Feeding Britain: 12 Months On
Response from Sheffield Diocese

Prepared by Jane Perry

On behalf of Steven Croft, Bishop of Sheffield and Sheffield Diocese Board of Faith and Justice

November 2015
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Preface

The Feeding Britain enquiry made a request to Bishops and others in September for an assessment of what is happening in the provision of food banks across the country.

This study describes what is currently happening across the Diocese of Sheffield. We know of a large number of food banks of different kinds in an ever evolving kaleidoscope of provision. They are networked together in very different ways in the five local government areas in the Diocese.

What they have in common is a desire to offer practical care and support to the most needy in our communities through feeding the hungry. Most are offered collaboratively by groups of churches and with others in the community. All of those involved in making this provision clearly see that there is a need but many are also deeply concerned that food poverty remains an issue in 21st Century Britain.

The research is a useful benchmark for our own reflection within the Diocese as well as vital evidence to build up the national picture.

+Steven Sheffield
Food banks in Sheffield Diocese

As part of their evidence gathering exercise, Feeding Britain requested a list of food banks operating within the Diocese. This is not something which was readily available for Sheffield Diocese. The Diocese includes 3 major administrative areas in their entirety – the metropolitan boroughs of Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield—and also parts of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough (around the north) and East Riding of Yorkshire (to the east). Food banks, and networks between them, have developed separately and distinctively in each area. There was no single external source of food bank information for the entirety of the Diocese and Church House does not routinely hold details of food banks across all areas.

As part of our response to this consultation, we did attempt to map food banks across the Diocese. Internet search results for food banks each area were checked by circulating them to local clergy (Area Deans), through consulting with the four separate food bank networks, and – where possible – by making contact with the food banks themselves. The results are summarised in Figure 1 and included in full in Appendix A.

The following points, which emerged during the mapping process, are worthy of particular attention:

- **Definition** – food banks and other forms of emergency food provision are not as easy to define as might first appear; questions emerged as to what exactly counted as a food bank or other type of emergency food provision; how formal it needed to be and whether its services needed to be advertised publically to ‘count’. Other issues arose regarding what name food banks were known as (with the same food bank being reported by separate people with very different names) and whether separate distribution points counted as one or several food banks.

- **Constant change** – the picture of emergency food provision which emerged is one which is constantly changing, during the course of our mapping we identified several food banks which appear to no longer be operating and others which are being set-up. Any list will be out-of-date as soon as it was finalised.

- **Partial knowledge** – although we attempted to reach out ecumenically, the information presented comes primarily from existing food bank network organisations, checked against the knowledge of local Anglican clergy. We are aware that emergency food provision among minority ethnic communities is under-represented in our list – because we did not have resource for comprehensive contact with other faith communities and because, anecdotally, emergency food provision through mosques and other places of worship were not thought to commonly connect readily with the over-arching food bank networks.

Our view is that any exercise which attempted to rigorously count food banks or track trends in food bank numbers would be fraught with difficulty. This also emphasises the importance of intermediate food bank networks, whose staff who can provide overview intelligence for the whole area (although of course, again, only for those food banks who are connected to their network).

The main finding however is that, Trussell Trust food banks represent only a small proportion of all emergency food provision (4/15 in Sheffield, 1/24 in Rotherham, 3/11 in Doncaster). The only exception to this being Barnsley, where the development of Council supported provision had led to dominance of 1 large Trussell Trust Foodbank.
Figure 1  Sheffield Diocese: Emergency Food Provision (Oct 2015)

**Barnsley**
1 large Trussell Trust food bank (12 distribution points), plus
- 1 independent food bank (known, ? others)
- ? Salvation Army projects
- ? projects providing emergency support to homeless

**Sheffield**
*Sheffield Food Bank Network*
15 food banks, including:
- 4 Trussell Trust Foodbanks
- 2+ Salvation Army projects
- 2+ projects providing emergency support to homeless

**Rotherham**
*Rotherham Food for People in Crisis Partnership*
24 organisations, including:
- 1 Trussell Trust Foodbank
- 5+ Salvation Army projects
- 2+ projects providing emergency support to homeless

**Goole and East Riding** – information not readily available

**Doncaster**
*Doncaster Food Bank Forum*
11 outlets including:
- 3 Trussell Trust Foodbanks
- ? Salvation Army projects
- ? projects providing emergency support to homeless
Food bank networks

A key feature arising from our attempt to map food bank use across Sheffield Diocese is the recent emergence of meta-organisations and/or arrangements which seek to network food banks across a town/city. The main features of the four main networks are summarised in Figure 2, below.

