWP official notifies the claimant of the decision in writing after the review. A certain percentage of reviews are successful for claimants and this reduces the number of tribunal hearings.

If however the review confirms the initial decision, then the claimant receives written notice of this and has to appeal in writing to the benefit tribunal. Often this is not clear to the claimant and instead it appears that the written notice after review is the conclusion of the proceedings. The claimant is dissuaded from appealing and this again leads to fewer tribunals.

Where claimants wish to appeal, they often need advice. They have to arrange for an appeal to be made in writing within one month of the date of the written notice. It can be difficult for claimants to find an adviser, make an appointment, see the adviser and decide whether or not to appeal all within this timescale. Often the claimant will not have seen an adviser prior to the review and once a suitable advice agency is found, an appointment might not be immediately available. All of this can be very off-putting, especially if the claimant is suffering poor health or has disabilities.

Many new obstacles to appealing have therefore been introduced in the past three years. This coincides with the period when Trussell Trust foodbank attendances alone have risen to over one million.

There are other reasons for reduced numbers of benefit tribunals apart from procedural changes.

In many cases, a claimant will be apprehensive about challenging a benefit decision. DWP officials already have a great deal of power over benefit recipients. Claimants on Jobseeker's Allowance or Universal Credit have to meet a set of commitments in order to continue to receive the benefit. The DWP also require those on ESA, especially those placed in the work-related activity group, to take steps to continue to qualify for the benefit. Claimants are aware that DWP officials can stop their benefit. This can cause a great deal of anxiety. At best, stopping benefit causes major inconvenience. At worst JSA claimants, for example, can be left with no income whatsoever and this can continue for three months, six months or even three years. This is catastrophic for the claimant who might be left destitute. This prospect is a major disincentive to challenging DWP decisions and this is reflected in the reduced number of benefit tribunals.

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Moreover, the individual claimants encountered at the foodbank were some of the most vulnerable members of the community and suffered very high levels of disability and lack of capacity. Coping with day to day activities is a full time task for those with serious physical disabilities or mental ill-health. A claimant on a disability-related benefit may have anxiety or depression or even more severe mental health problems. This may be the reason for the claim. Where there are serious mental health problems, it can be very difficult to find the confidence and determination to insist on legal remedies.

Finally, newspaper articles and television programmes tend to portray benefit claimants very negatively. They create the general impression that claimants do not deserve benefits and that these should be reduced where possible. This undermines benefits as a safety net for those who are unable to fend for themselves. It shifts the emphasis from the poverty suffered by the least able through no fault of their own, and instead misrepresents claimants as well-off or fraudulent. In fact, levels of poverty are extremely high, and actual destitution, where individuals have no income at all, is becoming more and more common.

This counterfactual portrayal of poverty has an effect on benefit claimants themselves and contributes to a reluctance to challenge adverse decisions. The overall climate makes it easier and more acceptable for DWP officials to reduce individuals' benefit levels.

All of this may lead to benefit claimants simply tolerating these conditions instead of challenging them. In the meantime levels of poverty and destitution rise dramatically and the worst-off suffer the most. It is not really surprising that foodbank attendance has escalated.



6 Proposals for change

It is quite clear that people do not attend foodbanks voluntarily, or simply because food is available at no cost. Foodbank clients at Govanhill had all been referred by one of the local referring agencies. Trussell Trust procedures depend on agencies in the social sector recognising that individuals they know are in need of emergency food aid, and referring them to a foodbank.

The rapid increase in foodbank attendance is therefore not primarily due to more stringent economic conditions or reductions in public expenditure. Foodbank attendance, at least in Govanhill, shot up in the period from 2012 to 2014, and this coincides with substantial changes in social security procedures. High levels of attendance have continued while these new procedures have been in operation. It is therefore more likely that changes in benefit or housing entitlement have forced individuals to claim emergency food aid. 90% of the people we saw at the foodbank had been adversely affected by an inappropriate bureaucratic decision by the DWP or the Council, or were simply not receiving social security benefits or accommodation they were entitled to.

a Benefits

i Benefit problems and foodbank use

There have been radical changes to the social security system in recent years. Some of these stretch back to the mid-2000s or before, while some have come in more recently. Some changes have occurred at a very general level and some involve very specific changes to procedures.

