



EVALUATING THE ADVICE AND SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDED THROUGH FOOD BANKS

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key messages

- The food bank advice and support services are delivering a range of positive outcomes for individuals, food banks and advice services providers – and for other organisations and local economies.
- These outcomes are being achieved despite the challenges that food banks and advice services providers face working within funding constraints, local pressures and the complexity of issues many people using the services face.
- Food bank advice services have become a critical part of the local landscape of delivery, reaching people who are not accessing advice and support elsewhere.
- The advice services can alleviate financial hardship in a sustained way, or prevent a person's situation from spiralling further. However, within the wider context of high rents and prices for essentials, insufficient welfare benefits, and low earnings, many people helped may find themselves struggling again at some point, possibly to the point of needing emergency food parcels.

Background and methodology

This study evaluated the **advice and support services** that Trussell has been supporting food banks in their community to deliver. The services offer **advice and support on money matters to people who use food banks**, typically including a mix of **income maximisation** advice, often **debt advice**, and sometimes **signposting, referral** and **wrap around** services (such as providing support to action the advice received or with related areas of need). The advice and support services (**hereafter ‘advice services’**) are delivered mostly through partnership with local (third party) advice organisations and sometimes directly (in-house) by the food bank.

The evaluation was undertaken between September 2023 and April 2024:

- To understand how the food bank advice services are delivered; who uses them, when and why; how the services have helped them; why some people do not use them; and what other support people may have had.
- To explore how people’s experiences differ across different models of advice provision, for different types of people with different types of need.

Our approach combined qualitative and quantitative methods:

- Case studies with 16 food banks involving an initial fact-find activity and interviews with colleagues from the food bank, the advice services, and other local organisations.
- Interviews with 42 people who had used food banks from eight case study food banks, and follow-up interviews with 28 of these people, three to four months after we first spoke with them.
- A survey of food bank colleagues and advice services advisers completed online by 131 food bank leads and 80 advice services representatives.
- A survey of people who had used one of 28 food banks completed online or on paper: comprising 466 people who had used the food bank advice services and 424 people who had not used the services.



Our survey samples are best viewed as convenience samples and should not be assumed to be fully representative of the populations they are drawn from. However, the achieved samples were sufficient for capturing a range of experiences covered and the analysis of these.

Samples for all elements of the evaluation reflect a good mix of food banks and advice services across various characteristics, including geographical location, locality, food bank size, and the nature of advice offered. The samples offer good coverage of advice services provision across Trussell’s community of food banks.

We have used regression analysis to strengthen our ability to conclude that differences in experiences and outcomes between groups are statistically significant and meaningful. This allows us to take account of other differences in characteristics between groups in the sample (e.g. advice type, housing tenure) and understand which characteristics are related to the impacts of the services (e.g. age and location).

Delivering the advice services

The advice services are meeting people's needs for support with money matters because they deliver a range of help in an accessible and person-centred way, under one roof, and in a trusted place where people feel safe and comfortable.

How the advice services are delivered to people

Trussell set broad parameters for the advice services which means food banks are able to deliver advice and support within these parameters that can be tailored to meet individual and local needs. Models of advice services provision are therefore as diverse as food banks themselves.

The help delivered by the advice services ranges from income maximisation advice to debt advice, to signposting and referral, as well as wrap around services (such as support to action the advice received), or a combination of these. Services are primarily delivered by third-party providers (such as Citizens Advice), or directly (in-house) by the food bank, or a mix of both. They vary in terms of referral processes, how many people they reach and how established they are within food banks.

Services are working hard to flex to the needs of individuals in relation to:

- Delivery mode, with services focused heavily on face-to-face delivery.
- Delivery structure, with services varying the number and length of interactions with people, and offering drop-in sessions, which colleagues said was preferable but not always practical.
- Target audience, with a small number of case study services seeing people at outreach venues (such as community centres) who did not currently use a food bank. This outreach model may prevent future problems for people who are at risk of destitution.

