



EVIDENCE SUBMITTED TO THE WORK AND PENSIONS SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO BENEFIT SANCTIONS

1.1 Background

The Trussell Trust co-ordinates over 400 foodbanks in the UK providing a minimum of three days' nutritionally balanced emergency food and support to people experiencing crisis.

In 2013-14 Trussell Trust foodbanks gave three days' food to 913,138 people nationwide. Of those helped, 330,205 were children. In the first six months of the current 2014-15 financial year almost 500,000 people received three days' food, a 38% increase on the same period last year.

Trussell Trust statistics are collected using an online data collection system into which foodbanks enter the data from each foodbank voucher, given to a client by a front line care professional. The system records the number of adults and children given three days' emergency food, using a similar measurement system to NHS A&E visitors. Trussell Trust figures are always reported in this way. We cannot measure unique users on a national scale, but recent evidence collected from a sample of foodbanks suggests that over 50 per cent of foodbank users were only helped once over a six month period.

Trussell Trust data also includes a tick box for the main crisis cause, as determined by the referral agency (such as doctor, social worker, JCP etc). There is not a specific box for 'Benefit Sanction', and sanction is usually recorded as 'benefit change' or sometimes as 'benefit delay'. In order to gain a greater understanding of the impact of sanctioning we have conducted two surveys of Trussell Trust foodbanks this year (see below). We are currently reviewing the way in which data is collected, and will be adding 'sanctions' as a specific referral reason to our foodbank voucher forms.

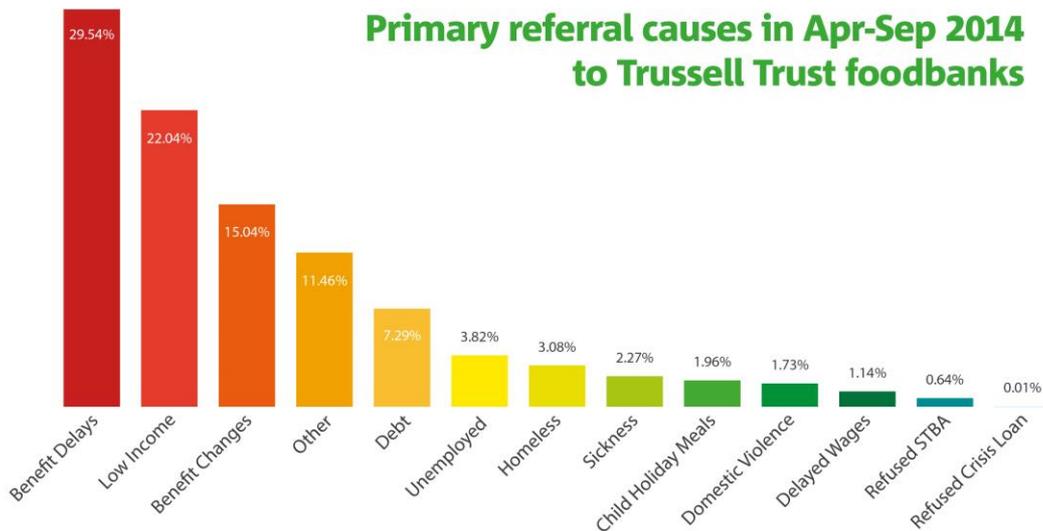
Our recent report 'Emergency Use Only' (in partnership with Oxfam, CPAG and Church of England) also provides valuable insight into the impact of sanctioning and its link to foodbank use.

1.2 Statistics and sanctions: 2013/2014/2015

Data collected by the Trust indicates that problems with welfare, including sanctioning, are increasing demand for foodbanks. **83%** of Trussell Trust foodbanks surveyed in March/April 2014* reported that benefit sanctions, which have become increasingly harsh, have caused more people to be referred to them for emergency food in the 2013/14 financial year. Over 50 per cent of referrals to foodbanks in 2013-2014 were a result of benefit delays or changes, including sanctions.

**This survey captured evidence from 140 foodbanks covering a variety of UK regions, including both urban and rural locations.*

Recent mid-financial year figures from the Trussell Trust (April – September 2014/2015), demonstrate that problems with the social security system (including sanctions) continue to be the biggest overall trigger for foodbank use (45%), of which ‘benefit delays’ accounted for 30% of referrals, and ‘benefit changes’ 15%.



