

**The Trussell Trust Foodbank Network:  
Exploring the Growth of Foodbanks Across the UK**

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Final Report  
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## **About this report**

This consultancy report forms the first of several planned outputs from recently completed research, funded through the Applied Research Fellowship Scheme at Coventry University. The report is designed to be of practical use to the Trussell Trust and its Foodbanks and to meet key objectives agreed at the beginning of the work. This report does not provide a critique of the Foodbank phenomena or its implications and such discussion will be pursued in academic and policy settings through forthcoming publications.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Forward

Thousands of people in the UK regularly go hungry because they haven't enough money to make ends meet. They face impossible choices between eating and heating; feeding their children or paying the rent. The welfare system is not responsive enough to prevent it. The consequences for society can be huge as some individuals commit crime to close the gap, whilst others end up losing their homes, facing mental health breakdown and even the prospect of their families breaking up as relationships crack under the strain or children are taken into care. Foodbanks provide responsive emergency relief – a minimum of three days nutritionally balanced food and sign-posting to further help.

Led by local churches, the Trussell Trust's foodbanks galvanise community action. Across the country, in metropolitan inner cities just as much as amongst dispersed rural populations, the foodbank franchise enables local people to do something positive about a problem so often hidden from general view. With all the food donated by the public and the organisation of foodbank entirely dependent on volunteers' time and commitment, this is a movement that reminds us once again of the amazing resilience of local communities and the depth of compassion that exists there.

The Trussell Trust's vision is a foodbank in every community. The growth of the foodbank network has been phenomenal but there's still a long way to go. This report provides very valuable insights into the issues that we have to address as we drive forward to implement that vision. We are privileged to benefit from the careful and thought-provoking approach of the research team and determined to pick up the challenge.

**Chris Mould**  
**Executive Chairman, The Trussell Trust**  
**November 2011**

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## Executive Summary

This consultancy report presents findings from research into the growth of the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network. The first Foodbank was established in Salisbury in 2000 and a social franchise model was developed in 2004. Since then the number of Foodbanks has grown to 148 (to date) and the first half of 2011 saw the launch of one new Foodbank every week. This report presents insights into some of the key factors which appear to have contributed to this proliferation of Foodbanks across the country. It goes on to identify some of the potential challenges that the Network and individual Foodbanks may face in the next phases of growth.

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### From 1 to 148 Foodbanks

The research findings highlight two key aspects, central to the design of the Foodbank model, which seem to have played a key role in the growth of the Network to date.

#### 1. The Foodbank social franchise model.

The model provides a mechanism for the Trust to work towards its strategic aim of having a Foodbank in every town in the country, whilst simultaneously protecting the ethos of the Foodbank approach – that they are locally driven projects motivated, run and sustained by local communities. Through marketing and strategic targeting of places and churches, the Trust has been able to stimulate a demand and promote uptake in local communities across the country. The fact that the franchise model is able to provide a tried and tested reputable project further accounts for the prolific take-up of the Foodbank model nation-

wide. It provides motivated groups of local volunteers with a ready-made project which they can take on and with which they will continue to get support from the Trust for the duration of the work.

#### 2. Foodbank as faith-based social action.

The stipulation that Foodbanks are Church-led initiatives appears to have also had a role to play in network growth. Firstly, the Foodbank provides Christians with a tool for undertaking the social action work that their faith calls them to do. Secondly, by prescribing that Foodbanks are church-led there is an inherent capacity for nation-wide growth given the geographical reach of churches across the country. In this way, demand is able to be stimulated in those who are pre-disposed and committed to take on social action projects because of their faith and, due

to the number and spread of churches, this demand is stimulated nation-wide.

The simultaneous timing of the recent recession and the prolific growth of the Network raises the question of **the role that the economic downturn has played** in both the number of Foodbanks that have been established over the last few years and the growth of individual Foodbanks. This question is largely outside the scope of the research and ultimately the timing makes it hard to assess. The insights that were garnered through the data collected were mixed, but many case study interviewees felt that the biggest impact of the recession was yet to be felt.

### Potential challenges going forward

1. **Managing the growth of the network and the growth and sustainability of maturing Foodbanks** will be a key consideration for the Trust. Financial security and quality control across the Network will be central to this. Supporting individual Foodbanks with guidance on how to manage their growth in line with their capacity will also be important, particularly in relation to the number of distributors that they take on in their formative few months.
2. **The Foodbank-distributor relationship** also poses challenges:
  3. There is an outstanding question regarding whether or not the **Christian focus of the Foodbank** initiative could prove problematic in terms of the accessibility of Foodbanks for clients of other faiths and the question of how the Trust will 'reach' places where there are no active churches.
  4. **Bulk donations, particularly of fresh food** can pose challenges for Foodbanks. Logistical concerns include having space and volunteer capacity to sort and store the food and being able to make sure it is provided to clients safely before the 'use by' dates. Such provision can also be unreliable in terms of how much and what food will be delivered. Redistributing surplus food through Foodbanks also raises an important question of dignity and social justice and whether it is right for clients to be given those items which are only one step removed from the dustbin.
  5. The results of this research suggest that there is also a question relating to

**the relationship between Foodbank and supermarkets.** A number of different suggestions were made regarding how the two could be more closely aligned and it will be important for the Network to return to the underlying principles of the Foodbank model before deciding the nature of this.

6. At the level of individual Foodbanks this research suggests that upholding **Foodbank procedures to avoid client dependency and clients 'abusing the system'** will require on-going focus and attention.
7. By their very nature, Foodbanks are emergency responses and focus on providing parcels of food to people in 'need'. Foodbanks and other charitable food assistance projects like them have a limited impact beyond this provision and the signposting they can do to other forms of help. In order to promote wider societal changes and to promote the cause of those vulnerable people that they serve, a sustained focus on **advocacy and campaigning for social justice** will have to be a key focus for the Trust.

### Conclusions and recommendations

Inherent within many of the challenges identified in this report is a significant tension between the desire that 'no-one

goes hungry' (while they await support from other services) and many of the principles which underlie the current Foodbank model (such as being church-led initiatives, local people meeting local need and only taking on clients within a 'managed process'). The Trust and individual Foodbanks need to be clear and consistent about the overall aim of the Foodbank initiative and reconcile with the consequential limitations it might have.

It will be important going forward that the proliferation of Foodbanks and the success of the Network does not become an end in itself, at the sake of those the initiative seeks to serve. The Trust must take active advantage of the fact that they are uniquely placed to raise awareness of the social injustices faced by their clients, to promote and facilitate change.

The final recommendation of this research is a call for informed debate about the presence of national scale emergency food initiatives such as Foodbank and what they mean for research, policy and practice. It will be vital going forward to take the time to critique such provision, to explore some of the potential consequences, particularly for the food experiences of the recipients, and to raise awareness of their political and practical implications.

## 1.0 Introduction

Charitable food assistance programmes are well-established in the welfare landscape of a number of developed nations, most notably the USA and Canada (see Tarasuk 2001; Poppendieck 1998). In the UK they are not as common a sight, yet since the early 2000s it is possible to observe a rise in formalised organisations of charitable food provision in the form of both community food banks and food redistribution programmes.<sup>1</sup>

There is very little UK-based research relating to food banks or other types of charitable food assistance. In 2000 Hawkes and Webster looked in particular at surplus food redistribution programmes in the UK. They observed the expansion of a number of large schemes and predicted a continued momentum of growth; they called for debate around the implications of the expansion of such initiatives and the consequences for policy and experiences of food poverty (Hawkes and Webster 2000). Riches (2002) echoed this call for public debate, and emphasised the importance of such a public conversation before initiatives become entrenched in the welfare landscape. Since these publications however, there has been very little research around charitable food assistance in the UK, particularly research which engages critically with the issues in the context of wider theories of poverty, inequality or social justice. Given the observable rise in national-level charitable initiatives in this country up to and particularly since the early 2000s, the need for informed public debate is pressing. This research hopes to contribute to the initiation of such a debate by providing an evidence-based account of the rise and proliferation of the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network in the UK. The current economic and policy climate of rising food and fuel prices, the restructuring of benefits and wider cuts in public spending provides an opportune ‘moment’ in which to examine the work of charitable food assistance programmes and to explore some of the questions they raise for social research and policy.