How people are referred into the advice services

People need to get a referral to a food bank in Trussell's community of food banks before they can receive a food parcel. Referral into the food bank advice services is through two main routes: either people use the food bank first and are approached by staff or volunteers to invite or encourage them to use the service; or they are referred into the services (and food bank) by a third-party referral agency.

Referrals into advice from within food banks could vary. Some checked in with everyone using the food bank to see if they might need support from the advice services, some encouraged people who had used the food bank a certain number of times to speak to the advice services, while others were more light touch in their approach.

Formal and informal partnerships with other organisations are a key part of how food bank and advice services operate, particularly for managing capacity locally and inward referrals to the food bank. For partner organisations, food banks were a needed additional source of help, which was perceived to be quick and easy for people to access and relieved pressure on their own

services. However, there were some concerns about other organisations over-relying on food bank advice services, due to pressure on their own services.

What works well in delivering the advice services

People using the food bank advice services valued them because they removed the need to speak to multiple people or agencies and provided a safe and welcoming space to discuss money issues. People generally saw the services as part of the food bank and advisers as food bank staff (even where advisers were employed by a third-party provider such as Citizens Advice).

The case studies showed that advice delivered by a third-party adviser (who was embedded within the food bank team), was a particularly effective model. This was because there was a built-in connection to a larger advice network to facilitate smoother referrals to other services, while also reducing the perception of these wider services as separate from food bank services. These outcomes could similarly be achieved through direct (in house) provision, but were perhaps more easily facilitated via the former model.

How effective a service was perceived to be – by the people using and delivering it - was not just about *what* was offered but also about *how* it was offered. Having a space where people could access ongoing face-to-face help with a range of support needs – underpinned by a holistic, person-centred approach – was highly valued. The evidence highlights a need for a broad service model that reflects individual and local needs. This is central to achieving positive outcomes for people with complex needs who may find it difficult to get the help and support they want.

Accessing the advice and support services

Who is reached by the advice services

Trussell's *Hunger in the UK* study shows that households with a disabled person, working age adults, households with children, and people experiencing adverse life events are among the groups most likely to need to use a food bank.¹

The profiles of people using the advice services broadly mirrored those of people who use food banks generally. There was also little difference in the characteristics of people who used the advice services and people who did not, indicating that the services were effective at reaching all types of people who used the food bank.

However, some groups were under-represented among people using advice services. Most notably, nearly twice as many **people experiencing some form of homelessness had not used the advice services**² compared to

¹ Trussell (2023) [Hunger in the UK](#).

² We adopt a broader definition of homelessness including not only rough sleeping, but living in a hotel, hostel, refuge, B&B, night shelter, staying with friends or family (sofa surfing), or 'other' living arrangement. See Glossary for further information.

those who had. Previous research shows that a third (34%) of people referred to food banks were either experiencing some form of homelessness at the point of referral or had done in the previous 12 months.³ Food bank colleagues were aware of the difficulty of supporting people experiencing homelessness, because their situation makes it hard for people to keep appointments, and to complete the support needed; but also because there is only limited support that can be offered during a period of homelessness, and support often needs to be provided in conjunction with other external services.

Why some people don't use the advice services

Looking across the survey and interviews, the reasons why people had not used the advice services were driven by: a reluctance to seek advice or to talk about their situation, occasionally due to poor experiences elsewhere; stigma and mental health issues; and marginally lower need.

The qualitative interviews shed further light on why people did not use the advice service: they found it difficult to ask for help; questioned if they were eligible or worthy of support; and were unsure if the support would make a difference. In some cases, there was a mismatch between individuals' expectations about their needs and what the services could offer, the nature or timing of the support offered, and capacity issues within services.

Possible improvements to the advice services to address this mismatch in expectations might include using training sessions and workshops for staff and volunteers to further promote existing evidence on how to help people into the services.⁴ Another potential option is to co-design service improvements with people who have lived experience of financial hardship – particularly people from groups who are under-represented among advice services.