At a general level, there has been a greater and greater emphasis on the idea of "conditionality". It is not enough for claimants to be without funds and in need of help. Specific conditions are laid down for benefit entitlement, and if claimants do not meet these they are denied payment. To a certain extent this has always been the case, but recently much more severe penalties have been introduced for failing to meet the conditions laid down.

For example, under the original conditions for Jobseeker's Allowance, claimants failing to comply could be taken off benefit (that is "sanctioned") for one week. If subsequent problems arose subsequent sanctions amounted to two weeks and then four weeks. It was uncommon to come across large numbers of clients with these problems, and in any event they were unlikely to last very long.

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In 2013, sanction periods were extended and instead of claimants being sanctioned for one week then two weeks then four weeks, periods of three months then six months then even three years were substituted. There was a huge increase in the numbers of sanctions imposed and they reached the hundreds of thousands. Benefit claimants have been left without any income at all for long periods.

This led to a significant change in the culture within the Department of Work and Pensions. It became commonplace for DWP staff to conceive of claimants being destitute, and for this to be a normal part of the service provided to the public. There was an expectation amongst DWP managers that their staff would impose a certain number of sanctions. This climate is unlikely to generate good morale amongst DWP frontline staff, who may not be the most highly paid civil servants.

It is entirely predictable in this new climate that destitution caused by non-receipt of benefit becomes more and more generally acceptable, and that DWP officials in particular accept that a certain percentage of claimants will be destitute, at least temporarily.

Where it is part of the function of DWP officials not only to assess benefit claims, but also to meet expectations to remove claimants from benefit, then the absence of benefit for other reasons, and the resulting destitution caused to large numbers of those most in need, becomes less and less of a concern. In the period October 2014 to September 2015, it resulted in DWP officials themselves providing 547 of the 2,638 vouchers received at the foodbank, and 175 of the 246 clients – around 70% of the total – were there because of benefit problems.

Our overall objective is to reduce the need for emergency food aid. We believe that the recognition of all of this is a very important first step in achieving this objective. If social security and social housing decision-making can be improved, then the numbers of people going to foodbanks should reduce. It is important for benefit recipients and tenants to challenge decisions which are incorrect, and for decision-makers to recognise the damage they are doing to individuals who are dependent on the benefit system. This is especially true where individual claimants are sick or disabled.

A second problem is that people who are sick or disabled are often forced into applying for benefits which are not intended for them. Claimants taken off ESA may have to wait several weeks or months for a review. They can only be put back on ESA if the review or subsequent tribunal is successful. Prior to the review, the claimant is faced with the dilemma of having no income at all or having to make an inappropriate claim for Jobseeker's Allowance. Most people who are sick or disabled will be unable to meet the JSA requirements, and it is likely they will be taken off this benefit. This is again a very common problem experienced by many of our clients both at the foodbank and in general.

Thirdly, it is an unavoidable feature of this type of benefit regime – where conditionality is emphasised - that at least some claimants will be without income for a period. Where benefit

regulations set down commitments which claimants have to comply with, DWP officials will have to assess whether claimants are in fact complying. A certain number of claimants will inevitably be judged as not complying and their benefit will cease in one way or another.

In practice a DWP official who deals directly with claimants often refers such a decision to another official who takes the primary responsibility for it. This has the consequence that the official making the final decision may have no direct contact with the claimant concerned. The decision-maker will therefore be insulated from the effect that his or her decision has on the individual claimant. In some cases the anonymity of the claimant might be desirable. It might make the process more objective. If however the decision-maker has no personal knowledge of the claimant at all it is more likely that it will be easier to make a decision which causes severe hardship. It is more difficult to disadvantage someone with whom you have a relationship, even if this only involves meetings at the Job Centre.

