



Wirral Foodbank Annual Report 2019 – 2020

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Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registered in England charity number 1167967

Trustees' Review 2019-20 – Revd. Colin Hart, Chair of Trustees

This report is of the operational and financial year 1 September 2019 to 31 August 2020 from the perspective of the Trustees.

Since last year's report, Paula Walker and Paul Franklin have joined the Trustee Board. We currently have ten Trustees.



As with most organisations, the most significant developments during the year 2019-2020 related to the Covid-19 pandemic, which overtook all of our expectations and “best-laid plans”. Since March 2020, all meetings of the Trustees have been held online. On several occasions, especially during the early stages of the pandemic, the Trustees held additional meetings and there were also consultations with stakeholders.

At the beginning of the first national lockdown, the Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council set up a hub to distribute food to people who were unable to obtain it for themselves. The Trustees decided to suspend the independent operations of Foodbank distribution centres in order to support the Council hub. At the same time, and following advice from the Government, we reluctantly decided that volunteers who were over the age of 70 or vulnerable in other ways should not be allowed to work in our own warehouse or in the Council hub. During the third national lockdown, which at present is gradually ending, the Council hub was re-opened and again we suspended independent operations. Following the recent closure of the Council hub, we have re-opened some distribution centres and are in the process of re-opening others.

During the first lockdown, some of our paid staff undertook additional responsibilities and worked additional hours on a temporary basis, in recognition of which we made some additional payments to them. Mike Cleave was given leave of absence as a Trustee so that we could employ him temporarily to work in our warehouse.

Between August 2020 and January 2021, we gradually re-opened some distribution centres on a socially-distant basis. The only buildings which were re-opened were those which could offer separate entrances and exits and very good ventilation. In order to reduce the time in which clients would be present in the building, supplies for different family sizes were packed in the warehouse and distributed to clients without the usual discussion of needs and preferences. We have been unable to provide our usual opportunities for conversation and refreshments, which many of us consider the most important parts of our service: this is very regrettable, but necessary under the circumstances.

To our surprise, we and some other foodbanks across the country have experienced a reduced number of clients seeking our help during the pandemic.

At least one of the reasons for this reduction has been a good one, namely the temporary increase in Universal Credit payments. Many of our clients are usually people who do not have enough money left to live on when various deductions have been made from their Universal Credit payments, and

this small increase has made all the difference to them. If the increase is withdrawn in the Autumn, we can expect numbers of clients to go back up. It is also likely that when the furlough scheme ends, there will be a big increase in the number of people receiving Universal Credit.

Another reason for the fall in numbers has been the availability of other sources, including social supermarkets, family support schemes which normally help during school holidays but extended their support while schools were closed, and “pop-up” neighbourhood groups. Social supermarkets have certain advantages: people feel they retain their dignity when they pay for what they receive, even if at a reduced rate, and distributing short-dated food in this way prevents it from going to landfill. However, there is a real possibility that an underclass will develop, who feel that people like them cannot shop in normal supermarkets. Anecdotal evidence suggests that people prefer to receive help from one of the family support schemes or informal neighbourhood groups, because they do not have to answer any questions about their needs, but this also means that no one is helping them to find ways out of their problems. We are forming relationships with some of these groups, and encouraging them to refer clients to our Foodbank Plus advisers. We do not know yet how many of the informal neighbourhood groups will continue to operate when life returns to something like normal.

The probable reason for a reduction in numbers which causes us most concern is the likelihood that some people who would normally have received Foodbank vouchers may have been excluded by the reduced service currently offered by referral agencies, and we hope that those agencies will soon resume face-to-face engagement with their clients.

During the pandemic, we have been very grateful to staff and volunteers for the flexibility they have shown in responding to rapidly changing needs. In my own role as leader of a Distribution Centre, I have frequently had to ask volunteers to change the day or location of their volunteering, and no one has ever complained about these constant changes.