In three cases, the food bank network was developed after the food banks were well established. In each the driver for this development was a recognition of the need for increased communication, information sharing, co-ordination and joined up working between food banks. In these cases, food banks have stayed independent and the network provides a meta-organisation facilitating partnership working.

In the fourth case, Barnsley, the partnership occurred earlier in the development of food banks in the Borough and was driven by the perceived need for a strategic, co-ordinated, Borough wide approach. Most small local food banks came on board and only 1 major independent food bank was identified.

In several cases, networking was also linked to (or had facilitated) access to council funding and/or contracts with FareShare. In two cases, Rotherham and Doncaster, the network is co-ordinated by a paid worker, contracted to a Third Sector body by the Local Authority. In Barnsley, Local Authority funds have, initially, directly funded the food bank co-ordinator, with this financial input set to decrease as the food bank becomes established.

Key points:

a) In South Yorkshire the sort of network envisaged in the Feeding Britain report already exist, generated as a spontaneous response to identification of the same issues (need for co-ordination and an element of strategic planning)

b) The different ways networks operate in South Yorkshire illustrate a number of different potential models, each with a slightly different relationship to the State/Local Authority.

c) Networks are the main source of information and communication for food banks. Any initiatives seeking to map or work with food banks need to be working with them.

d) However organisations which choose not engage with the local network will not be reached. Questions can be raised about the reach of informal networks – for example representation of organisations developed by, and attempting to reach, other non-Christian faith groups and minority ethnic communities.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Food Bank Networks</strong></th>
<th><strong>Details</strong></th>
<th><strong>Relationship to Local Authority</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rotherham Food in Crisis Partnership</strong></td>
<td>Facilitates partnership working between 24 organisations working in Rotherham. Members meet regularly to share best practice/resources/expertise/problem solve and explore ways to obtain more resources (e.g. funding). As a result the partnership is working more strategically and consequently co-ordinating and strengthening provision to local individuals and families in need.</td>
<td>Work supported by RMBC &amp; Public Health and links into the Welfare Reform Steering Group co-ordinated by the Rotherham Together Partnership. Main initiative: 16 organisations involved in single collaboration on contract with FareShare (facilitated by RMBC, not direct funded) after sustainability of food supply identified as a key concern.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ness Bryan</td>
<td><a href="mailto:vanessa.bryan@varotherham.org.uk">vanessa.bryan@varotherham.org.uk</a></td>
<td>Council grant used for employing C.A.B. workers (4 x p/time) who are based in 4 foodbanks for a session a week. Other funding went in general pot for things like shelving, training etc. - any food bank / food based project across the city could apply. There is a 3rd pot which has been frozen, which we want to use as creating some sort of ‘sustainability project’ where we can pool food etc and store centrally to ensure food stocks do not go so low we can’t help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sheffield Food Bank Network</strong></td>
<td>A very loose network which meets every couple of months to encourage one another, share ideas and work out how best to tackle some of the challenges of food poverty in our local communities. Some of our members take part in the City-wide Tackling Poverty Group and the Sheffield Food Executive Group. They don’t speak on behalf of all of the food banks, but they do try and ensure that the relevant organisations in Sheffield take food poverty seriously - and minimise it wherever possible. Formal partnership with CAB with them and have just put in a grant to the Lottery for another 4 workers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob Drost</td>
<td><a href="mailto:rob.drost@mail.com">rob.drost@mail.com</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Doncaster Food Bank Forum</strong></td>
<td>Set up in 2014 and currently facilitates partnership between 11 outlets (three of which are Trussell Trust, 8 independent). Roles are wide and varied, but ultimately support and help develop the sector, including mapping of Third Sector groups and services they offer. The benefits of the available networking and support/information sharing are evident: e.g. best practice sharing and informal sharing of surplus food. DMBC was keen to provide a platform for the development of the Forum and assist in providing the venues enabling the groups to meet and providing access to available training (food hygiene etc).</td>
<td>Project lead based in New Horizons Doncaster, contracted by Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council (DMBC) to deliver third sector infrastructure support to groups in the Borough. DMBC who are keen to support the work the groups do and have incorporated information groups bring within their Anti Poverty Strategy. DMBC recently made available a Small Grant Aware for groups providing food and assistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bev Harrison</td>
<td><a href="mailto:BHarrison@meetingnewhorizons.co.uk">BHarrison@meetingnewhorizons.co.uk</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Barnsley Food Bank Partnership (Trussell Trust)</strong></td>
<td>Came out of Barnsley Church Action on Poverty group initiative to meet need for co-ordinated food bank in Barnsley. Agreed on Trussell Trust franchise. Now 12 outlets across borough, so includes most food banks in Barnsley.</td>
<td>Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council use Local Welfare Assistance Scheme money to fund co-ordinator for food bank.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Consultation Responses
Churches and Emergency Food Providers