People's experiences of the advice and support services

People typically presented to the advice services with concerns around long-term low income or unaffordable debt. They most commonly needed support with welfare benefit eligibility or applications, managing debt and utility bills.

How the advice services are meeting needs

There is strong evidence from the survey data and interviews that the advice services are meeting the needs of the people they serve.

People were highly likely to have received or be referred to the relevant type of support for them, based on their initial reason for getting in touch with the advice services. But they were also provided with or directed to help with other issues that were indirectly related or contributing to the money worries they presented with. For example, people with concerns related to a change in their

³ Trussell (2023) [Hunger in the UK](#).

⁴ Trussell Trust (2022) How to help someone have a good experience accessing and engaging with financial inclusion advice run by a food bank.

family situation might be signposted or referred to services supporting mental health or bereavement. To this end, there is evidence that people were receiving relevant, person-centred *and* holistic support.

Almost a half (47%) of people using the advice services had been referred onward to other services for help with issues not covered by the advice services.



Although many of the people who received advice had first spoken to the advice services team in the last month (46%), the majority had spoken with the team more than once, reflecting the ongoing nature of their concerns. Keeping people engaged with the services until issues were resolved was a key challenge for advice services teams – particularly people in the most complex situations.

Around nine in ten people had good experiences of support from the advice services, from the ease of accessing them to satisfaction with how their concerns were understood. People tended to report better experiences using the food bank advice services than they had with other advice services.

While the advice services were funded to provide wide-ranging and holistic support to people with complex needs, there was a clear sense from the case studies that many advisers went above and beyond the letter of the services they were funded or contracted to provide.

What enables a positive experience of the advice services

The figure below describes how people who used the advice services appreciated the qualities of the food bank staff (and the staff delivering the services); the set up of advice delivery; and the clear, practical support they received.

		
The people	The set up	The support
non-judgemental, kind, welcoming, reassuring, knowing someone is there for you	informal, in person, welcoming, not restricted by time pressure	clear, simple advice, step by step, walking them through the process, actually able to help them

How the advice services can be improved

While interview feedback on the advice services was overwhelmingly positive, some areas for improvement were identified by people using advice, including raising awareness of the services outside of the food bank environment, and improving accessibility for people with physical and mental health problems –

although most noted that the services were accessible in terms of timings and locations.

Overall, the nature of support and the way it was delivered provided the foundations and stepping stones on which the positive outcomes detailed below were built.

Outcomes for people using the advice and support services

The financial impacts for individuals

Based on analysis of Trussell's administrative data, the estimated financial impact of food bank advice services is large:

- **Income gains** (through income maximisation) – 38,685 people received an average of £1.7k between April 2023 and March 2024 (£66.5 million overall)
- **Debts managed** – 10,326 people had an average of £4.6k debt managed between April 2023 and March 2024 (£47.3 million overall)
- **Debts written off** – 1,669 people had an average of £7.5k written off between April 2023 and March 2024 (£12.6 million overall).

This equates to an average financial impact of around £1,000, average debt managed of around £700, and average debt written off of around £188 per person accessing the services. In total, over 66,770 people accessed services between April 2023 and March 2024.

How the services are helping people to maximise their incomes

Financial gains came from increased benefits and ad hoc support, typically in the form of fuel or shopping vouchers and cash grants. With unclaimed income-related benefits and social tariffs estimated at £23 billion a year,⁵ increased take-up of benefits is a large part of what Trussell hopes to achieve through the advice services. In our survey, **37% had begun to receive additional money from welfare benefits (of any type)**. This was either because they had received more of benefits they already received (10%) or, more often, because they had started to receive them (31%) – with 4% having both received more and started to receive new benefits.

The case studies highlight the dual benefits of the advice services in: making people aware of the welfare benefits they were eligible for, when often they had no idea about this before visiting the food bank; helping people complete the application forms for welfare benefits, or appeal benefits decisions, as this support was needed and hard to access elsewhere.