Another feature of our experience during the pandemic has been very generous increased financial giving from the people of the Wirral. This helped us to buy food during the first lockdown, when people who would normally have given it to us were unable to do so. In addition, we have been able to set aside a significant sum as a “Covid recovery fund”, to be used during the coming year to meet probable increased demand and to finance new activities.

Foodbank Plus



When we were setting up our Foodbank Plus service, we received some generous “start-up” grants which we knew would not be repeated in subsequent years. So a priority for the Trustees has been to ensure that the FB+ service should be sustainable. We decided that this could be achieved more easily if we were to set up Wirral Foodbank Plus as a separate charity. The only role of the new charity is in relation to financial support for the work of Foodbank Plus. The Trustees of the new charity are appointed by the Trustees of Wirral Foodbank, and all policy decisions relating to Wirral Foodbank Plus are made by the parent charity.

Some of our supporters have made one-off or regular gifts to the new charity and Richard Roberts will gladly supply the relevant forms to others who wish to support our advice work in this way.

Because of Government restrictions during the pandemic, our Adviser, Nicky, has been unable to work in her usual mode, in face-to-face consultations with clients at Foodbank Distribution Centres. However, clients receiving help from the Council hub and from our Distribution Centres when open have all been offered telephone consultations with her. She has been so busy that CAB seconded

one of their advisers to help her. The Trustees have allocated some of the Covid recovery fund to take over responsibility for paying this second adviser, Sylwia Mianowana, and we have committed ourselves to funding two advisers until at least the end of August 2022.

Fuelbank

In last year's report, I explained that the Trustees were facing a dilemma in relation to fuel vouchers. On the one hand, the fuelbank scheme was helping people who desperately needed help with the costs of heating their homes and cooking their food, but on the other hand we were in danger of becoming a fuel voucher service, with food as a less important extra, and a few clients even admitted that they did not need food, but had come only to get a fuel voucher. The existing fuelbank scheme was about to close, but it was going to be replaced by a new scheme, and the Trustees would have to decide whether to participate in the new scheme or not.



I am pleased to report that, with the help of one of our partner organisations, Energy Projects Plus, we have been able to resolve this dilemma. We have signed up to the new scheme, but we have separated the issue of fuel vouchers from our core role of providing emergency food support. Energy Projects Plus are administering the fuel voucher scheme on our behalf. In addition, Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council used some of the corona virus emergency funding given to them by the Government to pay in to the fuelbank scheme, and so they have also been able to issue fuel vouchers to people who needed them.

Multi-agency support centre



About two years ago, Rose Mullarkey, one of our Trustees, told us informally that the local branch of the St Vincent de Paul charity was exploring the possibility of opening a multi-agency support centre in Birkenhead. We said that in principle we would be interested in participating in such a project and asked her to keep us in touch with any developments.

In due course, this suggestion progressed far enough for a Joint Steering Group to be set up between SVP and ourselves.

This group has met regularly during the past year. At one time it looked as if it might be easier to locate the Support Centre in Wallasey rather than Birkenhead, but more recently we have identified suitable premises in Birkenhead and the SVP National Trustees have approved the project. Many details remain to be worked out, but we hope that the centre will open within the new few months.

Policies

As always, some of the work of the Trustees during the year under consideration has consisted of reviewing and revising policies. Our policies for safeguarding, finance and complaints, together with the guidance for distribution centres, have all been revised recently. A new policy for consulting stakeholders has been approved and will shortly be implemented.



We became aware that we were not following best practice in relation to policies for employing staff. So we set up a small working party of three Trustees, who produced up-dated job descriptions for our four paid staff, a staff handbook (based on a template from Trussell Trust) and a system for annual appraisals. These documents were all discussed with the staff, after which revised versions were presented to the Trustees and eventually introduced. We have also adopted a new volunteer handbook, which was based on a Trussell Trust template; this will be made available to all volunteers shortly

Safeguarding



In recent years, safeguarding has become recognized as an important responsibility of the Trustees of any charity, but particularly one which helps families in crisis, as we do. Neil Dalby, of Wirral Council, kindly led a training session on this subject for the Trustees. We have also adopted a policy that our own Safeguarding Officer and her deputies should undertake regular training.