This consultancy report is part of a wider piece of research which aims to explore the recent increase in voluntary sector initiatives providing emergency food supplies in the form of food banks to people in the UK and to explore the implications of this phenomenon. Drawing on the experiences of the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network, the key objectives for the wider research are:

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<sup>1</sup> The Trussell Trust Foodbank Network and Fareshare provide good examples of this.

- To evidence the recent increase in food bank provision in the UK;
- To present data on the reasons for and motives behind this increased provision;
- To locate this phenomenon within theories of food poverty and food insecurity, and socio-economic and health inequalities;
- To interrogate the implications of the rise of food banks, particularly in relation to issues of social justice and the questions raised for social and food policy.

This report is focussed on the first two of the project objectives (evidencing the rise of the Foodbank Network and providing insights into the reasons behind its growth). It is comprised of two main sections: the first presents findings relating to Network growth to date and potential key drivers of this; the second outlines some of the key challenges that the results indicate may be faced by the Network and individual Foodbanks going forward. The third and fourth objectives (relating to implications for theory, policy and social justice) will be met in the next phase of writing, in the form of a number of further research papers. By taking this approach to analysis and writing it is hoped that this first output, in the form of a consultancy report, will be of practical use to the Trust and individual Foodbanks and could help to inform strategy and policy going forward. The research did not involve an evaluation of the Foodbank model and therefore cannot present findings relating to its impacts or outcomes. Furthermore, this report does not provide a critique of the Foodbank phenomena or its implications and such discussion will be pursued in academic and policy settings through forthcoming publications.

### 1.1 The Trussell Trust Foodbank Network

The first Trussell Trust Foodbank was established in Salisbury in 2000. In 2004 the decision was taken to develop a way of sharing the model more widely and the Foodbank was developed into a social franchise. The first franchise was established in Gloucester and in the last seven years the number of Foodbanks has grown to 148 across the UK.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Figure correct as of November 2011.

In the year 2010-2011 the Foodbanks within the Network fed 61,468 adults and children, collected 563.38 tons of food and distributed 491.995 tons.<sup>3</sup> Since 2010 the growth in the number of Foodbanks launched has grown exponentially, from 55 to over 100 in 18 months. In the first half of 2011 one new Foodbank was launched every week (Trussell Trust 2011).

Foodbanks are community-based projects, where food is donated by local people, stored locally and distributed to local people in need. The model is described in the Foodbank Operating Manual in the following way:

*'The **'Foodbank'** stores or 'banks' food donated by the community, and can be drawn on by people in crisis. It is a simple and unique concept designed to help individuals in crisis by providing free emergency food for three days (10 balanced meals). Three days is the period assessed as the minimum time it takes for the appropriate agencies to be in a position to assist. This period can be extended if necessary. We collect food from the public at supermarkets, from churches and through local groups and schools, and this is 'banked' in a store. Food is drawn in two ways [vouchers redeemable at the **Foodbank** or Emergency Food Boxes held by distributors], both of which operate as a result of referrals from registered Care Professionals such as Social Services, Health Visitors, Probation Officers, Church Pastoral Workers, schools and others working in the front line of poverty' (Trussell Trust 2004 p.1)*

Foodbanks are set up by collaborations of local churches who obtain the franchise through a one-off donation and nominal annual donations. Each Foodbank is audited annually and they receive on-going support from a Network Manager and where available, regional co-ordinators. Food is collected from people in the community, most commonly through churches, schools and special collections at local supermarkets. All food parcels contain a prescribed combination of key (long-life) food items, enough for 10 meals; whilst the basic composition of each parcel is the same, the amount of food provided is increased according

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<sup>3</sup> Figures relating to the number of adults and children fed is collected through details given on Foodbank vouchers and does not take account of repeat visits to Foodbanks by the same individuals.

to the number of people in the household.<sup>4</sup> As the description above suggests, recipients of food parcels have to be referred to a Foodbank by a 'care professional' who is working with them, and either provides them with a voucher or gives them a box directly. Recipients can be given up to three food parcels; where they might need a fourth, or more, the care professional (or 'distributor') is required to make special arrangements with the Foodbank.

In presenting the findings of the research project, this report contains five further chapters. Chapter two locates the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network within concepts of charitable food assistance and the current policy context. Chapter three outlines the methods used in the research. Chapter four presents findings relating to factors which have contributed to the growth of the Foodbank Network since 2004, focussing particularly on the role of the social franchise model, understanding Foodbank as faith-based social action and the role of the most recent recession. Chapter five presents findings relating to some key challenges that the Network and individual Foodbanks might face in the next stage of their growth. The report ends with a chapter drawing out key conclusions and outlining the next steps for the research.

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<sup>4</sup> All Food parcels contain the following items: cereal; soup (canned or packet); beans/spaghetti in sauce; tinned tomatoes/pasta sauce; tinned vegetables; tinned meat (or vegetarian options); tinned fish; tinned fruit; rice pudding; biscuits; sugar; pasta/rice/noodles; tea or coffee; juice; UHT/powdered milk; and extra treats such as sauces or chocolate – depending on what the Foodbank has available.

## 2.0 Charitable Food Assistance in the UK in 2011

### 2.1 Conceptualising charitable food assistance

Charitable food assistance comprises a number of different types of initiatives which work in some way to provide food for people who are experiencing limited access to food, often conceptualised in an immediate sense – as ‘emergency’ provision. These charitable initiatives include food banks, soup kitchens and shelters. In light of the lack of literature regarding charitable food assistance in the UK there is a corresponding lack of established research terminology which can be employed to describe the phenomenon. Elsewhere, however, particularly in the USA and Canada, there exists a vocabulary which can helpfully inform the foundations of this research. It is important to note that individual organisations vary, so the definitions that are outlined here will not necessarily apply uniformly across all charitable food assistance projects.

In the US context the term ‘food bank’ usually refers to warehouses or centres which collect, store and redistribute food to charitable organisations who then pass on the food directly to beneficiaries (Berner and O’Brien 2004; Costello 2007; Molnar et al 2001). In this model, food banks effectively work as ‘middle men’, collecting and redistributing food, but they are not themselves client-facing. The food is distributed to charitable organisations which can be either ‘emergency’ food programmes or ‘non-emergency’ programmes (Mabli et al 2010). Emergency providers include food pantries, soup kitchens and emergency shelters (Mabli et al 2010; Berner and O’Brien 2004). Food pantries distribute food for people to take home and prepare themselves (Berner and O’Brien 2004 and Mabli et al 2010). Soup kitchens provide prepared meals which are served on site and emergency shelters provide both shelter and prepared meals to clients in need (Mabli et al 2010). ‘Non-emergency’ programmes include, for example, day care centres or summer holiday camps (Mabli et al 2010).

The discourse in the Canadian context incorporates a broader notion of community based charitable food assistance, in contrast to the rather more prescribed vocabulary of the US – possibly a result of the influence of the models of large scale national initiatives like Feeding

America.<sup>5</sup> In Canada, the food bank model varies and does include initiatives which give food to people directly (see Riches 2002; Tarasuk and Eakin 2003). Published research also includes work relating to community kitchens, where groups of people 'pool their resources to cook large quantities of food' (Engler-Stringer and Berenbaum 2007). The Trussell Trust Foodbank model as it currently stands, where local initiatives collect, store and distribute food to local people appears to be more closely aligned to Canadian experiences, rather than the large-scale warehouses found in the US.