Invitations to participate in the consultation were sent to Anglican churches across the Diocese (through the Salt and Light representatives) and to all emergency food providers identified through the mapping exercise. Two online consultation forms were available, tailored to the different groups. There was also the option of a telephone conversation, the main points of which were then collected in the online form.

Responses were received from:

- 11 churches via the Salt and Light network, Area Deans or through the Sheffield Church Action on Poverty group
- 10 organisations involved either in directly providing emergency food or in referring individuals for help. Of these, 5 were projects directly run by churches, 4 were independent projects with strong relationships with churches (e.g. donations and volunteers) and 1 had no religious links.

As a church, do you have any involvement in emergency food provision? (CHURCH)

What sort of emergency food provision does your organisation provide? (PROVIDER)

Responses shown in the table below indicate a breadth of engagement from both churches and emergency food providers:

- Most churches who responded were involved in crisis support multiple ways, involving but not limited to food
- Informal provision (for example food being given to visitors to the vicarage) often runs alongside more formal, organised provision
- There were examples/types of provision not included in our list – an indication of the variety of local responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHURCH</th>
<th>PROVIDER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help given on an informal basis (e.g. to visitors to the vicarage)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directly involved in running a food bank</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports a food bank run elsewhere</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signposting people to local food banks or other help</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soup kitchen / homeless shelter</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast club (or other food provision for children)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Developments in last 12-18 months (PROVIDERS)

How has your work progressed and developed in the last 12-18 months? (PROVIDERS)

Demand:

- 3 stable, but with 1 noting that this was despite notable increase in provision of emergency food across the city (i.e. demand across the city must be rising)
- 1 dropped, but an increase in large families using food bank
- 2 indicated a significant increase in demand, accompanied with what was seen to be an increasingly punitive environment:

  “... people are increasing getting threatening toned correspondence and threats of legal action around housing and council tax issues. It seems to me that if a claimant’s benefit is sanctioned, their council tax / housing benefit is also stopped leaving them with a double whammy. The local council, despite saying they do what they can to help seem very quick to issue legal proceedings.”

1 food bank reported a change in referral patterns linked to Local Council restructuring having affected referral agencies.