Richard Haswell and Maggie Close have stepped down as Deputy Safeguarding Officers, and been replaced by Mary Kilcoyne and Gill Peters.

Pathfinder Project

At last year's AGM, a representative of Trussell Trust gave a brief introduction to the Pathfinder Project, the aim of which is to remove (or, more realistically, at least to reduce) the need for foodbanks. Our Trustees are



entirely sympathetic to the ideology of the Pathfinder Project, which is a helpful challenge and corrective to the continual growth experienced in recent years both by Wirral Foodbank and by other foodbanks across the country. Our Foodbank Plus programme is an example of the kind of development which the Pathfinder Project wishes to encourage other foodbanks to introduce.

The Trustees have discussed the Pathfinder Project on several occasions, as more details have become available. To begin with, we assumed that our commitment to the ideals of the project implied we should fully participate in it, but more recently it has become clear to us that elements of the project may not be appropriate in our circumstances. After much discussion, we have decided to commit Wirral Foodbank to the principles and goals of the Pathfinder Project, but not at this stage to participate in the project itself. We are seeking to appoint a Trustee who will take responsibility for strategy and we may in the future reconsider our decision about participation in the Pathfinder Project in the light of advice from that Trustee.



Finally, on behalf of the Trustees and of the many people who received help from Wirral Foodbank during the year on which I am reporting, I express cordial thanks to the following:

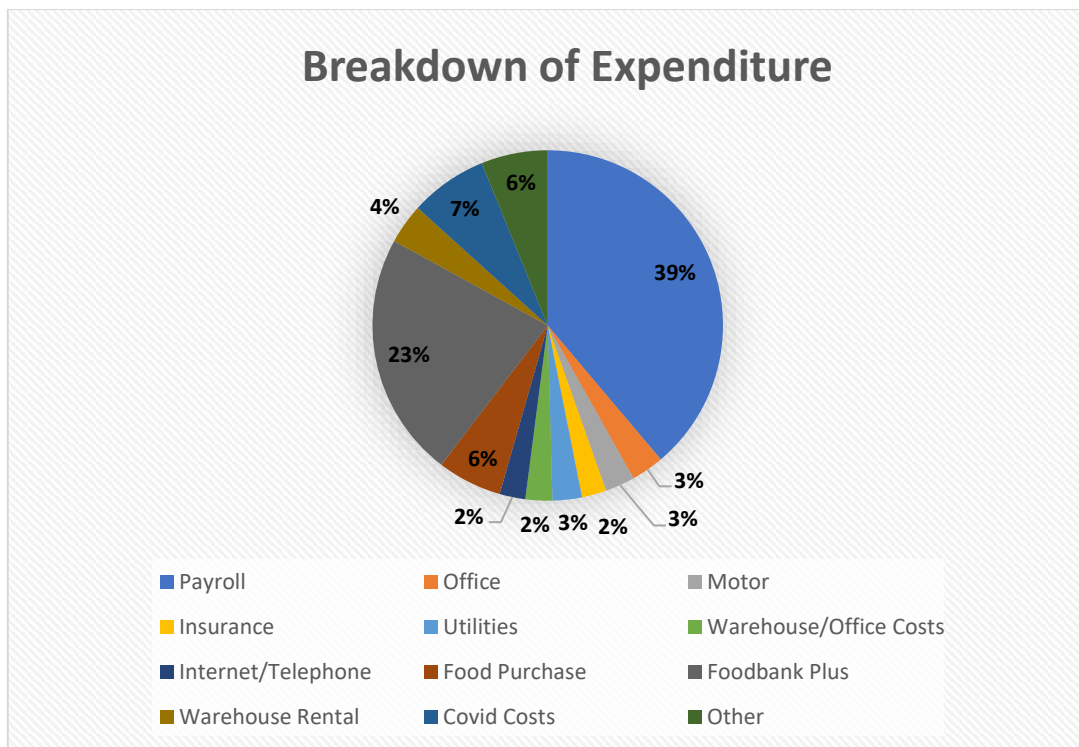
- those who have given food *via* churches or supermarkets or directly as companies or individuals
- those who have given money to Wirral Foodbank and Wirral Foodbank Plus, especially those who do so *via* standing order and Gift Aid
- the churches which host distribution centres on their premises, especially Link with Emmanuel Church, in Birkenhead, who have been extraordinarily generous with their building during the pandemic
- St John Plessington School, Abbeyfield Housing and the John Moores Foundation, for their support of Foodbank Plus
- Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council for their support during the Pandemic and the provision of additional storage space for food donations.
- Argyle Satellite Taxi Service
- Michael Donnan & Co, who have continued to undertake our book-keeping on a *pro bono* basis
- our paid staff
- and all our volunteers