Charitable food assistance in the UK is not new, and there is a history of ad hoc provision through food banks, soup kitchens and shelters. What appears to be new in the case of the Trussell Trust Foodbank is the professionalisation and formalisation of such provision through a nation-wide initiative. In this way, the Network moves the UK closer to the experiences of North American countries where such initiatives have become common place and are now well established within their welfare landscapes. This current period of assurgency is therefore key for exploring the reasons behind the growth of the phenomenon in this country and for taking a step back to discuss some of its implications.

## 2.2 Policy Context

The economic and policy context of 2011 presents an important 'moment' for conducting this research. Public financial austerity, civil society policy programmes like the Big Society and wide-scale welfare reform make the question of charitable food assistance, its rise and apparent demand, extremely pressing.

Within the wider landscape of public sector financial cuts, two policy programmes in particular make this phenomenon and the research timely. The Welfare Reform Bill of 2011 proposes a number of significant changes to welfare provision in the UK, including: replacing the disability living allowance with Personal Independence Payments; imposing restrictions to Housing Benefit; capping the total amount that can be claimed in benefits; and changes to child maintenance (Houses of Parliament webpage 2011). The consequences of these

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<sup>5</sup> Feeding America is a nation-wide network of food banks which is reported to feed 37 million Americans every year; the organisation collects food from local and national sources and re-distributes it to local agencies (Feeding America 2011)

changes, and the periods of transition involved, could impact on the lives of many potential and existing clients of charitable food assistance programmes and may increase demand considerably.

The Big Society presents the second key policy programme of relevance to this research. The set of initiatives this programme encompasses is designed to further reduce the role of the state and to promote community-level responses to meeting local needs. Key dimensions of this programme include encouraging people to 'take an active role in their communities' and supporting not-for-profit organisations (Cabinet Office no date). Foodbanks, with their focus on community participation, local responses to local needs, and charitable status are potentially extremely well-placed to inform this policy programme.

It is important that the work of the Trussell Trust Foodbank initiative is located within the context of these large-scale and widespread policy reforms. The implication of these policies for Foodbank, its future growth and possible entrenchment requires analysis and discussion amongst and between practitioners, policy-makers and academics.

### 3.0 Methods

The empirical research reported here was conducted between May and July 2011 and comprised two phases of fieldwork. The first involved semi-structured interviews with strategic members of the Trussell Trust as well as individuals from the very first Foodbank in Salisbury. The second phase involved semi-structured interviews at a number of case study Foodbanks in London (Tower Hamlets Foodbank), the West Midlands (Coventry Central Foodbank), the East of England (Haverhill Foodbank) and the South West (Gloucester Foodbank).

Case study Foodbanks were identified in discussion with the Trussell Trust and recruited through the Network Manager. Interview participants at the case studies were recruited through contacts at those Foodbanks who acted as 'gatekeepers'. In total 31 interviews were conducted. Bearing in mind a number of participants reflected on their experience of a number of different roles within Foodbanks (usually both client and volunteer), data from these interviews drew on the perspectives of: 5 strategic Trussell Trust personnel; 11 Foodbank managers, administrators and affiliates; 8 volunteers; 5 clients; and 6 distributors.

This report presents the research findings thematically across the case studies, rather than sequentially. In order to protect the anonymity of the distributors and clients who participated in the research, any quotes given are not attributable to the Foodbank from which they came. The same approach is taken wherever possible towards participants from the Trussell Trust and individual Foodbanks who are only identifiable by their role for example 'strategic level interviewee', 'Foodbank manager' or 'Foodbank volunteer'.

## 4.0 From 1 to 148: Insights into Network Growth

In exploring the growth of the Network the research highlighted a number of aspects, central to the Foodbank initiative itself, which seem to be key to the successful proliferation of Foodbanks. In particular, the social franchise model developed by the Trust and the faith-based nature of the work have played (and will most likely continue to play) key roles in the growth of the Foodbank Network. The Foodbank social franchise model provides a ready-made, reputable tool for local churches to take up as part of the social action work their Christian faith calls them to do. At the same time, the strategic approach to the roll-out of the model amongst churches enables the Trust to work towards its mission that every town should have a Foodbank in light of the geographical reach and presence of churches throughout the country.

The simultaneous timing of the recent recession and the prolific growth of the Network raises the question of the role that the economic downturn has played in both the number of Foodbanks that have been established over the last few years and individual Foodbank growth. This question is largely outside the scope of the research and the timing makes it ultimately hard to assess. The insights that were garnered through the data collected were mixed, but many case study interviewees felt that the biggest impact of the recession was yet to be felt.

### 4.1 Foodbank as a social franchise

The Trussell Trust's mission is to '*replicate the Foodbank Project throughout the UK: every town should have one*' [Trussell Trust 2004 p.2]. The findings of this research indicate that the success of the social franchise model developed by the Trust is key to the achievement of this.

The original motivation for sharing the Salisbury Foodbank more widely was the notion that '*if Salisbury needed a Foodbank, surely every town in the country needed a Foodbank*' [Strategic Interviewee]. In deciding exactly how to replicate the original Salisbury Foodbank, a number of different options were considered, including the idea of '*setting up Foodbanks*

*one after the other around the place*' [Strategic Interviewee] and retaining control centrally and also the idea of *'just producing the manual on disk and giving it to anybody who turned up at the door and let them get on with it'* [Strategic Interviewee]. The third option considered was that of establishing a not-for-profit social franchise.

A number of key factors motivated the choice of social franchising.<sup>6</sup> Firstly, it provided a mechanism for meeting the strategic aim of the Trust: *'we did want to see every community have a Foodbank and just throwing the idea up, there was no control'* [Strategic Interviewee]. However, the social franchise model also allowed for Foodbanks to remain essentially bottom-up initiatives *'these are community based projects, they work because the community catch the vision [...] there's something kind of disempowering and controlling about those that set up their branches, and so on, and directly control them'* [Strategic Interviewee]. The fact that the Foodbank model was tried and tested was a further reason for establishing a franchise, to protect it from being adapted and also to ensure quality control:

*'we were absolutely convinced we had a system we'd designed that was very effective, so we didn't want it to be adapted inappropriately and then the whole problem of quality being cut back and screwed up basically by well-meaning volunteers who thought they knew better when we'd researched it for three years and evaluated it and fine tuned it.'* [Strategic Interviewee].

The original decision to turn the Salisbury Foodbank into a social franchise was therefore a strategic one, as a mechanism through which to spread Foodbank activity and its ethos across the country. This particular model allowed for the satisfaction of two key drivers for the Trust, to see the provision of emergency food parcels rolled out across the country whilst maintaining the community-based, bottom-up, participatory approach of the Salisbury Foodbank.

The precise design of the franchise model decided upon incorporates a number of undertakings for both the franchisee and the Trussell Trust (Trussell Trust 2004). Franchisees pay an upfront donation of £1500.00 and annual contribution of £360.00 and agree to subscribe to the aims and visions of the Trussell Trust; among other things they are

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on social franchising see Mavra (2011) and Ritchie et al (2011)

also required to use the Foodbank logo appropriately, collect data and allow an annual audit to be taken. Included within the list of things the Trussell Trust provide franchisees is the operating manual, training, on-going help and support, co-ordination of the Foodbank Network and provision of branding. In terms of the governance of individual Foodbanks, it is stipulated that they are inter-church initiatives and of the case study Foodbanks visited, all have or plan to have umbrella charities, working together with other churches under which the Foodbank is one project.