In a survey conducted in November 2014 (attached)*, **86%** of Trussell Trust foodbanks who returned the survey said that they had seen an increase in foodbank referrals as a result of sanctioning (49% of foodbanks said that they have seen a significant increase in the proportion of clients coming to their foodbank as a result of benefits sanctions and 37% of foodbanks have seen a slight increase).

27% of foodbanks said that they are seeing **many** instances of people being sanctioned for seemingly **unfair** reasons and 49% are seeing **some instances** of unfair sanctions.

**51 Trussell Trust foodbanks across a range of regions responded to this survey*

1.3 Emergency Use Only

The Trussell Trust has worked in partnership with Oxfam, CPAG and the Church of England on a recently published report: 'Emergency Use Only'. This report consists of independent in-depth research into the drivers of foodbank use based on interviews with foodbank users. It was conducted within Trussell Trust foodbanks.

As that report says: "Sanctions' featured strongly in the in-depth interview participants' reasons for food bank use. Supporting this finding, the additional administrative data collected in three food banks indicated that around 20- 30% of food bank users had had their benefit reduced due to a sanction. This varied from 19% in Tower Hamlets, 23% in Epsom and Ewell, and 28% in County Durham. Sanctions could have a considerable long-term impact, especially when missing money was never restored even on appeal."

1.4 Evidence from Trussell Trust foodbanks: Case studies

Trussell Trust foodbanks consistently report that more people are coming to them as a result of sanctioning, and that many of these appear to be unfair. We asked foodbanks to provide specific examples of cases, a selection of which are listed here (see attached survey for more):

Client from Clay Cross Foodbank:

"Genuine mistake ... I had two appointments booked in different places – work assessment and work capability assessment. I went to one and was immediately penalized for not attending the other. It is a Friday afternoon so I don't know where else I can turn before the weekend."

Suzanne, Renfrewshire foodbank:

Suzanne's husband used to be a clinical nurse but suffered a nervous breakdown and couldn't work, she was then made redundant whilst pregnant. They lost their house and car just before the baby was born.

Living on benefits with Suzanne caring for her children and her husband, her husband was then sent two dates for the same ESA appointment, so the family contacted the benefits office who told them to go to one and not the other. After attending the correct appointment and not attending the other, their benefits were sanctioned as he 'hadn't turned up'. They were reduced from £100 pw to £50 pw for their family of four. After 1.5 months, they had not had any contact about the status of their appeal or time frame for their sanction.

They had a 15 year old son and an 18month baby. They had also been hit by removal of the spare room subsidy, as they have 3 bedrooms (extra £40 to pay).

Suzanne's mother had Parkinson's, and Suzanne was her carer. She walked 4 miles every day to her house, which when she'd not had a meal in weeks was 'exhausting'.

“I have gone without to feed my kids, and would go without again. It’s heartbreaking to open the kitchen cupboards and struggle to feed my boys. I never thought I’d be in this situation. I used to take people to foodbanks when I was a social worker. It is nice to have someone offering real help”

The couple appealed the sanction, and – after threatening legal action – the sanction was overturned and the payments backdated. The family had been through an incredibly difficult time and needed to use the foodbank whilst they appealed the decision. They lived on £50 per week for three months. It caused both parents to suffer high levels of stress and anxiety, and made simple tasks like paying for transport to take their son to school immensely difficult.

Further examples of sanctions from Renfrewshire Foodbank:

1. Gentleman who missed appointment due to being at hospital with his partner who had just had a still born child.
2. Gentleman who carried out 60 Job searches but missed one which matched his profile. Attention was given to that one and the other 60 ignored.
3. Young couple who had not received any letters regarding an appointment which was thus subsequently missed. Their address at DWP was wrongly recorded. They were left with no money for over a month.
4. Several cases of being a few minutes late due to bus delays. These people expressed to us how when they are on time they often are left waiting long periods before being dealt with.
5. Gentleman who had secured employment and due to start in three weeks. He was sanctioned in the interim period because JCP told him he was still duty bound to send CV to other companies. He was left without money for those 3 weeks.
6. Young man who was homeless and awaiting HGV driving documents told he had not done adequate Job search
7. Young man who only completed five searches when it should have been more. His words, 'It has totally broken my spirit'
8. Young man with learning difficulties wrote, 'My money keeps getting stopped for some reason and I don't know why'
9. Young man who secured employment but in the interim was sanctioned for not looking for work. The money he was denied prevented him from being able to pay travel to the job which he then lost. The system of sanctioning actually cost him the job instead of supporting him to maintain it.