Finance Review 2019-20 - Mike Donnan Trustee & Hon. Treasurer

During the year the Covid-19 pandemic led to an unprecedented increase in financial support from private donations. This was the experience of many foodbanks across the UK. Some of the monies received were in lieu of food donations, as many people were unable to deliver or collect food on our behalf. We are extremely grateful to all who have given so generously.

The Trustees decided to designate £90,000 of donations received in the year to a "Post-Covid Legacy Fund to deal with anticipated future costs as a result of the pandemic.

A breakdown of our expenditure for the year is detailed below.



Wirral Foodbank Plus is funded from grants received from external funders. In 2020, we were successful in securing funding from Asda, John Moore Foundation and National Lottery, extending the project until August 2022.

A full set of accounts is available from Charity Commission website [WIRRAL FOODBANK - 1167967 \(charitycommission.gov.uk\)](https://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/WIRRAL-FOODBANK-1167967)

Operational Review 2019-20 – Richard Roberts, General Manager



At the start of the pandemic, flexibility was certainly a key requirement, as we entered uncharted waters. During the first lockdown, we reacted quickly, by temporarily closing our foodbank centres, and concentrating all our resources in supporting the Wirral Council Food Hub. Between April and July, Wirral Foodbank distributed 71 tonnes of food (equivalent to 6,500 people), via the Food Hub, to those in need of emergency food support across Wirral. Over 40 Wirral Foodbank volunteers transferred to the Food Hub; their experience and professionalism was invaluable in ensuring emergency food was prepared ready for delivery.



Picture of volunteers at Wirral Council Food Hub

Working with Wirral Council enabled us to meet our core objective of “providing emergency food to people in crisis” and avoided the need for people to leave home, as Wirral Council delivered food.

Mark Camborne, Wirral Council’s lead for the humanitarian response to the COVID-19 crisis in Wirral, commented during the period of lockdown:

“The Foodbank is one of our key partners in the excellent work being done by the Emergency Food Hub. We simply wouldn’t be providing such an exceptional level of support to our most vulnerable residents without their help; though the scale of this situation is unprecedented for us all, feeding people during a crisis is what they do, it’s what they’ve done for years.

“Having Wirral Foodbank and other community food providers and charities, and the social supermarkets, so embedded in this operation from the very early days of the pandemic has been central to what we’ve been able to achieve and is the reason why so many other local authorities have been using our model as the one to follow.”

As we came out of the first lockdown, it was important to ensure a Covid-safe working environment for our staff, volunteers and clients. Through the incredible generosity of donors and the support of Wirral Council, we were able to rent another warehouse, next door to our existing warehouse and temporary accommodation at the Grosvenor Ballroom, Wallasey for a Distribution Centre.

It was with some trepidation that we opened a number of our foodbank centres in August 2020. It was necessary to introduce strict social distancing procedures for clients and volunteers. Our volunteers have always valued the opportunity for a chat with clients attending our foodbank centres over “tea and coffee.” Clients open up about the issues they are facing. It is through this interaction that clients are referred to Wirral Foodbank Plus. It has not been possible to do this since the introduction of social distancing guidelines. Our office volunteers took on the

responsibility of phoning all clients, who had attended a foodbank centre, where they needed extra support and with their agreement, they were referred to Wirral Foodbank Plus.