The results suggest that the social franchise model has played a contributory role in the growth of the Network since its establishment in 2004. From a top-down perspective, in terms of the 'roll-out' of the franchise, the success was attributed by strategic Trussell Trust interview participants to a number of key characteristics which could be typical of any successful franchise. In the first instance, the Trust has been strategic about facilitating the roll-out of their Foodbank franchise, marketing the Foodbank and targeting either particular areas where there were no Foodbanks or specific churches or groups of churches that they feel might be particularly well-placed to take up a Foodbank:

*'...we've put a lot of effort into marketing and we've adapted and improved our marketing and we learned a bit better about targeting. [...] So there's a thing about us and the effort we make and we do plan, we do strategic plans, business plans, we think about it'* [Strategic Interviewee]

The exact pattern of growth to date, notably a small number of Foodbanks being established in the first few years and then significantly more being opened within the last 18 months, was seen as a reflection of normal, reasonable growth patterns for a franchise initiative:

*'...purely a factor of growth. It's really, really hard to set up your first couple of projects in any replication. [...] But there's something that happens down the line where it starts to multiply of its own accord, if you do the marketing so, you know, our efforts, we target churches and we target the media.'* [Strategic Interviewee]

In terms of the level of local take-up of Foodbank, the results from both strategic and case study interviews suggest that the franchise model was a contributory factor here too. The fact that the model was ready-made with clear instructions was seen to be key, as was local

confidence in the manageability of the project and the Trussell brand and in the credibility it would have amongst the local community. Finally the on-going support provided by the Trust and the Network was also seen to be a key reason for take-up.

From the strategic-level interviews the fact that the franchise provides a ready-made, ready researched, tried and tested community project was seen to be a key incentive for local groups. The clarity and level of instruction provided by the Foodbank franchise was also seen as important, and procedures and policies having already been devised. This was supported by evidence from the case studies where managers talked about the relative ease of taking on the franchise over having to devise and implement policies and procedures from scratch or even *'re-invent the wheel from the start'* [Foodbank Manager]. This point was particularly well articulated by the Foodbank Manager from Haverhill:

*'It's just there, it's just done, it's ready, it's, I mean we're doing at the moment, we're having to write our own policies and procedures for our REACH centre, the resource centre, cor! Do me a favour! I mean, it is such hard work trying to write stuff down, this is already done for you...'*

Local confidence in the manageability of the project and in the Trussell brand were also seen as key at a strategic level, as was an appreciation for the credibility Foodbank would have amongst the local community. Again, this was mirrored by the findings from the case study Foodbanks. In Gloucester, the Foodbank was initiated by a small local church and it was felt that the franchise model made it possible for the church to feel confident about taking on the project and that they would not be overwhelmed by it. In Coventry confidence came from the auditing processes and how these would ensure that they were doing things appropriately and being kept on track. For case study Foodbanks the credibility of the franchise was seen as important at the outset, to be able to point to the work of the Trust, the Network and other Foodbanks in order 'prove' the credibility of the new local project particularly to care professionals, but also to potential partner churches and other local stakeholders.

*'I started to attend school cluster meetings and said, this is Foodbank, it's a Christian project, this is how it works, this is the track record, we'll be launching, look out for us'*  
[Foodbank Manager]

The on-going support provided to franchisees was also seen by both strategic and case study interviewees as an important aspect of the model. A Foodbank Network Manager, supported by an assistant, provide practical help and mentoring to the Foodbanks in the Network. In some areas there are also Regional Network Managers on-hand. The idea that there is help at *'the end of the line'* [Foodbank Manager] or *'just a telephone call'* away [Strategic Interviewee] was seen as extremely beneficial.

The Foodbank social franchise model is therefore a key driving factor behind the growth of the Network. It provides a mechanism for the Trust to work towards its strategic aim of having a Foodbank in every town in the country, whilst simultaneously protecting the ethos of the Foodbank approach – that they are locally driven projects motivated, run and sustained by local communities. Through marketing and strategic targeting of places and churches, the Trust has been able to stimulate a demand and promote uptake in local communities across the country. The fact that the franchise model is able to provide a tried and tested, reputable project further accounts for the prolific take-up of the Foodbank model nation-wide. It provides motivated groups of local volunteers with a ready-made project which they can take on and with which they will continue to get support from the Trust for the duration of the work.

#### 4.2 Foodbank as faith-based social action

A second key finding in explaining the growth of the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network relates to the faith-based nature of both the Trust and the Foodbank franchise. It became immediately clear in the earliest stages of the project just how important the faith-based nature of the work was, to both its approach and in explaining the successful and rapid growth of the Network. The premise of the Foodbank initiative is that local Foodbanks should be Christian led projects:

*'Foodbanks shows Jesus' love in action by giving food to people in crisis in the local area, providing short term emergency relief. Our church-based Foodbanks engage the whole community in providing food to local people going hungry' [Trussell Trust 2004 p.1]*

The findings suggest that the faith basis of the Foodbank initiative is an important factor in explaining the rapid growth and success of the franchise for two key reasons. Firstly, the Foodbank provides Christians with a tool for undertaking the social action work that their faith calls them to do. Secondly, by prescribing that Foodbanks are church-led there is an inherent capacity for nation-wide growth given the geographical reach of churches across the country. In this way, demand is able to be stimulated in those who are pre-disposed and committed to take on social action projects because of their faith and, due to the number and spread of churches, this demand is stimulated nation-wide.

The Foodbank franchise initiative is based on providing a tool for churches and congregations who are predisposed to social action; moreover, to respond to the specific call to 'feed the hungry'. Strategic-level interviewees from the Trust pointed to the biblical passage of Matthew Chapter 25 as a key focal point for the Foodbank initiative and the motivations of Christian churches to take the franchise up:

*"I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me". The righteous will then answer him, 'When, Lord, did we ever see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we ever see you a stranger and welcome you in our homes, or naked and clothe you? When did we ever see you sick or in prison visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these members of my family, you did it for me'. (Matthew Ch25 V35-40, Good News Bible, 1994, p.38)*

This was supported by findings from individual case studies where managers and administrators pointed to a number of motivating biblical passages including Matthew Ch25 V35-40, Isaiah Ch58 and John Ch1 V14. From the case study interviews there was a sense that social action was at the heart of Christianity and for some interviewees Foodbank provided a mechanism for '*living out our faith*' [Foodbank Manager]:

*'What opportunities do you get to help the people that as Christians we're told we should help? And Foodbank provides an opportunity for people to put their faith into action.'* [Foodbank Manager]

Churches involved in each of the case study Foodbanks had been doing some form of ad hoc food provision previously, suggesting that perhaps the Foodbank model provided a good way to formalise pre-existing work. In Haverhill and Gloucester this took the form of Christmas hampers and in Tower Hamlets and Coventry the ad hoc provision of tinned goods. Furthermore, Foodbank was often located in the context of churches' other social action work. In every case study, those involved in running Foodbanks and their churches were working on other social action projects as well including an advice centre, night shelter, Street Pastor programme, community cafe, debt counselling through Christians Against Poverty and children's nursery.

The prescription that Foodbanks should be church-led enhances the capacity for the growth of the Network, due to the presence of churches in communities across the country. This nation-wide coverage of potential franchisees provides a key mechanism through which the Trust can achieve their strategic vision of every community having a Foodbank:

*'The Trussell Trust mission is to replicate the Foodbank Project throughout the UK: 'Every Town Should Have One'. This will be achieved by empowering Churches and Christian organisations with the necessary tools, training and back up required to set up and run a successful Foodbank in their town.'* [Trussell Trust 2004 p.2]

The faith basis of the Foodbank franchise initiative is therefore perceived to be key to explaining the growth of the Network: those establishing local Foodbanks are committed to social action, particularly 'feeding the hungry' and given the number of churches and their geographical spread, churches provide key mechanisms for national network expansion.

### 4.3 The recession

The final growth factor to be explored in this report is the role played by the recent recession. Data from end of year reports from Foodbanks in the Network highlight how growth has recently accelerated, particularly since 2009 when the number of open Foodbanks has gone from 20 to 148 (to date). In the last year the number of visits to Foodbanks in the network almost doubled, to over 60,000 adults and children. The results are mixed as to the exact role that the recession has played in the growth of the network, and would be very hard to

quantify through the data collected and given the natural rise in food input/output of young Foodbanks as they become established and the snowball effect resulting from the Trust's marketing activities.