York foodbank:

A gentleman had an appointment at the job centre on the Tuesday, was taken to hospital with a suspected heart attack that day, missed the appointment, sanctioned for 9 weeks.

Wokingham foodbank:

Mother of three in tears as she asked for food for her family. Sanctioned because she failed to attend an interview that the DWP had cancelled.

Durham Foodbank:

Sanctioned for failing to attend a course despite being there.

Sanctioned for failing to complete job search diary despite being present (confirmed by jobcentre) at jobcentre job search sessions.

Sanctioned for insufficient detail in job search reports - second JCP officer could see no problem with records.

Sanctioned for not applying for enough jobs online - library was limiting access to computers to 30 minutes a day due to cuts in their opening hours.

Cromer and District Foodbank:

A gentleman who requested permission to attend the funeral of his best friend; permission declined; sanctioned when he went anyway.

Two individuals in the past few months, both diabetics, sanctioned, unable to buy food - one became ill and sent by GP to hospital.

Two young men (unconnected) presented - both told of having no food because of sanctions; both were on treatment for mental health problems; both said their tablets had to be taken with food to be effective no food, no tablets worsening mental health results.

Several sanctioned because allegedly had not sent in required forms - only to find after some weeks that they HAD been sent and received.

One man sanctioned for attending a job interview instead of Job Centre Plus - he eventually got the job so did not pursue grievance against the JCP.

Mid-Norfolk Foodbank:

One case where the claimants wife went into premature labour and had to go to hospital. This caused the claimant to miss an appointment. As we operate in a rural area claimants are reliant on buses which can be delayed. No leeway given.

Sparkhill Foodbank:

Examples: being ill; going to a funeral; childcare responsibilities - all of which they have let the Job Centre know in advance. A recent example: client being sent off for training but this coincides with their time/day to sign on so when client attends the training (after having confirmed with the JCP that this is ok), they are then sanctioned despite being told to attend training instead.

Farnsworth and Kearsley foodbank:

A more recent example is of someone who missed an appointment because he has learning difficulties and his advisor had written his appointments dates down in a

random order instead of chronologically and he didn't realise.

Bridgend Foodbank:

A client recently told us that he failed to attend an interview as his father died in hospital that day...he was summoned to attend one week later...the day of his father's funeral. One week after that he was sanctioned for missing two appointments and was given a voucher to attend our Foodbank. He left saying "at least you people could see that my head was all over the place".

1.5 Evidence from foodbanks: *Why are people being sanctioned?*

(see attached survey for full results)

Foodbanks surveyed listed a variety of reasons, including people attending funerals instead of job clubs, people missing appointments (often for reasons outside their control), problems with literacy, lack of access to computers, transport etc, at hospital appointments/emergencies.

A few examples:

Lutterworth & Villages foodbank:

Lack of information being available or failure to understand the system
Loss of paperwork by authorities
Failure to attend job interview (lack of suitable transport links in semi-rural area) –
Sometimes the clients don't know why!

Dukeries and District foodbank:

Missed appointments as not got the bus fare to get to the benefits office.

Bexley Foodbank:

Missing appointments, sanctions given are as high as 13 weeks. One lady was given a sanction even though she had been admitted to hospital the night before on a 999 call so could not attend the appointment, even with this reason she was still sanctioned.

Richmond Foodbank:

Conflicting appointments, lack of funds to meet travel, administrative errors, notice of not being able to make appointments ignored.

York Foodbank:

missed appointments, often genuine reasons why. Not applied for enough jobs, again, genuine reasons why this was the case.

Sparkhill Foodbank:

Missed/late appointments. Some clients have been illiterate or unable to access the internet so can't demonstrate what they have done to look for work.