Provision:

- 2 organisations indicated a change in their provision, broadening the support given including other provision (e.g. clothes, Christmas presents) and wider educational and social projects:

  Our Meet and Eat sessions started last January letting us keep in contact with clients past their initial referral. The original intention was for people to learn new cooking skills and for us to share a meal together. That has happened but for many people the chance to get out the house for a few hours and spend time with other human beings is the most important part of what we do

- 1 provided interesting insight into how they worked with users and volunteers: “Users become volunteers and often they move on to work”

In your recent experience, are charitable food supplies (donations of food or money) able to keep up with demand? (PROVIDERS)

8 of the providers indicated that they had no great concern about supplies of food, or volunteers, keeping up with demand, although one indicated that changing links with churches (some churches setting up their own food banks and so no longer supporting; others starting to support) had changed where their donations had come from.

2 of the 10 providers expressed explicit concern that supply was not keeping up with demand. For example:

“I think that despite people giving increasing amounts of donations it is not keeping pace with demand, it’s almost as if, the more people give the more the government are taking away from people. It doesn’t seem fair at all. Almost a race to the bottom.”

And one indicated they were concerned about the future:

“Luckily we are currently able to meet demand, but this is only through the kindness of local companies and the generosity of the volunteers. The demand is increasing and I am unsure how long we can meet the need.”
The Problem:

Does your church encounter instances of hunger or food poverty? (CHURCH)

All respondents responded in the affirmative, including one respondent from a much more affluent parish who responded: “Not a great deal because of the area we live in, but there has been a trend towards the need to [regularly] help one or two people who rely on benefits.”

Other notable comments included:

- I have noticed an increase in people who actually voice a request for help i.e. referral to foodbank the numbers attending our Foodcycle lunch have grown significantly over a year
- More single parents (Single mum or Single dad) Single Men both young and of older generation are affected. More so with people in work who are struggling to feed their families and pay bills.
- We began supporting around 15 families a week and by the time we closed down this had increased to 40-50 households a week which indicates an increasing need for this type of support programme.
- The winter months are quite challenging as more people experience fuel poverty and had no means of cooking food. Occasionally, the Foodbank was able to help with meter charges, but this year’s fuel poverty is looming and we need to be more prepared.

In your opinion, what are the key reasons why people are hungry or struggling to afford to eat? (CHURCH)

Responses from individuals broadly supported existing findings from Feeding Britain:
Do you collect and publish data on the reasons people are coming to you for food assistance? (PROVIDERS)

6 providers collected information, usually as part of wider organisational procedures, and indicated that this was made publically available.

2 said they did collect information but that this was not published, with 1 indicating that it was in narrative rather than quantifiable form.

2 organisations said they didn’t collect data, with one expressing strong opinions about this: “This would be an anathema to us. We question nobody and accept everyone as we find them.”

What are the key reasons why people you see are hungry or struggling to afford to eat? (PROVIDERS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benefit problems (delays or errors)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefit sanctions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes to, or problems with, disability benefits</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living costs (rent, food, utilities etc)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low income from work</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High cost debt repayments</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low income - from benefits</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How has your work been affected by, and interacted with, Local Welfare Assistance Schemes?

One provider had experience of working directly with the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme, having been directly funded from it. 2 responses indicated no contact at all or not relevant. Other comments included:

- The Local Assistance scheme seems to be set up so that if you need help, you do not qualify for it. We have not had much luck in helping our clients to apply for help.

- We work in conjunction with statutory & voluntary agencies. We try not to provide support when individuals are entitled to statutory support & will help them to access their entitlements. The statutory assistance schemes are becoming more difficult to access as monies allocated for support are reduced from central government.

- Hardly at all. It receives very little publicity in Doncaster and is very little known and is very difficult to access successfully.