Food banks or advice services may have the capacity to issue cash grants and fuel vouchers themselves or else have close relationships with other local organisations who do so. Overall, 28% of people using advice services had

⁵ Policy in Practice (2024) [Missing out 2024: £23 billion of support is unclaimed each year](#).

received extra money as a result of help getting cash support and 35% had received fuel vouchers from the advice services to help cover energy costs.

How the services are reducing the burden of unmanageable debt

Debt advice is often an integral part of the food bank advice services, and the management of unaffordable debt through debts written off and debts managed is an expected positive outcome for people using the services. Around a third of people said that their debts were easier to manage as a result of the advice services. While two in ten had already seen some reduction in debts or arrears, a further three in ten people were expecting to see some reduction in debt or arrears in the future, suggesting that many people who sought advice on debt were receiving the support they hoped for.

How the services are helping people to reduce their expenditure

Reduced expenditure was reported by a third of people who used the advice services (33%), primarily through reduced energy costs and help with budgeting.

The impacts on financial wellbeing

Around a half of people using the advice services (49%) felt that they were managing better with their money, and this was more likely than for those using other advice services for a similar purpose.

There was strong evidence that using the advice services was associated with reduced worry about money – and, again, more so than using other advice services. Food bank colleagues felt that the services were helping to reduce people's shame and stigma about financial hardship.

While there was little evidence that using food bank advice services translates into lower levels of destitution,⁶ at least not in quantitative terms, financial impact data shows that advice services were nonetheless increasing people's incomes. This suggests that services are reducing levels of financial hardship for individuals, although for some people the reduction is not sufficient to lift them out of destitution. Nonetheless, many of the people we interviewed talked about the importance of being able to eat properly and heat their home, and felt that the advice services had helped considerably with this. This illustrates how services were helping to improve financial and wider wellbeing as a result of increased incomes.

There was evidence that advice services were reducing but not ending the need for emergency food, with a half of food bank leads agreeing that the food bank was experiencing fewer repeat referrals.

The impacts on personal wellbeing

The advice services are not primarily supporting people with personal wellbeing needs. However, there was evidence of some positive (if limited) wellbeing impacts. Perceptions of physical and mental health were notably low

⁶ According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, people are considered destitute if they have not been able to meet their most basic physical needs to stay warm, dry, clean and fed.

among people responding to the survey, with around a half saying that their physical and mental health were poor (49% and 52% respectively).

When controlling for sample differences, the likelihood of reporting good physical health was significantly *lower* among people who had used the advice services than people who had not. This perhaps reflects the characteristics of people referred into the services compared with those who were not.

Just under a half of people using the advice services (47%) said that their health and wellbeing improved because of the support they received. The interviews with people using advice also highlighted that the emotional support and improvements to mental health were often considered as important as the financial outcomes.

From the perspective of advice services leads, using advice helped to improve people's access to other services; and improved people's relationships with statutory organisations and housing situations.

People who had used the advice services were more likely than people who had not to feel they had support to go to when they need it and to feel better about the future.

How the outcomes are being sustained

Our follow-up interviews offer some important insights into how people were getting on three to four months after we first spoke with them. Overall, we found that people using advice still felt better off than before they had used the services. This was unsurprisingly the case for people who had experienced an increase in their income from using advice. However, even people who were still struggling financially three months later, or who had seen no real income increase, felt the wellbeing benefit from the services.

Impact of the advice services on local support networks

The funding and delivery of advice across the sector is complex, with many advice providers relying on multiple funding sources to deliver their services. Different funding models can constrain delivery (e.g. contracts to deliver telephone and digital only services) and drive inefficiencies, which in turn can impact on the ability to meet demand or to reach people with unmet needs.⁷ National services are generally more focused on debt advice, but there is an increasing move toward embedding this within the wider support that people need – which is closer to the models seen in food bank advice services and other community-based services.

The advice services were largely reaching people who existing services were missing or under-serving, or people who had not been successfully helped by other services. This may be due to gaps in local funding or provision, or

⁷ 4OC (2023) [Funding and operating models of the debt advice sector](#), Money and Pensions Service.

because funding and design constraints are preventing other existing services from reaching people.