Some strategic-level interviewees felt that rising unemployment, as a consequence of the recession, had led to a rise in 'need' which could help explain the rise in the number of Foodbanks and the numbers of those clients helped:

*'So I think those established Foodbanks are seeing a rise in demand, I think you've got to put that down to the recession really biting now and people losing their jobs.'*

[Strategic Interviewee]

This view was contentious, however, with other strategic-level participants arguing that the 'needs' being met by Foodbanks were largely pre-existing before the current recession. These interviewees felt that instead, the main impact of the recession had been to raise public consciousness of these pre-existing needs and perhaps to increase media and public sympathy for the cause.

*'...you see the need has always been there, this is about volume and it's about awareness. It's primarily about awareness and I would say the one thing that the recession and economic downturn has done for Foodbank is to enable journalists to have a reason to pay attention to what we're doing.'* [Strategic Interviewee]

The data collected from the case study Foodbanks was also mixed regarding the role of the recession and there was a sense that there was a pre-existing need, but that the recession may have exacerbated things. One of the most significant findings regarding the recession from the data collected at the case study Foodbanks was a sense that the worst is yet to come. Participants from Gloucester, Coventry Central and Tower Hamlets Foodbanks talked about how they felt that the recession hadn't completely 'hit' or 'bitten' and with changes due in welfare systems the effect was likely to be exacerbated.

*'I don't want to be a prophet of doom, but I don't think we've seen anything yet, I think there's a lot more to come.'* [Foodbank Manager]

Ultimately, it is difficult to determine the exact role played by the recession in the growth of the Foodbank Network from the data collected for this research. Furthermore, the timing of the recent recession in relation to the natural development of the Network is almost too entwined to draw any conclusions. There may well be a benefit to further research into this question and a more systematic assessment of whether or not the recession has led to a rise in 'need'. The insights which can be drawn from this limited data suggest that whilst the impact of the recession on growth may be hard to determine, participants 'on the ground' felt that the biggest impact may yet be to come.

## 5.0 The Next 148 Foodbanks: Potential Challenges Going Forward

In the process of exploring some of the reasons behind the growth of the Foodbank Network since its inception and collecting data on the experiences of Foodbank clients, distributors, volunteers and management it is possible to identify a number of key challenges which the Trussell Trust, the Network and individual Foodbanks may face as growth continues. Whilst further increases in the number of Foodbanks will clearly be important in the pursuit of the Trussell Trust's mission that every town should have a Foodbank, the growth of local projects once they are established also needs to be taken into consideration. This chapter outlines a number of potential challenges that could arise as the Trust and its Foodbanks enter the next phase of their growth.

### 5.1 Growth and sustainability

A key consideration for the Trust going forward will necessarily be that of managing the early and maturing growth and the sustainability of Foodbanks and the network. Financial security and quality control are likely to be key to this.

Data from strategic interviewees indicate that the Trust are focussed on their strategic approach as the Network grows, on '*changing gear*' and ensuring that the structures are in place '*so that we don't end up going down the wrong track*' [Strategic Interviewee]. The fact that payments from franchisees do not cover the costs of the management of the Network means that funding will necessarily remain a pressing issue for the Trust. The Trust has previously obtained funding from a range of organisations including Blythwood Care, Pears Foundation and Big Lottery Fund, and '*have never been dependent on any one source of income*' [Strategic Interviewee]. Whilst this diversified approach to sourcing funds avoids any situation of dependency on one income stream, at a time of financial austerity in the public and voluntary sectors the Trust will need to maintain innovative approaches to generating income. In addition to securing further support from funders, the Trust appears focussed on encouraging individual Foodbanks to develop social enterprises to assist their own sustainability through for example the Restore charity shop model developed at Salisbury.

As the Foodbank Network continues to grow, upholding quality throughout will become an increasing challenge for the Trust. As numbers grow and new Foodbanks learn and share experiences from other newer Foodbanks, there is a risk that *'go to two hundred and you may actually find some don't even look like a Foodbank'* [Foodbank Director]. One strategic-level interviewee described a key concern relating to quality control, that:

*'somebody somewhere won't do it properly and as a consequence social services director in city Z will say 'well that was rubbish, I'm not letting these volunteers near us again' and then he or she will tell the story and there's only 150 authorities in the country so it doesn't take long to get the message round and then we're in real trouble so it's vital that people deliver top-quality service and focus on excellence'* [Strategic Interviewee].

The Trust remain committed to *'maintaining the quality of each project and the quality systems that support it'* [Strategic Interviewee ]. Ultimately, each Foodbank will be unique *'because of the nature of the people running it'* [Foodbank Director]. However, in order to protect the integrity of the franchise, the Trust will have to ensure that the underlying functions and processes remain in-line with the model. Such control mechanisms (for example through the annual auditing process) naturally provide means by which to ensure uniform approaches to sustainability and growth management amongst the Foodbanks and protect against projects becoming unmanageable.

In addition to protecting for financial sustainability and ensuring quality control a further challenge for individual Foodbanks as they continue to grow is that of managing their supply and demand. More specifically, managing demand through close control over the number of vouchers held by distributors at any one time. The Gloucester Foodbank implement 'a brake and accelerator' approach with the amount of vouchers held by local distributors:

*'...if we think this thing is running away from us, we don't give out as many vouchers, if we think we can manage more, we give out more vouchers it's as simple as that, brake and accelerator, brake and accelerator, but you have to watch that because human nature says I want to keep helping, I want to keep helping, oh another agency, we'll keep helping and before you realise it you're busting'* [Foodbank Director]

These reflections point to the importance of Foodbanks carefully managing the number of vouchers held by distributors locally to ensure that they do not become overwhelmed and left in a position where they are unable to honour the vouchers when clients come to the Foodbank. Whilst it is of course unlikely that every voucher held locally by distributors will be given out in any one week, manageability needs to be a key consideration, particularly for new Foodbanks. At the initiation of Tower Hamlets Foodbank, on the advice of both the Trussell Trust and with support from the Foodbank's steering group, six distributors were originally taken on board and the numbers grew from there. As the quote above from Gloucester Foodbank indicates there is of course an inherent tension involved in the curbing of numbers of vouchers available and the amount of distributors signed up by Foodbanks. The aspiration that no one in the local community is left to go hungry can over-ride the seemingly harsh practicalities involved in protecting the viability of the project.

However, precautions regarding the number of vouchers available cannot account for extraordinary circumstances. In May 2011 Coventry Central Foodbank was overwhelmed by 23 local families, all from A8 European Union countries who had their benefit payments stopped unexpectedly and in total 150 adults and children were referred to the Foodbank. The importance of the wider Foodbank Network proved crucial:

*'I put out an appeal in any direction I could think of. You may have received that email. And we had Chesham come in with 750kilos, you know this story, and Gloucester with 550, with more cereals than I reasonably knew what to do with coming in from Dorset cereals and, and, and, and, and it's, erm, I think without the network kind of looking after you, we would have been reasonably stuffed but that's, yeah.'* [Foodbank Manager]

Aside from this rare instance in Coventry, insights from Gloucester and Tower Hamlets indicate the importance of the careful management of distributor and voucher numbers. Where the desire that no-one goes hungry begins to over-ride managed growth tactics Foodbanks may benefit from stricter guidance on managing their capacity.

The management of growth and focus on sustainability is likely to remain key into the future, particularly in light of likely increases in demand for food parcels brought on by further impacts of the recession and also changes to the welfare system. As highlighted in Chapter 4 there was a perception amongst case study interviewees that as far as the impact of the

recent recession is concerned, the worst is yet to come. Where this will meet the impact of forthcoming welfare restructuring and other cuts in public provision, it is possible to see the potential for a ‘perfect storm’ where Foodbank demand could grow exponentially and donations are affected by wider experiences of limits to disposable income. It will therefore be vital that Foodbanks are guided and supported in maintaining reasonable and manageable levels of vouchers and distributor agencies to prevent them being overwhelmed.