- No, despite our positioning in communities, we’ve had little contact with them since the early days when even then it was not helpful. I’m not even sure they still operate locally
Do you forecast that the numbers of hungry people will increase or decrease in the year ahead? Why? (PROVIDERS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Stay stable</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase - it seems to be the govt's direction of travel, punish those who cannot fight back</td>
<td>As we are located in such a poor and deprived area we do not expect to see much change.</td>
<td>I would expect that numbers will increase when the tax credit changes come into operation. But currently we do not understand why use of the foodbank has decreased this year - this was not anticipated, so maybe things are improving...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase because of changes to welfare benefits &amp; the time taken for DWP to deal with benefit applications/changes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potentially increase with the forthcoming tax credit changes and further cuts in Welfare provision</td>
<td>Difficult to say; in my experience, the demand has always been steady.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase. Cuts are still being made and with every cut, another person appears. This could either be the cut has directly affected them and they can no longer afford the basics, or indirectly affected them and they have become depressed as a result</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low wage - anticipated to grow. Delays will continue to go on - not the same people, new people will face benefit crisis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It will increase as reductions in child tax credits come into effect and as Universal Credit is introduced and paid monthly to people who will struggle to budget. Many of our clients have problems with substance abuse and giving them a large sum of money in one go will probably kill them.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Child hunger:

Do you have significant concerns regarding child hunger? (CHURCHES)

Responses regarding child hunger varied: 2 respondents reported that they didn’t see a problem in their locality, however many others expressed concern about child hunger. Several did have experience locally, or at first-hand, including school seeing children coming to school hungry or having a free breakfast club which is well attended. One respondent was aware that “the owner of the local cafe hands out free breakfast baps on the quiet to children who come in during the holidays and who she knows are hungry”.

For others the concern expressed was because of wider awareness of the problem, from friends/family or the news: “It worries me that children go hungry. They need good nourishing plain food to help them grow. I think that some parents lack an ability to provide adequately for their children because they had no such provision in their young days on which to build up the necessary knowledge and skill. …..It does seem strange that our Government says there is no poverty and no child hunger in England. I have no personal experience of this but surely the news reports can’t all be wrong?”

One respondent reflected: “Long-term responses must come from political decision making, but short-term responses can come from all of us.”

Do you have significant concerns regarding child hunger? (PROVIDERS)

Over half of providers said they had no hard evidence or particular concerns about child hunger as a specific issue, although some noted that this was to do with their client base or referral mechanism.

For those that did indicate concern, several mentioned an increase in numbers of children referred to their food bank and/or popularity of snack times at activities they put on. Others raised concern about the impact of cuts to tax credits: “The reduction in child tax credits will make things much worse, particularly as families are fluid rather than fixed. Two individuals, each with two children would each receive full child tax credits. If they move in together and form a blended family then they will see their tax credits reduced.”

However there was less clarity about differences in demand between term-time and school holidays – several providers mentioned that they didn’t see a change in demand but suggested that this may be due to other coping mechanisms: “Sometimes the kids are sent away to stay with family or friends when their parents have no electricity or gas for a few days”.

Finally one provider raised concern about quality of food that both children and adults eat and one a wider concern with the relationship between child hunger and neglect:

The best way of ameliorating child hunger is to make sure that parents have sufficient income to feed their children, though when parents are struggling with addiction or substance abuse then concerns about child hunger are not necessarily eased. Although I am not advocating the following course of action, I do think it’s an interesting thought experiment: It does seem to me that when parents have no money to feed their children. no lighting, heating or hot water in the house, then the logical conclusion is to take the children into care so that they can be warm, clean and fed. That would be incredibly expensive and write off any money saved by sanctioning people. I suspect it would be politically disastrous. It would certainly be disastrous for the families. But when a family are left with no money to care for their children then I do wonder whether those who make that decision are culpable for putting children at risk of neglect (inadvertent neglect on the part of the parents because they cannot provide for their child’s basic needs).
Recommendations from Churches and Providers

Whose responsibility should it be to relieve and prevent hunger in this country?

Respondents could choose more than one response. This revealed a broad range of responses, with a definite preference towards National and Local Government responsibility: 100% of both church and provider responses indicated that relieving hunger should be the responsibility of national government.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CHURCHES</th>
<th>PROVIDERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National government</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food retailers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other voluntary sector bodies</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALL</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Personally, what do you feel about the involvement of churches in emergency food provision?

Responses to this question were thoughtful and nuanced, often expressing alternative viewpoints within this same response. For example:

“We feel this is a good thing and also provides outreach to the community locally and enables the church to support some individuals with complex needs/situations. However, it does seem sad that churches are needed to meet these needs in a prosperous first world country.”