In August 2020, we introduced an on-line foodbank referral system. Previously, clients would receive a paper foodbank voucher from a referral agency. The ability for vouchers to be issued electronically, with the client receiving a foodbank code over the telephone, enabled those agencies working remotely to continue supporting clients. Clients then visited one of our foodbank centres, presented their code and, subject to verification, received emergency food sufficient for three days.

Our volunteers and staff excelled in adapting to the new way of working.



Celebrating National Volunteers' Week

The Covid crisis highlighted the work undertaken by volunteers across the country. In June, we celebrated National Volunteers' Week with our volunteers. We would like to thank "The Real Dairy Ice Cream Co" who kindly visited and donated Ice Cream to our Warehouse volunteers.

Revd Colin Hart, Chair of Trustees, sent the following message:

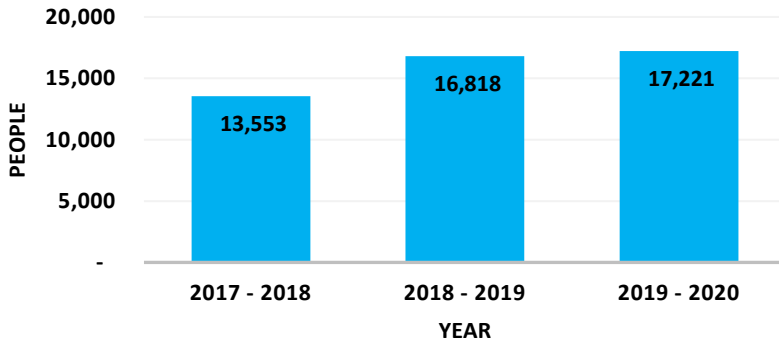
"On behalf of all the people in need on the Wirral who have turned to the Foodbank in their hour of need during the past year, the Trustees express heartfelt thanks to all the volunteers at Distribution centres, warehouses and office who have made this response possible.

We are especially grateful to those who have responded to the current crisis by offering their services in the Council Food Hub and our own warehouse. You are doing a great job.

For those who are unable to volunteer at present, because of the pandemic, thanks for all you have done during the year and we look forward to welcoming you back when circumstances allow. Meanwhile, John Milton's words are true, "They also serve who only stand and wait."

Facts and Figures

People supported by Wirral Foodbank



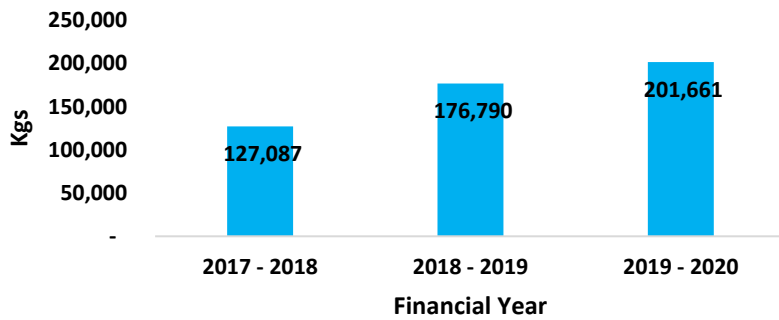
Covid was a major contributor to an increase in demand in 2019-2020. In the first lockdown (April – July 2020) we experienced a 50% increase in the number of people needing emergency food support.

During the lockdown period, we transferred food stock to the Wirral Council Food Hub, for distribution to those in need of emergency food support.

For this period, we suspended the issue of foodbank vouchers, with all requests for emergency food managed via the Wirral Council Corona-Virus Helpline.

Wirral Council supplemented our food donations with fresh food. This collaborative approach enabled us to meet the unprecedented demand experienced during the first lockdown.