Clifton NG11 foodbank:

Funerals, hospital appointments, job interviews, sent a letter of appointment after the date given, joining families together, depression, disabilities (can't leave the house), parents splitting, domestic abuse.

Cardigan Foodbank:

The main reason for sanctions is missing or not attending appointments for all sorts of reasons. These have been due to not being able to afford the bus fare to get to training meeting; One was an 18 year old that had to travel 10 miles by bus, the bus was late, he arrived at the JCP 5 minutes late, he was sanctioned for 2 weeks, had no money so they advised him to go to the job centre to get a food voucher.

Glenrothes Foodbank:

Missed appointments because they live in homeless accommodation and their mail is often missing/interfered with. Notified cancellations for funerals. Notified cancellations for hospital appointments. Notified cancellations because of lack of bus fare/access to travel. Late arrival because of public transport problems Late arrival because of a failure to estimate the exact time it will take to walk seven miles to the place of appointment

Gravesham Foodbank:

Reasons given have been: no credit on mobile phone therefore cannot keep contact with agency. Couldn't make appointment due to sickness but agency wouldn't believe me. The agency keeps losing evidence submitted and say I haven't submitted it.

Selby Foodbank:

We have had 3 due to late attendance. Two due to late buses into town, and also one case of illness resulting in sanctions due to non-attendance on time.

Helson and The Lizard Foodbank:

Because we live in an area where most work is seasonal, many people find themselves out of work for the winter months, sadly they have to wait, sometimes up to three weeks for benefits to 'kick in'. Also sanctions against people being a little late for an appointment or because they do not apply for enough jobs are totally unreasonable. Our bus service is, to say the least inadequate and due to the very

rural, isolated area in which we live, many jobs are just not accessible for many people. Cars, although a necessity in rural locations are not an option for the majority of people receiving benefits.

Abergavenny Foodbank:

Unable to access computers to complete forms and job searches
Loss of documents in the post or office by DWP
missed appointments
Letter for appointments arriving after the interview or medical assessment date.

Kinson and West Howe Foodbank:

Late for an appointment
Missed work club due to family illness
Missed sign on appointment due to hospital stay

Rickmansworth foodbank:

Missed appointment due to conflicting appointments or health issues.
Difficulty accessing due to cost of transport.

Malvern Hills Foodbank:

Change of address that doesn't get registered.
Applications that have been lost and the client has to begin again.

Coventry Foodbank:

Missed appointments, arriving late, incorrect information given/left out in jobsearch.
Not making a effort to look for work. Jobs saved in hotmail account instead of universal jobsearch site.

Crosby Area Foodbank:

Mixture of missed appointments, sometimes when at a course or interview sent on by Job Centre.
Poor communication when apologies sent for appointments ie messages not passed on.

1.6 Potential solutions to the problem of sanctions:

The Trussell Trust would suggest that the recommendations made in Emergency Use Only related to sanctions be adopted. We would also support the adoption of all recommendations related to sanctioning made in the APPG on Food Poverty and Hunger's report 'Feeding Britain'.

Our attached document also includes suggestions on improvements to the sanctions process made by individual foodbanks, for example:

Norwich Foodbank:

‘Opportunity (maybe just one) to reschedule - this could be when funerals or interviews are on the same day as appointments so known in advance and the appointment can be changed. Very clear information and guidelines when an appointment is cancelled what the implications are / might be (i.e. sanction) and if a sanction, how long it will be imposed for and how much and why and the right to appeal - this information needs to go out much quicker than is currently happening. Provide a period for an opportunity for a client to explain why an appointment was missed and this could include proof of interviews / funeral / illness etc.’

1.7 Conclusion

Many Trussell Trust foodbanks across the UK have reported an increase in numbers needing emergency food from foodbanks as a direct consequence of sanctions, many of which have appeared to be unfair.

The Trussell Trust has found that in many instances lack of information about sanctions has contributed to the long term impact on the lives of those attending foodbanks. An example of this is the problems arising from the impact of sanctions on payment of Housing Benefit. The failure to provide clear information about sanctions to the local authority can have a particularly severe effect on the payment of Housing Benefit, leading in some cases to the threat of eviction. They can also lead to, or exacerbate, problems with debt.

The Trussell Trust would welcome the opportunity to provide oral evidence to the Inquiry.