The anonymity within the decision-making process can lead to a greater number of claimants being disallowed benefit and a consequential greater use of foodbanks.

All of this has the effect that the destitution caused to the claimant by the withdrawal of benefit is normalised within the social security system and among the civil servants operating the system. Rendering someone completely indigent becomes part of the day-to-day experience of DWP officials and an unremarkable part of the job. So much so that benefit problems became the primary factor for around 70% of the foodbank clients we saw, and the DWP became the second biggest issuer of foodbank vouchers in south east Glasgow.

ii Sickness and disability and foodbank use

As noted above, around 70% of those we saw at the foodbank had ill-health or a disability. There were a very wide range of ailments. These included physical and mental health problems, learning disabilities, addiction problems, personality disorders and other conditions. Foodbank clients were amongst the most vulnerable and least capable in the local community. Social security was often their only means of subsistence. Once denied benefits, they fell below subsistence level.

When benefit problems arose there was very little consideration given as to how claimants would cope with no or greatly reduced income, or how their health, which was already very poor, would be affected. The impression we gained was that those least able to get by were the victims of completely inappropriate benefit decisions. Foodbank clients already had very difficult lives, and this was exacerbated by increased poverty or, in many cases, actual destitution.

In our view it is essential that particular provision is made for those who are disabled or in poor health and facing potentially adverse benefit decisions. The DWP often have information

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on the health of claimants, especially where they have qualified for disability-related benefits. DWP officials should be required to take into account the health of a claimant before imposing a decision to reduce benefit. Where a claimant has a significant health problem, there should be no reduction in benefit.

There should be much better liaison between DWP officials and GPs and health centres. In order to avoid exacerbation of health problems, closer contact between the DWP and the NHS is crucial. These changes alone would greatly reduce the necessity for emergency food aid.

iii Automatic hardship payments

Claimants who have been sanctioned can claim hardship payments. This would only have helped a small minority of those we saw at the foodbank but there are hundreds of thousands of sanctions each year. Sanctions were one type of problem experienced, but foodbank clients were affected by a wide variety of benefit problems.

Hardship payments are paid at 60% of the basic benefit allowance, or 80% if a claimant is in special need, for example being pregnant or seriously ill. Claimants are not however automatically entitled to a hardship payment when they are sanctioned. They have to make a specific claim and satisfy specific criteria. This is unhelpful. Claimants may be unaware of the existence of hardship payments, or the claim may be refused by the DWP, and the claimant will then continue to be destitute.



A system of automatic hardship payments would go some way to alleviating current problems of destitution and privation, especially for those in poor health or with disabilities. The abolition of the current system of sanctions would at least remove one of the causes of foodbank attendance.

An automatic basic payment to adults with no other means of income would not only reduce the use of foodbanks, but would also help eradicate the levels of destitution which have arisen recently. This is not inconsistent with current levels of provision which provide for hardship payments when benefit claimants are sanctioned. It would simply recognise that claimants who have had their benefits removed are highly likely to be suffering hardship and in need of some level of income.

Providing for an automatic basic payment for those with no other form of income or savings would be a very important step towards reducing the need for foodbanks.

iv Payment during Mandatory reconsideration

There is no justification for denying benefit, or reducing payments, to a claimant who is challenging an adverse benefit decision. It will never be justified to disadvantage a claimant with a good challenge, even temporarily, and the balance of convenience will always lie with the claimant. A claimant left with no income or reduced income pending a review will face severe privation. The Department will either be able to impose the reduction after the review or appeal, or will have been rescued from an embarrassing error. It will not lose out.

Under the present system, when an adverse decision is made against a claimant, the penalty is imposed immediately. Benefit may be reduced, often leaving the claimant with no or very little income, leaving it to the claimant to seek a review by a more senior DWP official. Where the initial decision is upheld on review, the claimant can appeal to a tribunal and benefit may be reinstated at that stage. It might however take weeks or months to get to that stage.