## 5.2 Challenges posed by the Foodbank-Distributor relationship

Distributors play a pivotal role in the Foodbank process. The findings from this research suggest that the giving out of Foodbank vouchers by front-line care professionals is important from a number of different perspectives. In the first instance, having external professionals distribute vouchers enables volunteers and managers at the Foodbank to remain non-judgemental. A number of volunteers talked about not ever wanting to have to decide who did or did not get food parcels, feeling ‘*poorly equipped*’ to make the decision or not wanting ‘*the responsibility*’. The relationship also enables Foodbanks to hold agencies to account, thereby protecting themselves against dependency through ensuring clients are ‘*supported*’ and ‘*moved on*’ by their agencies [Foodbank Administrator].

One volunteer also talked about how the referral process provides legitimacy when talking about the Foodbank to members of the public and being able to say that those people who are helped have been referred through agencies like social services ‘*then they have more trust in it I think and are more willing to give because they know it’s being handled properly*’ [Foodbank Volunteer]. The referral process was also seen as an enabling mechanism for clients, a way of overcoming fears that they would be assessed at the Foodbank itself and possibly be turned away:

*‘I think it’s enormously important that at that point people can come through the door confident that they’re going to get their food because they’ve got their voucher, so yes I think that’s hugely important. I mean imagine being turned away at that point, that would be devastating, wouldn’t it?’* [Foodbank Volunteer]

Whilst the Foodbank-distributor relationship is clearly central to the functioning of the model, the relationship appears to pose a number of key challenges for Foodbanks. In the first instance, the ways in which distributors assess 'need' and decide who to refer can prove challenging for Foodbanks. One case study Foodbank described problems with a distributor who *'gave out vouchers a bit willy-nilly'*. While some distributors work closely with clients that they refer, knowing a lot about their circumstances and requirements, other agencies, particularly in the case of drop-in or advice centres will necessarily be limited in the assessment they can make. One distributor who works at an advice centre articulated this point, describing how *'we can't validate what the client is saying, if somebody comes in and says I haven't got any food then we take it at face value'* [Manager at a voluntary sector advice centre]. It is also interesting to note that this interviewee then went on to assert how they didn't want to have to *'judge whether somebody's worthy of a food voucher'*. The Foodbank model relies on the distributor making this judgement and where distributors are not doing so this can pose a challenge for Foodbanks who are then in turn obliged to honour the voucher. Going forward there is also the potential that should demand for vouchers from distributors increase, they could begin to assess need in different ways, with the threshold creeping ever-higher.

Data from the interviews – with both distributors and Foodbank workers – highlighted how distributors can find Foodbank vouchers a useful tool in their kit of client provision. However, there is also evidence to suggest that providing clients with Foodbank vouchers can have the effect of saving distributor agencies money from their own hardship funds or programmes. Whilst this can be to some extent a natural consequence of involvement in the project it poses the question as to whether this is right and what is then happening to the money these agencies would otherwise have spent on giving clients money for food. Examples of this occurring were given from two of the case study Foodbanks. In one of these examples it appeared to be a case of pure money saving, but in the other, the agency was still focusing their hardship funds on clients and instead of providing money for food and fuel they were then able to focus on giving money for gas and electricity. Therefore where these funds are still used for clients, and perhaps then able to stretch further and help more people, this appears to be a positive way of partnership working. The challenge for Foodbanks comes where distributor agencies are using them as a money saving exercise and an alternative to drawing on their own funds.

As the number of distributors affiliated to Foodbanks increases, a further challenge is ensuring that those workers giving out vouchers know all that they need to about the procedures and ways of working at Foodbanks. Data from interviews with distributors revealed a number of cases where they did not appear to be informed or aware of key aspects of their Foodbanks. In one case a distributor talked about not knowing what was in the food parcels, in another not knowing what the set up was at the Foodbank and in a third case not knowing how many times they could refer a client. Whilst this may be a question of information-sharing within the care agencies themselves, such lack of knowledge could ultimately cause problems for Foodbanks; client expectations when they arrive at distribution centres could be misinformed, they could be referred too many times, or a lack of understanding by distributors could even lead to them not referring clients if they are concerned about how they will be treated when they get there.

Data from the case study Foodbanks suggests that different Foodbanks are taking on different types of distribution agencies. One example of this is asylum seeker and refugee agencies. A key premise of the Foodbank-Distributor relationship is that the longer-term wider requirements of clients are being met or resolved by the agency. There are of course particular instances where the agencies concerned are not able to resolve the issues of their clients and this can be true in the case of asylum seekers and refugees. Due to the turn-around time involved with application and appeal procedures, peoples' status can remain uncertain for significant periods of time. It is therefore a challenge for Foodbanks in deciding whether or not to recruit agencies dealing with asylum seekers and refugees and if so how to manage the number of parcels they can receive. In keeping with the principles of the Foodbank model and issues of capacity one case study Foodbank turned away an agency working with HIV positive asylum seekers and refugees; in the local area the organisation was dealing with 4,000 people, all of whom had no recourse to public funds. In comparison, another Foodbank was having difficulty grappling with the idea of turning away such clients and was subsequently struggling to decide how best to reconcile the desire for no-one to go hungry with the sustainability of the project in light of the three-voucher rule:

*'there is no welfare state backup for people who've overstayed their visas and actually there's no solution, bar sending them home, so a three food voucher system for them, really to me, isn't quite the solution but none of us really know what the solution is unfortunately. Do you just keep feeding them and feeding them and feeding them, I just don't know. It's an imponderable, I can't get my head round it at all that one. [...] I come back, every time, to Matthew 25-35 that doesn't say 'when*

*somebody's reached their third food voucher you stop feeding them' it just says you know 'I was hungry, you fed me, I was thirsty, you gave me a drink' it doesn't put restrictions on it, so I don't know what the answer to that is, that's my one issue with the Foodbank.'* [Foodbank Manager]

Foodbank guidance relating to voucher provision, limits in the number given to clients and the stipulation that they are within some kind of managed process are all key to the sustainability of the model. As this example shows there are some instances where potential clients do not fit within this. The issue clearly poses a challenge for both individual Foodbanks in terms of managing the situation locally for their project but also suggests that the Trust could provide clearer guidance relating to whether there are particular types of agencies Foodbanks should not sign up, providing a rationale.

Data from interviews with voucher distributors also highlighted a number of challenges that working with the Foodbank poses for them. Interviews with Foodbank distributors revealed a number of aspects that they found positive from working with Foodbanks. There were many positive comments about the provision generally, with reflections such as *'it's integral to what the community here provides and needs'* [Family Support Worker at a Children's Centre] and *'it's only advantage, advantage, advantage and nothing else'* [Drug worker working with prolific offenders]. Being able to give their clients vouchers for food parcels was seen as providing them with an additional tool or 'ammunition' [Drug worker working with prolific offenders and manager at a Refugee Advice Centre]. It could also fit well and complement other services that distributor agencies provide or signpost their clients to. There was also a sense that Foodbank could fill a gap in the services they were able to provide.

Distributors did, however, raise some concerns or challenges that working with the Foodbank poses for them. Reflecting on the beginning stages of working with a Foodbank, one distributor talked about the initial reluctance amongst their colleagues due to *'taking the interaction outside of the team'* [Social Worker from a family support team]. Another distributor talked about the more general problem of referring clients to another organisation and not knowing if the volunteers would be equipped or *'well suited to meet my clients' needs'* [Drug worker working with prolific offenders]. The same distributor went on to raise the issue of danger and the risk associated with referring a client who could potentially pose a risk to other Foodbank clients or Foodbank volunteers. A concern was also raised

regarding partnership working and the requirement for more formality in terms of process and procedure. One distributor from a children's centre talked about the need for more formalised referral procedures:

*'the paperwork must be in place, we can't take, we mustn't take a referral unless we've actually got a paper-trail for it because it's got to be allocated as well and a file opened up and so on, for statistics apart from anything else.'* [Family Support Worker at a Children's Centre]

Distributor concerns are likely to be particular not only to the different Foodbanks but the agencies, their clients and individual workers concerned. A final consideration for individual Foodbanks and the Network would therefore be to gain insights into and work to overcome the difficulties their ways of working might pose for their distributors.