Food banks are playing a key role in formal and informal local networks to improve the sector (e.g. by ensuring community needs are being met in the most efficient way), and many food banks were taking steps to formalise or improve the way organisations worked together and to minimise gaps or duplication of support. At the same time, the advice services are helping other services to reach the people they want to help.

Both the food banks and wider organisations we spoke with were clear that the advice services provided benefits to individuals, organisations and the wider area, which went beyond the traditional advice model. This is because the advice services model is predicated on providing continuity of support in a place people already came to, where they felt safe, and that was strongly relational – with advisers often fulfilling a support worker role for people with the most complex problems.

Positive outcomes for individuals were also likely to have a consequent impact on the wider community. These were therefore a net benefit to the local area (e.g. by reducing pressure on local services), improving efficiency for local support services, reduced risk of homelessness and rent or other arrears (e.g. Council Tax), and other wellbeing benefits that can positively impact the economy.

Conclusions

Overall, the food bank advice services appear to be working well and are achieving good short to medium term outcomes for the people using them, including more money in their pocket through additional welfare benefits, reduced debts or arrears, and decreased expenditure. Many have improved financial and personal wellbeing as a result. The advice services create the opportunity to address a person's financial issues in the round, rather than just temporarily moderating them with a food parcel. Our evaluation shows that **the services have good capability to take people from crisis point to a place where their finances are more stable**, and can reduce the need for emergency food. This can make an enormous difference to people's overall wellbeing.

People using food bank advice services often had very complex issues and health conditions, including traumatic life events, anxiety and other mental health issues – which created and exacerbated financial difficulties – and they needed substantial support with these. There was general agreement among colleagues that the advice services were reaching people who were often missed or under-reached by other services, either because other services had difficulty reaching them, or through problems accessing them. Overall, **the design of food bank advice services is well suited to meeting complex and ongoing needs**.

The advice services can alleviate financial hardship in a more sustained way than food based responses alone, or prevent a person's situation

from spiralling further. However, **within the wider context of high rents and prices for essentials, insufficient welfare benefits, and low earnings, many people helped may find themselves struggling again at some point**, possibly to the point of needing emergency food parcels.

Recommendations

For Trussell:

Food bank advice services work to a range of delivery and service models, but all share the common principle of placing the needs of the individual at the heart of their services, meaning that holistic and continuous support is provided to people who need it. The evidence shows this is central to achieving good outcomes for people and communities and should remain as a fundamental underpinning ethos of the food bank advice services model. Trussell's approach to funding and supporting advice services is creating the necessary space for food banks to develop approaches that work for their local circumstances and the needs of people who use them while also reflecting Trussell's values of compassion, justice, community and dignity.

The following recommendations relate specifically to **Trussell**.

Meeting the need. The Trussell Trust should continue supporting food banks to deliver advice services while there is unmet need, and while trying to address the causes of unmet need.

Building partnerships. Trussell recognise that local partnerships and integrating services are key to addressing the root causes of financial hardship, and Trussell should look to develop more local and national partnerships to further extend the reach of the services, and to amplify the sharing of good practice that is beneficial for all.

Peer support networks. Food banks who have more experience in delivering advice services could play a role in training or mentoring food banks that are at an earlier stage of setting up the services. New learning from research and policy should continue to be communicated back to food banks and advice services.

Training and support for colleagues. While Trussell only fund services that have the appropriate supervision and training in place (and also provide access to advice, training and resources), they could explore the opportunity for further training and support, such as support with compassion fatigue, to ensure that advisers and others involved in delivering the services are being supported in this sense.

Lived experience. Food banks are largely delivering services that meet the needs of people who use them. Many of the principles underlying the existing advice services delivery reflect those found in the 'How to help' resource co-produced by experts by experience who were part of the Together for Change panel. Future developments should continue to be co-designed with the

people who use the services, particularly with people who are under-reached by existing services.