Where a claimant seeks a review of an initial decision, benefit should be reinstated at once.

At the moment, there is a two stage process. Where an adverse decision is challenged, a DWP official makes a mandatory reconsideration as a first step in the process. After this, the claimant can appeal to a benefit tribunal as a second step. Maintaining benefit during review is important, but direct access to the benefit tribunal should also be reinstated, with the appeal being heard within a specified period of time. A review of the decision could still be made during that period as part of the normal appeal process. Where the initial decision was reversed on review, the benefit tribunal could be cancelled.

At present claimants are left on little or no income during the first step of the procedure while the matter is under review. Many of the people we saw at the foodbank were in this position.

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Simply changing the procedure would substantially reduce the need for individuals to attend foodbanks.

Such a change in procedure would also be cost neutral. Claimants who are successful on review or appeal receive backdated payments. Accordingly they receive benefit in a lump sum at a later time after experiencing a period of increased poverty or destitution. Continuing benefits until review or appeal would result in claimants receiving the same amount of money and not experiencing increased poverty or destitution. The DWP can always impose the reduction after the appeal.

v Sanctions

We saw fewer sanctioned claimants at the foodbank than we expected. Nevertheless, sanctions were still a significant cause of attendance at foodbanks. Sanctions do not make a significant contribution to an increase in the take up of available employment. They simply cause significant hardship to large numbers of individuals. The sanctions regime should be abolished.

vi Deductions

It is now possible for claimants to have payments for numerous types of debt deducted from their benefit. Since benefit is already a minimal payment which often does not even provide a subsistence level of maintenance, such deductions can cause severe hardship.

b Housing

i Local Housing Allowance

Many private sector tenants, who rely on state benefit, are now seriously disadvantaged by current housing conditions and benefit rules. Benefit payments in respect of rent or housing costs have been progressively restricted since the current regime of "assured tenancies" was introduced in 1989. Originally benefit paid to private sector tenants might cover all of the rent if a rent officer decided that the landlord was charging a "reasonable market rent". In the early 1990s this even included rentals at the top end of the market. In due course benefit payable was restricted to the average rent in an area. Under current arrangements a maximum "local housing allowance" is limited to "the 30th percentile on a list of rents for the appropriate category of dwelling" in a particular area. It is often less than this.

These progressive restrictions were no doubt due to increasing expenditure on private sector housing benefit as rents went up and the number of private sector tenancies increased. Prior to 1989, most private sector rents were regulated in order to prevent landlords charging a premium for scarce accommodation.

Now housing is again scarce, and market conditions do not encourage cheap rents. A tenant taking on a new tenancy may be faced with the option of temporary homeless accommodation on the one hand, or insecure private sector accommodation on the other. It can take many months, or even longer, to be granted housing as a homeless person, and private sector renting is often the only practical option for many people. The local housing allowance may well cover only a fraction of the rent charged. Even if the landlord simply takes what the tenant can give, rent arrears still mount up. We found that around 10% of the people we saw at the foodbank were faced with problems like these.

Private sector rented problems potentially affect tens of thousands of people in Glasgow. There are around 170,000 tenancies with around one third of these being private rented and two thirds social sector. Unaffordable rent is one of a number of problems affecting the private sector, and these are likely to continue while rents remain unregulated and housing benefit is severely restricted. It is a significant contributory factor to foodbank attendance at Govanhill.

ii Homelessness

People also presented at the foodbank with homelessness problems. Under current homelessness legislation, a homeless person, who is not intentionally homeless, can apply to the local Council for permanent accommodation. After investigation, applicants are granted a Scottish secure tenancy or an assured tenancy if they are found to be homeless. The tenancy should be offered as soon as possible after the application is successful, but in practice applicants can end up waiting for months for a house. Applicants should be granted temporary homeless accommodation during the investigation, but some foodbank clients were not even granted that.