### 5.3 Faith, ethnicity and accessibility

The Trussell Trust Foodbank model focuses on empowering churches to run Foodbanks, to *'do what they have been called to do through their faith'* [Strategic Interviewee]. Whilst the Foodbanks necessarily have a Christian focus and ethos, they are not exclusive initiatives and clients, distributors and volunteers are encouraged from all faiths or none. Whilst inclusivity is at the heart of the endeavour, it is possible that a further challenge for the network and individual Foodbanks could be the accessibility of Foodbanks for clients of other faiths and the question of how the Trust will 'reach' places where there are no active churches.

*'There's then another big challenge with, at the moment we insist that it's Christian led. [...] If we are passionate about spreading this as we say we are, right across the UK, there will be areas of the UK where it is extraordinarily difficult, somewhere like Leicester, there are patches of Leicester where you are not going to find any Christian church to partner with within your area but there are some people who have very well held beliefs and have all the right credentials and tick all the right boxes. So, I think there is a point where we're going to have to think 'well, are we prepared to make that compromise and say if we believe the ethical beliefs etcetera of those people match ours even though they believe something different to us, are we prepared to help to do this.'* [Strategic Interviewee]

Other data collected, however, appears to question the potential applicability of Foodbanks to people of other faiths. As one case study participant observed, from conversations with people from their local Muslim community, *'they tend to feel that if, that if there's a problem within the Muslim community, the Muslim community handle it'* [Foodbank Director]. Tower Hamlets Foodbank is located in an extremely diverse London Borough; reflecting on the accessibility of Foodbank for the local population, the manager felt that the Christian basis of the work hadn't posed any problems. Their approach was to emphasise the professionalism of the project but not to hide the Christian ethos:

*'and that's what really blows their mind, that Christians are professional, it doesn't make sense.'*

It is not clear from the data collected whether the Christian basis of the Foodbank currently is or will become an issue in the future. The issue of accessibility and future reach in more diverse areas may well be worth the Trust exploring. However, the Christian ethos is central to the Foodbank endeavour and changes to this could risk compromising the foundations of the work and a key part of its success to date.

#### 5.4 Bulk food donations and the distribution of fresh food

The Foodbank Operating Manual (Trussell Trust 2004) describes how *'as a community project the Foodbank has developed its community donation process rather than seek bulk donors'*. Such bulk donations are not discouraged, however, and the Operating Manual does cover processes and guidance for those projects which do wish to obtain food in this manner. Donations from food manufacturers and distributors could be both long-life or short-dated perishable foodstuffs.

Data from a number of the case study Foodbanks indicates that there is a desire to provide fresh food through Foodbanks on a regular basis to supplement the non-perishable items in the food parcels. Coventry Foodbank is already doing this on a routine basis, receiving thousands of pounds worth of end-dated fresh foods from the local Costco. In describing how this food supplements the Foodbank food parcels the co-manager at Coventry talked

about how it *'takes what really blesses people for three days long-dated food to something which just is spectacular'*. Interviewees from Tower Hamlets and Haverhill Foodbanks talked about their desire to provide fresh foodstuffs for clients. In Tower Hamlets for example, the provision of fresh food was something that was going to be explored in light of the fact that *'health and nutrition is so bad'* and given the levels of obesity in the Borough [Foodbank Manager]. It is important to note the potential tension within this aspiration in Tower Hamlets as the purpose (promoting health and nutrition) appears to go beyond the notion of immediate 'emergency' provision on which the model is premised.

Whilst the lack of fresh food in the Foodbank provision can prove a challenge locally, at the same time providing these foodstuffs can be problematic. The Foodbank Operating manual warns Foodbanks about the fact that *'some manufacturers will try and dump food on you to avoid paying disposal costs'* (Trussell Trust 2004). There are also logistical considerations such as having space and volunteer capacity to sort and store the food, and being able to make sure it is provided to clients safely before the 'use by' dates. There are other factors to consider relating to the reliability of such provision in terms of how much and what food will be delivered and therefore available to distribute every time. There is also an important question of dignity and social justice in relation to such food distribution and whether it is right for clients to be given those items which are only one step removed from the dustbin. Dignity and respect are key to the considerations given to client experience by the Foodbank model and therefore forethought must be given to the extent to which redistributing surplus food is in-keeping with these principles.

## 5.5 Foodbank and supermarkets

Some participants from the case study Foodbanks reflected on the possibility of a more proactive role for supermarkets in terms of partnership working and food donations. At a local level one participant talked about getting supermarkets to match every item of food purchased for donation at their store. Another participant talked about supermarkets helping to *'top up the Foodbank'* to ensure sustainability. One case study interviewee talked about the idea of a national-level approach to arranging buy-in from supermarkets which at the moment is left for individual Foodbanks to sort out with the managers of local stores:

*‘so co-ordination with supermarkets done at a national level instead of a local level would to a certain extent save all the negotiating – it can take two to three months to get a supermarket on board and working with you.’ [Foodbank Manager]*

This participant went on to suggest more centralised ways of working with supermarkets, such as tax break incentives for donations and the idea of ‘*a donation in terms of food itself of 1% of their annual turnover*’ [Foodbank Manager]. Whilst suggestions such as this have the potential to, as the participant went on to say, increase the food available for distribution exponentially, there is a serious tension with how the model is designed, in terms of a local provision for local people and community-wide involvement in providing for those in need. Therefore, whilst obtaining food on a national scale from supermarkets could increase the amount of food available for distribution and assist in achieving the goal that ‘no one goes hungry’ it simultaneously goes against the community focussed, participatory ethos of the Foodbank model.

## 5.6 Challenges at the Foodbank

Data from case study interviewees suggests there are a number of other challenges that individual Foodbanks face on an ongoing basis, in relation to upholding Foodbank procedures to avoid client dependency and clients ‘abusing the system’. Whilst the Foodbank model is designed to prevent against them, these issues necessarily require ongoing consideration from local Foodbanks. In order to avoid client dependency and therefore Foodbank un-sustainability, procedures are in place regarding the number of vouchers a client can receive. In line with the Operating Manual a Foodbank client can be given up to 3 food vouchers and after this point special arrangements have to be made between the distributor and the Foodbank to agree any extension of support. This three voucher threshold provides a mechanism through which Foodbanks can hold agencies to account. Rather than simply a cut-off point for purposes of capacity, this system enables Foodbanks to enquire into the progress being made with the issues clients are facing:

*‘If you come with your fourth voucher we want to know why the key worker is not having an effect on your situation so we’ll phone them up and say ‘what is going on? What’s your plan? What’s the management plan?’ [Strategic Interviewee]*

However, as one case study interviewee pointed out *'it's easier to give a voucher away rather than manage the person'* [Foodbank Director]. As this quote suggests, holding agencies to account will continue to be a key challenge for Foodbanks in avoiding client dependency.

In addition to the challenge of client dependency, is one of overcoming the issue of 'cheating' or 'abuse' of the system. Interviewees from a number of case study Foodbanks talked about this issue. One distributor from Haverhill provided the example of a family who had obtained one voucher from them and then another from a health visitor and they had then received a call from the Foodbank querying it. This example shows how the model's processes work to prevent misuse of Foodbank vouchers but also highlights the importance of robust administration systems in order to pick up on these instances. To a some extent, however, misuse is inevitable, as one interviewee articulated:

*'But I think we would sit here and say actually there is, there are some people who are playing it because it's there to be had. And for the best controls in the world you're always going to have that.'* [Foodbank Manager]

### 5.7 The importance of advocacy and campaigning

This research did not involve an evaluation of Foodbank and therefore did not accrue a substantial amount of data regarding the 'impact' of Foodbanks on their clients. By their very nature, however, Foodbanks are emergency responses and focus on providing parcels of food to people in 'need'. In the first instance therefore, Foodbanks and other charitable food assistance projects like them have a limited impact beyond this provision and the signposting they can do to other forms of help. In order to promote wider societal changes and to promote the cause of those vulnerable people that they serve, a focus on advocacy and campaigning for social justice will have to be a key focus for the Trust.