The main themes which emerged are set out on the following page.

What action is needed from Government Departments to relieve and prevent hunger in this country?

Having identified, overwhelmingly, a government responsibility to act, responses regarding what Governments should do encompassed a whole array of social policy areas and initiatives – see Fig X.

“more importantly work at a preventative level....... invest at least as much money/resources into keeping people living well and peaceably in body/mind/spirit as they invest in military offensive/defensive programs.”

What could private and voluntary sectors do to help maximise the effectiveness of anti-hunger strategies?

- Lobby government/ Speak Out!
  - feedback the ‘on the ground’ effects of various strategies to local and national government
  - listen to local communities and be a voice for them. Continue to motivate the whole community to grow in compassion and active response to one another.
- Work more effectively together
• Education is a useful tool, for example, we were able to obtain a small grant for our Food Co-operative that enabled us to give users a slow cooker alongside lessons in low energy cooking with low cost ingredients.
• Publicity – of issues and of food banks
• Pay Living Wage
INvolvement of churches in Emergency food provision – The dilemma:

- Little choice but to act, because of Christian “responsibility to care for the needy”:

“It is often left to churches to provide care where the local authority or national government do not or cannot provide this.”

“It’s categorically 100% necessary for churches to be involved.”

“You do not need to be religious to look after your neighbours but religions make it clear that this is part of being alive. It [the church] also has the buildings and the experience to support neighbourhood friendships.”

- Dismay, outrage and anger:

“It causes me pain to see this and there is little, other than a small donation and lots of prayer, that I can do for them.”

“I think it’s disgraceful that so many people are relying on foodbanks in 21st Century Britain. There is no safety net for the most vulnerable people in our society. The church’s call is to "respond to human need by loving service" (Mark 3 o the 5 Marks of Mission). But alongside that is the call to "transform the unjust structures of society" (Mark 4) and the two need to go together. We shouldn’t be aiming for a society where foodbanks are accepted as part of a system of social security.”

- Call for further action:

“The Church should and also could do more to help and voice out the poverty crisis, it is our responsibility to help and care. We have to lead by example, our role is to help and feed the need as Christ our Lord. The church has to have local leaders on the ground and also to hold the government accountable.”

“The church isn’t directly involved in the group. I feel it could do a lot more. They do occasionally donate some food. But the group are charged for the hall usage even though it’s all volunteers.”

- Concern for the future:

“the need in some areas appears to be too big for local churches to provide for.”

“Churches struggle financially to keep themselves open for business and yet will often step in to help those in great need. More difficult for poorer parishes who may have financial problems or lack of resources / people-power.”

“Worried - it concerns me that churches are filling the gap left by the state”

The tension within these opinions were often expressed as a dual call to act to provide immediate support but also to campaign for longer-term action:

“I am glad that we have the opportunity to demonstrate God’s love through practical care for those around us, and I think we are shockingly neglectful if we don’t respond in some way, but would rather that nobody went hungry in the first place.”

“I think as Christians we should be supporting and being involved in helping provide food to the hungry and should try and influence the governments to influence supermarkets to make healthy food much more affordable.”

“As a committed Christian, I believe that the church has a mandate to demonstrate God’s love by caring for the poor and needy in society and that voluntary organisations provide an opportunity for individuals to help care for those less well off in their neighbourhood. However, as we live in a democratic society with a government that provides a welfare system, I don’t feel that charities/churches should be acting as a prop-up to a failing welfare system. Working in a foodbank, I have come across many instances where people are suffering unnecessary hardship due to injustices in the current welfare system and so I think that some reform is needed.”
GOVERNMENT ACTION REQUIRED:

- **Tax and welfare:**
  - Modifications to the tax system (e.g. higher taxes to wealthy) and economic system (e.g. ensuring Government money spent where most needed, and in UK)
  - Review benefit system: “pay more. get it right”; “Benefit levels at a level which allows people to live in dignity. Better administration of benefits so that there are fewer delays.”
  - Review sanctions policy
  - Better access to short term benefit advances and hardship payments