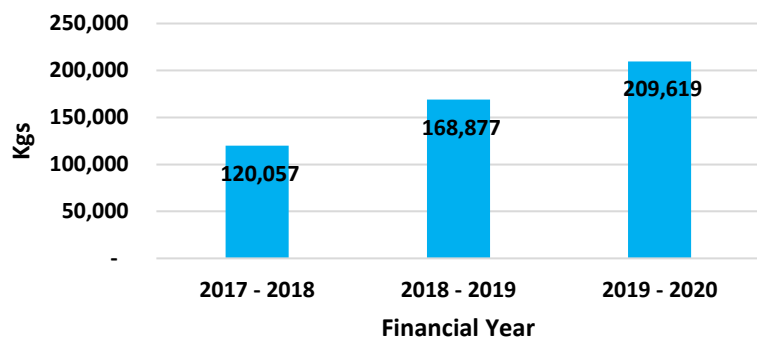
Food Distributed



Food donations continue to increase, year on year. We are overwhelmed by the generosity of the people of Wirral.

An increase in financial donations also enabled us to purchase food items.

Food Donations



Benefit continue to be the key reason affecting individuals and families needing the support of Wirral Foodbank.

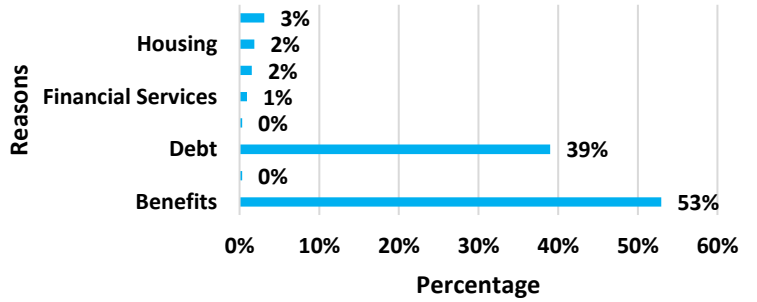
The pie chart provides a breakdown as to the various issues people face with regard to benefits.

Behind the statistics are individuals, families and children. Here are some of the comments received from those who used the foodbank in 2020:

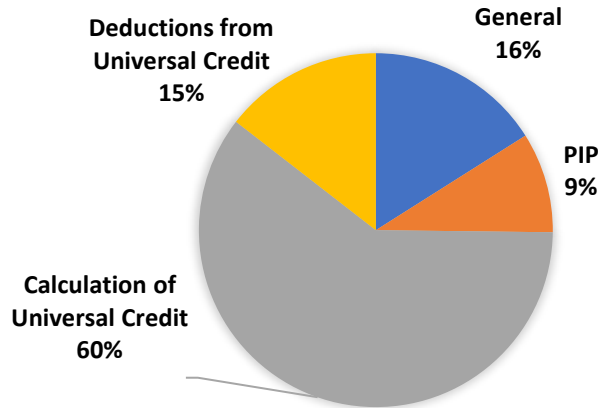
“The volunteers were absolutely incredible; I couldn't believe how nice they were. They sorted me out with plenty of food, shampoo etc. and cat food. I was beyond grateful x “

“They have given me the help I need when in crisis. It has been an absolute godsend for me and my daughter; I don't know how we would have coped”

Reasons for Needing Foodbank



Benefits





News from Trussell Trust:

Trussell Trust has issued its latest State of Hunger report, read the report in full [State of Hunger - The Trussell Trust](#).

95% OF PEOPLE REFERRED TO FOOD BANKS IN OUR NETWORK IN EARLY 2020 WERE DESTITUTE, MEANING THEY WERE UNABLE TO AFFORD TO EAT OR STAY WARM AND DRY.



62% OF WORKING AGE PEOPLE REFERRED TO FOOD BANKS IN OUR NETWORK IN EARLY 2020 WERE DISABLED - THREE TIMES THE RATE IN THE GENERAL WORKING AGE POPULATION.



18% OF HOUSEHOLDS REFERRED TO FOOD BANKS IN OUR NETWORK DURING THE PANDEMIC WERE SINGLE PARENTS - MORE THAN TWICE THE RATE IN THE GENERAL POPULATION.