It is arguable that the Council is not meeting its legal obligations under current arrangements. The reasons for this are no doubt partly due to the scarcity mentioned above, which contributes to high private sector rents. Another reason may be that the Council in Glasgow has the responsibility of housing homeless people, but no longer has any houses. The Council housing stock was transferred to Housing Associations in 2003, and it is very difficult for the Council to insist that Associations offer tenancies to homeless applicants.

Homeless foodbank clients had very little in the way of facilities and we saw a significant number who found it difficult to use the food provided in the food parcel. Those attending the foodbank with these difficulties faced a very unpredictable and precarious day to day existence and were often completely destitute. They were prone to high degrees of anxiety and insecurity. The lack of a permanent address exacerbated the difficulties they already faced in claiming benefit or gaining employment.

Again around 10% of the people we saw at the foodbank had homelessness problems, around the same number as those who had private rented sector difficulties. Of the 246 people in our sample, around 70% had benefit problems, 20% housing problems and 10% other problems.

7 Needs of users – Appropriate foodbank services

It is clear from the research which forms the basis of this report that foodbank attendance is only one symptom of a greater set of problems which affect some of us more than others. A public sector which makes its sick and disabled destitute is not fit for purpose, and foodbank clients suffer from more than lack of food. It is important to deal with this wider set of problems, as well as providing emergency food aid.

The foodbank does however have the potential to provide a wider range of services to those who need them most. In our view it is important to ensure that foodbank clients have suitable advice which helps to reduce poverty, and access other necessary services such as health, nutrition and housing. Foodbanks require increased resources to develop these services.

a Advice needs

It is important to devote further resources to help foodbank clients with benefit and housing problems. Current levels of service are inadequate to meet this. A full-time advice worker is needed to advise on benefits, housing law and other social welfare law issues, and to develop client engagement strategies for local people who are particularly vulnerable.

b Support and co-ordination

As well as advice services, foodbank clients need to access other services. It is very important to ensure that those attending the foodbank gain the support of all the services they need to survive on a day to day basis.

A support worker is needed who can coordinate the service needs of foodbank users and act as a referral agent to the most appropriate services. For instance a foodbank client might have been referred by a Housing Association but require additional advice on benefits or additional health services. A foodbank support worker would be in a position to arrange for these services to be accessed.

A support worker would identify the particular agency which has referred an individual, and work with the individual and the agency in order to identify what other services are needed, and then make appropriate referrals.

c Foodbank management and development

All of this requires to be managed. A foodbank development manager would access the resources to enable the foodbank to grow and provide the right kind of services. He or she would develop a strategy with the objective of reducing local need for emergency food aid and replacing this with a much more constructive and positive service based round health and nutrition for all members of the local community.



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8 Beyond foodbanks

There has been a huge expansion in foodbanks in recent years. The Trussell Trust, one of the major organisations working in this area, has been supporting foodbanks in the UK since around 2007. In that time Trussell Trust foodbanks have gone from **providing 25,000 food parcels per year** to providing **over 1.1 million last year**. The figure has been **around 1 million** in each of the **last three years**.

The evidence collected for this paper tends to show that the sharp rise in foodbanks in south east Glasgow has been caused by serious systemic social security and social housing problems. In south east Glasgow, benefit problems and housing problems are especially acute for foodbank clients and this is consistent with the statistics published on the Trussell Trust website. Individual areas however may have problems which are particular to them.

We have set out to develop a long term strategy to reduce extensive foodbank use, and within that to work on individual initiatives which provide direct help to local people. Many people in south east Glasgow cannot afford to pay for housing, fuel and food, and this has resulted in a sharp growth in those attending the foodbank. Our approach is to work to minimise the need for emergency food aid and foodbank use.

Our overall aim is to ensure that local people have enough to eat and that local food provision is both healthy and sustainable. Within that, we aim to develop services at the foodbank in order to achieve the followings:

- to help people increase their income enough to buy their own food,
- to work with other agencies and individuals on local food and nutrition initiatives to ensure the availability of food which is both affordable and healthy,
- to engage local people in local food production and distribution networks,
- to link the foodbank with local health and nutrition services, treating food and its availability as a health issue, and
- to identify and help develop local networks of voluntary organisations and health services who deal with food and poverty and community development.