For wider practice:

The evaluation highlights key learning on *how* to deliver advice services to reach people at risk of facing destitution. The following insights are relevant to **food banks and others providing advice and support services, charities and community organisations**. Evidence from the evaluation has shown that advice services should provide:

Multi-faceted, connected support. To achieve positive outcomes, it is important not to treat issues in a siloed way, because they are typically interrelated. Generalist advice and support is a vital part of provision in situ at the food bank, in combination with access to more specialist support where needed, and overall, reflects the most effective model of service delivery. Unlocking access to the right kind of support is one of the most important roles fulfilled by the advice services, whether that specialist support is delivered as part of food bank advice services or by supporting people to access other local services.

Continuity of support. People's ability to get ongoing support from advisers over time was a feature that distinguished food bank advice services from other advice services. However, this often went beyond providing prolonged support, with advisers sometimes taking on a role more akin to that of a support worker. This type of support – where the adviser provides both advice and support to action it – may also build people's capabilities to self-resolve at least some of their problems in future, which can prevent them from cycling back into local services. While Trussell already fund time for prolonged case work, we would recommend giving consideration on how to formally build this level of support into existing roles, or if there is scope for a separate role for people who need a deeper level of support.

Meet people where they are. Advice and support delivered in a community setting like a food bank distribution point can reach people who may be under-reached by other services, in spaces where they feel comfortable and safe. Together with face-to-face contact, this is important for building the relational depth that allows people to engage with advice, and to be open about their situation. Co-location with other services is not only a benefit to individuals, but also to colleagues because it improves partnership and referrals and creates a sense of shared responsibility and working together to support people. This echoes findings in previous reports on the benefits of co-locating advice in the places where people already turn to for help.

For policy:

The findings from this evaluation raise a number of points that are more widely relevant for the **advice sector, including those who fund it, and those involved in poverty reduction policy, including national and local government**. All levels of government across the UK should:

Address the funding gaps in advice services in their areas, with a particular focus on services that can prevent severe hardship. They should ensure funding supports effective and targeted advice services as described above, providing holistic, connected support, meeting people where they are.

Services should identify and prioritise people at high risk of going without essentials and provide help *before* they reach the point of needing a food bank, and ensure everyone can access the right advice and support when they need it. Food bank advice services are not displacing services already available in communities, and they largely appear to be reaching people with an unmet need who are not seeking or accessing advice and support elsewhere. This is largely because of the type and depth of advice being offered, and *how* it's provided. The community setting of the food bank offers an opportunity to build a trust relationship with people, to the point where they are willing to accept an offer of support. Community settings and co-location with other services also help services to reach different demographic groups, including people who would not otherwise seek advice.⁶⁹

Advice in outreach settings should become part of the broader advice service landscape. While increased collaboration and integration within the sector can help to ensure that there is 'no wrong door' for people seeking help⁷⁰, it is clear that some outreach is required to guide more people toward a door in the first place.

Funding of services should be focused on a holistic range of outcomes for people and who the services are reaching, not purely number of people seen. Providing continuity of support and supporting people's ability to self-resolve, as described above, suggests a broader understanding of positive outcomes for advice.

Local government should fund and deliver money advice, and welfare benefits advice that prioritises people facing destitution. Strong partnerships and well-connected services locally are needed to provide the most effective support, and to bring people into support at the right time – ideally before a food-based response is needed. The relationship between advice services and local authorities is important, particularly for issues around homelessness. They should ensure the effective integration of support locally by convening actors across money and debt advice, crisis support, community groups, and setting up place-based strategies to tackle destitution. Services should be delivered by organisations with local knowledge and understanding of the specific needs and experiences of their communities.

The UK Government should ensure that people's incomes from social security and work are sufficient to cover the cost of essentials and consider widely supported recommendations for achieving this, including establishing an Essentials Guarantee in Universal Credit. The main drivers of food bank need are outside the control of food banks or advice services, and this evaluation adds to an already substantial evidence base underpinning calls for change to improve welfare benefits and paid work so that they provide sufficient protection from hardship.