Talking more broadly about charitable food assistance initiatives, Tarasuk (2001: 487) argued that they are unlikely to make a significant impact on the overall food experiences of beneficiaries due to their 'inability to overcome or alter the poverty that underpins this problem [of food insecurity]'. Furthermore, such initiatives can shape collective

'understanding of the problem and its solution', often in a way which focuses on food as central and depending on the type of initiative, as an issue of food provision or food education and skills (Tarasuk 2001). In this way, initiatives can even detract attention away from the underlying structural causes of inadequate food access (Hawkes and Webster 2000). To compound this, Riches (2002: 648) has argued that such food provision, particularly when it becomes well established in the welfare landscape, gives the impression that the issue is being addressed – something is being done – and can provide policy makers with the opportunity to 'look the other way' (Riches 2002: 648). Key to overcoming these challenges and outcomes is a focus on advocacy and campaigning; on drawing attention to the circumstances of the most vulnerable in society and calling for change.

The social injustice of having to go to a charitable food project is keenly felt by Foodbank clients. A number of distributors talked about how clients they have referred have been reluctant to go to the Foodbank because it feels like '*charity*' and one client that was interviewed described how the experience had felt like '*begging*'. Some participants also talked about how hard it was when people are not used to receiving support, or have never sought any kind of '*help*' before. Many of the distributors talked about how visiting a Foodbank was ultimately a humiliating and degrading experience for those people that they referred:

*'And I think it, you know people who are as poor as the people who usually need this are actually, they're knocked down all over the place, so it's just another humiliating thing to have to do...'* [Social worker from a family support team]

*'It's because I don't know, it's going back to the Victorian era, isn't it? Asking for more soup please, you know what I mean? It's degrading to some people, let's be honest, even if as a criminal he doesn't want to go out and ask for food, he'd rather you give him money and he goes and purchases food, and going to a food bank, when they hear it's a charity where they're going to be given bags of food they think oh my God, have I got to that now? That goes through their head and I say to them beggars can't be choosers mate'* [Drug worker working with prolific offenders]

Whilst volunteers and workers at the Foodbank, supported by the processes outlined in the model, endeavour to overcome negative emotions through creating a positive experience at Foodbank distribution centres, these feelings of social injustice are largely outside the scope

of Foodbanks to alleviate. Campaigning and advocacy by the Network as a whole is likely to be the most effective way in which Foodbank can promote social justice.

The Foodbank Network, through the Trussell Trust, is well-placed to undertake this campaign and advocacy work. Interviewees described how the model provided for an opportunity to capture information on the reasons behind client visits (for example benefit delays) which not only enables them to question front-line agencies but also to collect information about, reveal and raise awareness of more universal failings in welfare systems:

*'The final thing to say is unless we do this and see the clients and hear their stories, which is why it's very important to find out and collect statistics, we're not in a proper position to expose the system failure. It's the evidence that we've got which enables us to do the other bit which is the campaigning.'* [Strategic Interviewee]

As this quote suggests, in recent years the Trussell Trust has developed an approach to campaigning which aims to raise awareness of the issues faced by clients visiting Foodbanks and to advocate policy change. Since approximately 2007 the Trust has been developing their campaign work, driven by the imperative to 'speak out about justice'. The campaign work revolves around raising awareness of 'Hidden Hunger' and is designed to both raise public consciousness and to influence government policy. As the Foodbank Network grows and requires more and more capacity for its support, it will necessarily be a challenge for the Trust to maintain a sustained emphasis on campaigning and advocacy. As this section highlights, however, this emphasis is vital in order to promote social justice and hold the government to account.

## 6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

A key aim of the research on which this report is based was to provide insights into the growth of the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network and the key results from this have been presented here. This report has also highlighted a number of potential challenges facing the Network and individual Foodbanks as growth continues into the future. In concluding this report a number of key reflections from the research findings are provided.

Inherent within many of the challenges identified in Chapter 5 is a significant tension between the desire that no-one (in the community and in the country) goes hungry and many of the principles which underlie the current Foodbank model. With regard to the relationship between Foodbanks and distributors, the desire that no-one goes hungry can over-ride more sustainable approaches to growth, leading to Foodbanks stretching their capacity by taking on more and more distributors who hold more and more vouchers. Similarly, feeding everyone in need can also compromise Foodbanks' approaches to clients who fall outside of any kind of 'managed process', such as asylum seekers and refugees, and run the risk of becoming their most significant form of support for an indefinite period of time. The relationship between Foodbanks and the Foodbank Network and supermarkets is another example of where this tension is inherent. Where there is a desire to take on bulk food donations or establish nation-wide donation processes with large food industry corporations in order to more comfortably feed the 'needy', this goes against the underlying principle that Foodbanks are local projects where local people meet local need. Discussions relating to whether the Christian focus of the project should be questioned in order to spread the Foodbank project more widely challenges the fundamental Christian underpinning of the Foodbank work. Finally, the issue of redistributing fresh foods which would otherwise go to landfill has the potential to challenge the principles of client dignity and respect which are central to the Foodbank endeavour.

The first conclusion of this report is that the Trust and individual Foodbanks need to be clear and consistent about the overall aim of the Foodbank initiative. Is it that 'no-one goes hungry' (while they await support from other services)? If so, the current model may not be the most effective way of achieving readily-accessible emergency food and a more centralised system involving nation-wide logistical planning and partnerships with some of the main food industry corporations might be preferable. Or is the main aim for local

communities to work together to meet local need? If this is the aim then projects need to be made aware of and supported through the limitations of their work, particularly in the early stages of growth, and come to terms with the seemingly harsh practicalities involved in protecting the viability of the project.

This research has shown how the local nature of the work, where it has captured the imagination of local churches and their communities has been central to the successful growth of the Foodbank initiative. As the findings from strategic-level interviewees indicate the idea of a national-scale top-down initiative (such as that identified above to ensure 'no-one goes hungry' (while they await support from other services)) was shunned in favour of the social franchise model. The origins and original motivation of the Foodbank project was therefore community-based social action. It seems important, then, that careful and on-going attention is paid to the underlying drivers and principles of the Foodbank initiative.

It is vital that Network growth is not self-perpetuating for its own sake. Where the Foodbank phenomenon is met with uncritical praise locally and from policy-makers and the media it can be easy to forget to step back, to ask questions about what the presence of these initiatives says about society and welfare provision in the UK today. The Trust, through their Foodbanks, is uniquely placed to raise awareness of the social injustices faced by their clients, to promote and facilitate change. The second conclusion of this research is that it will be important going forward that the proliferation of Foodbanks and the success of the Network does not become an end in itself, at the sake of those the initiative seeks to serve and that the Trust continues to press for change and social justice.

The presence of national scale emergency food initiatives such as Foodbank highlights a number of stark questions for research, policy and practice: What does the wide-spread presence of Foodbanks tell us about society and welfare provision? What does it tell us about the lived reality of poverty in the UK today? Should the state be supporting its citizens in accessing food? Or are voluntary providers best-placed to respond to these needs? How effective are these initiatives? While such initiatives grow and begin to become entrenched, how can we ensure that focus is maintained on questions of tackling poverty and inequality?

As outlined in earlier chapters of this report, the next phase of writing and analysis for this research will begin to explore some of the implications of the Foodbank phenomena and go some way to initiating debate around the questions identified above. This next phase will involve engaging further with pre-existing literature and research. Locating the Foodbank project within theories of social justice will be key and debates surrounding a right to food and minimum income standards will be central to the discussion. Locating the Foodbank model within theories of food poverty will also be important, through the exploration of the impact of emergency food provision on these experiences and the political implications of their presence for the food poverty debate.

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