Foodbanks throughout the country have changed and developed over the past nine years and this process will continue. Questions need to be asked about the future of foodbanks:

- **Should there be better social provision which reduces the need for foodbanks?**
- **Should foodbanks continue as a partial service providing three parcels every six months?**
- **Should foodbanks be extended in order to provide a more comprehensive service?**

Whatever happens, change is essential. The status quo is not an option. Expecting local supermarkets and their customers to continue to provide free food for foodbank clients is both very impractical and very uncertain in the long term. Maintaining services in their present form does not meet the strategic objective that everyone should have enough to eat.



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Appendix – How foodbanks work

The Glasgow South East Foodbank is a Trussell Trust Foodbank. The Trussell Trust provides a basic infrastructure for foodbanks. Those foodbanks who subscribe to the Trussell Trust receive information on tried and tested methods of provision. They benefit from the experience gained by the Trust and its participants over many years.

Much of this information is set out at the Trussell Trust website.

Firstly, the foodbank identifies local sources of food donation. Schools, churches, businesses, voluntary organisations and individuals donate non-perishable food. It is often collected at supermarkets where individuals make donations. Supermarkets also make substantial donations to foodbanks periodically.

Secondly, volunteers arrange for the food donated to be delivered and sorted. The food is then provided to foodbank clients during opening hours.

Thirdly, foodbanks work with a wide range of care professionals who identify people in crisis. The Glasgow South East Foodbank has referrals from over 80 local agencies. The substantial majority of referrals however come from local immigration services, the Department of Work and Pensions, local advice agencies, local Housing Associations, the Social Work Department and local churches. Apart from these organisations, there are dozens more who might provide five or ten referrals per year. These might be local MSPs or MPs, environmental projects, childcare organisations and others.

When a referral is made, the worker at the referring agency completes a voucher and gives it to the person in need. They then attend the foodbank and exchange the voucher for a food parcel. The foodbank opens at a regular time which in south east Glasgow is 1pm to 2.30pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Fourthly, the foodbank client redeems the voucher for three days' emergency food. The foodbank can also signpost the client to an outlet which can provide free hot food.

The Trussell Trust recommends the content of the food parcel. It is often for a single person, but there are also many families who need the service. The food parcel consists of basic foodstuffs. The foodbank receives a variety of donations but donors are directed towards giving the type of food which is most useful for foodbank clients.

It is difficult to cost the value of the items in the food parcel. Prices will vary from area to area. The purpose of the food parcel is to provide approximately ten meals to enable the individual or family to subsist for three days. A food parcel for a single person might contain the following items.



Cereal	1 Small
Soup (can/packet)	2 Standard
Beans/spaghetti in sauce	2 Small/1stnd
Tomatoes/pasta sauce	2 Small/1stnd
Vegetables	2 Small/1stnd
Meat or Vegetarian	2 Small/1stnd
Fish	1 Small
Fruit	2 Small/1stnd
Rice Pudding/custard	1 Standard
Biscuits	1 small pack
Sugar	500g
Pasta/rice/noodles	500g
Tea or Coffee	40 bags/small jar
Juice/Squash	1 Carton
Milk UHT/powder	1 Carton/pkt

CASTLEMILK LAW AND MONEY ADVICE CENTRE



Castlemilk Law & Money Advice Centre is a charity and a company limited by guarantee registered in Scotland with its main office at 155 Castlemilk Drive, Glasgow G45 9UG. It is financially supported by City of Glasgow Council, Scottish Legal Aid Board, Scottish Government Violence against Women and Girls Fund, the Robertson Trust and other funders. Angus McIntosh is the Senior Principal Solicitor. Glasgow South East Foodbank is an independent charity supported by the Trussell Trust.

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