Reform social security decision-making processes and make social security support more accessible, so that people receive the benefits they are eligible for when they first apply (*getting it right first time*). Similarly, appealing benefits decisions should not be a complicated or drawn out process (*putting it right quickly and easily*). Overall, the social security system is not meeting the accessibility needs of many applicants. More should be done to ensure everyone is aware of the social security support they are eligible for and supported to apply for it

For research and evaluation:

This evaluation provides a wide ranging and comprehensive snapshot overview of how advice services in food banks are working. We explored all aspects of the services, from assessing the outcomes for people who used it, to evaluating the process of delivery from those who are involved in this element, through to understanding how these services impact on wider communities. The use of the mixed methods, and consistency of findings between data sources, together with previous findings from Hunger in the UK and other Trussell research, suggest that the patterns we have identified are broadly applicable. The data collected provides promising evidence of the ways in which advice services impact positively on people who use them (in the short to medium term) and gives insight into *why* this particular way of delivering advice and support is effective. However, the limitations of this evaluation include:

- The survey sample wasn't large enough to be sure of the representativeness of the network and people who access advice. A larger sample would also be needed to explore differences in impacts between the devolved nations, or at a regional level, for example, or between different delivery models.
- The longitudinal qualitative interviews give some depth of insight into how people manage after they have received support, but there is potential to strengthen the evidence relating to medium and longer-term outcomes by conducting larger scale longitudinal mixed methods research. A longer research time frame would provide an opportunity to track change over time.
- The use of a comparator group was helpful but also limited by the fact that, while the majority of people (> 70%) in the comparison group had sought advice on related issues, this was not the case for everyone.

The evaluation has highlighted further research that could be explored in relation to the food bank advice service:

Measuring the impact of food bank advice services on different groups of people. This evaluation echoes findings from Hunger in the UK⁷³ in identifying which groups are at highest risk of experiencing food insecurity and needing emergency food, and a larger scale survey could help better understand what works well for different groups.

Longitudinal research. To gain a much greater understanding of the outcomes from food bank advice services over the medium to long term (e.g. is there a fall in levels of destitution over time); what works in terms of achieving positive outcomes over time, and for who, longitudinal research

would be needed. A longitudinal approach, with the intervention group and with a comparator group, could also help to disentangle the impacts of food bank advice services from other factors, and to further test the validity of existing findings. Studies of this nature require substantial time and resources.

Econometric analysis. This evaluation gave some insight into the benefits to the wider community of food bank advice services, but there is room for a deeper exploration of this element, ideally encompassing econometric analysis to quantify the benefits. A cost/benefit analysis would help further strengthen the findings and support the case for investment in advice.

Supplementing and analysing existing data. A considerable amount of data about the food bank advice services is already collected by advisers and Trussell. Consideration should be given to how existing data can be linked to understand and track people's journeys. Further standardised data could also be collected. This could be collated and analysed at a national level to produce a set of measures for key impacts on financial wellbeing, for example. Our experience of conducting this evaluation has also highlighted some considerations for future research:

- Engagement with people who use the advice service: the use of food bank colleagues as 'community researchers' who supported people to complete the survey meant that we were able to include the views and experiences of people who otherwise would not engage with research because of some of the difficulties we describe above. These voices are typically missing from almost all survey research.
- Engagement with food banks: food banks are busy environments where the focus is rightly on delivering support to people who need it. This makes conducting research in a food bank setting more challenging. Long lead times and longer fieldwork periods are essential to increase the number of food banks and individuals who can take part, on a schedule that works with their circumstances – as well as avoiding peak times such as pre-Christmas and other major public holidays.



The Personal Finance Research Centre at the University of Bristol is an inter-disciplinary research centre exploring the financial issues that affect individuals and households, with a particular focus on low-income, marginalised or vulnerable groups.

www.bristol.ac.uk/pfrc