- **Jobs and employability:**
  - Encourage fair wages and introduce a true Living Wage;
  - Job creation schemes for those who cannot find work through lack of skills
  - Promote gender equality
  - Wages to keep track with inflation

- **Education:**
  - free money management, food and nutrition courses;
  - cookery and homecraft in schools
  - Promote healthy living

- **Regulation:**
  - Introduce a law for Supermarkets / farmers to give away unwanted food and not let the food go to waste food
  - Legislate against high cost lenders
  - stop high private housing rents

“I believe that Christians have a responsibility to care for those who are vulnerable and marginalised. Yet we have an obligation to challenge Government policy where this is either causing food poverty or making the problem worse. Foodbanks should not and cannot be a permanent or adequate substitute for the statutory provision of a proper safety net for the most vulnerable.”

“Some of the recent changes to benefits aimed at getting people back into work have a 'right motive' behind them but seem to be being implemented in a way that leaves no room for flexibility or compassion based on individual circumstances. They appear to be target driven, resulting in hardship and distress for people fail to meet the expected criteria for genuine reasons.

I don’t see how 'targets' can be applied to welfare and suggest that these need to be removed (or at least have some degree of flexibility) and staff trained to be allowed some room for compassion in order that the welfare system can provide for those in genuine need.

The government needs to listen to those who work with those who have fallen through the cracks of the welfare system and introduce changes based on their findings.”

“Children should not have to go without food or live in poverty, when this is one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Wealth distribution has to be fair and those in authority have to be held accountable to the lack of help and care to the basic needs of children. It’s a fundamental Human Right Issue that should not happen in 21st Century Britain or anywhere else in the world.”
Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

1. Because of problems of definition (eg distinguishing between main providers and distribution points), it is difficult to be precise about the number of food banks in the Diocese. But it appears to be in the range 50-60. Barnsley has a very large provider with 12 distribution points. There are in addition other forms of food provision by churches eg breakfast clubs and lunch clubs.

2. A Food Bank supported by the Trussell Trust is dominant in Barnsley but Trussell Trust food banks are in a minority in the rest of the Diocese (8 out of 50).

3. Barnsley adopted a strategic borough-wide approach with a highly organised network. In the rest of the Diocese, collaborative networks of food banks have developed after most of the food banks were established.

4. There is some local authority involvement (often including some modest resource) in each borough.

5. Only 11 churches responded, nearly all of which were engaged in some form of crisis support.

6. Key reasons why people are struggling to afford food are (in order of frequency):
   - Benefit problems (delays or errors);
   - Benefit sanctions;
   - Changes to, or problems with, disability benefits;
   - Living costs (rent, food, utilities etc);
   - Low income from work;
   - Low income from benefits.

7. Patterns of demand are variable with some reporting stability and others increased pressure.

8. There are similar variations in terms of supply, with the majority managing reasonably well but a minority concerned about inadequate resources.

9. Local welfare assistance schemes are difficult to access and not much help.

10. Demand is expected to increase as a result of further Government welfare cuts, particularly tax credits.

11. There is concern about child hunger and again a fear that this will get worse with tax credit cuts.

12. Respondents overwhelmingly felt that food poverty was a problem that should primarily be addressed by national and local government, though they also saw a role for schools, employers, food retailers, churches and other voluntary organisations. Food banks should not become a permanent part of the UK’s social security system.

Recommendations:

For churches, food banks and other voluntary organisations.

1. They should speak out and lobby their MPs for changes in Government policy.

2. Churches and voluntary organisations should work more effectively together.

3. Education eg in low energy cooking using low cost ingredients should be encouraged as supplementary to food banks.

4. They should seek publicity for the work of food banks and the reasons why they exist.

5. They should encourage employers to pay the living wage.

For the Department of Work and Pensions:

1. Minimise delays in paying benefits.

2. Rebuild an effective system of crisis loans and hardship payments.

3. Hold an independent review of benefit sanctions policy.