

Welfare Reform: Food Poverty and Food Banks

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Summary

The overall picture of food poverty

- Oldham has an estimated **24,500 people in food poverty** (10.7% of the population)
- Those in food poverty will have insecurity around food supply, eating too little food or unhealthy food, and lacking the financial resilience to carry them through crisis points without outside support.
- In turn, food poverty is a major health risk, and will have costly service implications for NHS, Oldham Council and wider public services.

Food banks

- Oldham Food Bank and other food banks in the borough provide crisis support. We estimate that **4,600 people (18.7% of the total number in food poverty)** received assistance from Oldham Food Bank last year.
- **30% of those fed are children.**
- There are a series of less documented food banks, some supported by Fare Share Greater Manchester, for which figures are not available.
- As expected, food bank usage broadly follows deprivation. However, it appears likely that **Failsworth has unmet demand**, and that **older people are not being catered for.**
- **Single people** are most likely to be fed.
- **South Asian communities** are active in collecting food, but citizens seldom use food banks. While there is food poverty, it appears that crisis points are avoided through bulk purchase of food essentials in advance, making this community more resilient.
- **Support for distributing food bank vouchers varies considerably between council services.** Some services which must be encountering high need do not seem to be offering this assistance.

Other activities aimed at food poverty

- There is a good range of voluntary organisations providing **crisis support** across Oldham, often church or mosque based.
- In terms of **affordable food**, there are only a small number of distributors and cafes assisting with this.
- **Get Oldham Growing** is intended to offer a wide and well-coordinated range of support towards food resilience.
- There is less support around **cooking skills.**

Opportunities

- There are potential opportunities to promote a “fair access to food” approach, through **community shops, growing and food education.**

What is food poverty?

While various definitions exist, one useful definition is :

*The inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.*¹

Action to relieve food poverty may take several forms, including

- Substituting cheaper, less nutritious foods for more healthy alternatives
- Eating less food than is healthy
- Seeking food in socially unacceptable ways e.g. begging, from skips or waste bins, or theft.
- Borrowing or pawning items to obtain sufficient money to buy food
- Over-reliance on families or friends for food

How widespread is food poverty in Oldham?

We would estimate that **24,500** people in Oldham (**10.7%** of the population) should be classified as in Food Poverty². This should be taken as a broad estimate rather than an exact figure, and is based on national estimates of 4 million persons in food poverty, together with data from the DCLG Indices of Multiple Deprivation.

Food prices have gone up by **18%** (from 2010 to 2014) and 1 in 10 Mancunians suffer from food poverty³. In contrast, average wage levels between June 2010 and June 2014 have increased by 6.1%⁴.

Who is impacted?

Research indicates that food poverty is more likely to impact key vulnerable groups⁵:

- Low income/unemployed households
- Households with children
- South Asian communities
- Those with disabilities
- Older People
- Isolated/single residents

¹ Elizabeth Dowler, Professor of Food and Social Policy, University of Warwick, in 'Poverty Bites' (2001)

² *Measuring Food Poverty in Oldham*, Business Intelligence Service, March 2015

³ Greater Manchester Sustainable Food Strategy (2014)

⁴ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-market-statistics/april-2015/dataset--earnings.html>

⁵ *Food Poverty and Health*, Royal College of Physicians, 2005,
http://www.muslimfoodprogramme.org/images/uploads/documents/bs_food_poverty.pdf

What are the impacts?⁶

Poor diet is a major health risk. It contributes to:

- almost 50% of CHD (coronary heart disease) deaths
- 33% of all cancer deaths
- diabetes
- increased falls and fractures in older people
- low birthweight and increased childhood morbidity and mortality
- increased dental caries in children

There is also growing evidence to support the link between poor diets and anti-social behaviour.

Service Implications of Food Poverty

There are likely to be a wide range of secondary service impacts leading on from the above, which will include but not be limited to:

- Negative impacts on school outcomes - hungry children will learn less well
- Health impacts increase NHS costs
- Increased costs to reablement through falls & fractures
- Increased costs to social care for Older People through after-effects of falls
- Greater costs to multiple services through anti-social behaviour
- Individuals in food insecurity are low down on need hierarchies, and therefore less likely to be able to have capacity for co-operative or volunteering activities.

⁶ ibid

What role do food banks play?

Food banks have a key role in supporting individuals and families at crisis points, which would include;

- Delays in benefits
- Changes to benefits (including sanctions)
- Crises associated with low income

While food banks may mitigate against the immediate issue, the very fact that a short term issue causes a basic necessity to become unaffordable means that vulnerable residents will continue to be in food poverty after the crisis intervention has passed.

As such, while food banks perform a vital function, they do not – and are not designed to – address the wider or longer term issue of food poverty.⁷ However, analysis carried out by Demos on statistics released by the Trussell Trust suggest that 50–60 per cent of those using food banks are doing so as a result of ‘chronic’ food poverty – i.e. a long-term inability to afford food because of entrenched poverty.⁸

Food banks in Oldham

In Oldham a number of organisations provide crisis food support.

Oldham Food Bank, run by the Trussell Trust is the largest food bank, working from Oldham Town Centre directly, and also distributing food to other distributing organisations and cereals to breakfast clubs in school holidays.

Other institutions and food banks in Oldham with which Oldham Food Bank works are

- Salvation Army
- St Aiden’s & St Oswald’s Church, Royton (drop in)
- Oldham East Methodist Church
- Churches Together, Shaw (food bank)
- South Chadderton Methodist Church (food bank)

Additionally, Fareshare Greater Manchester (operating as part of Emerge Manchester) distributes food to several locations within Oldham.

- Oldham Unity
- East Oldham Methodist Church (food bank, for people in Derker on benefits)
- Chadderton Community Church (food bank)
- Collier Hill Food Project

Other independent food banks or similar support are thought to exist, often distributing food to a limited clientele, including churches and mosques acting independently of Oldham Food Bank. Elim Food Bank, Greenacres Road, may be one such.

There do not appear to be any food banks in the Failsworth or Saddleworth areas.

It is not known what level of support which is informally provided to people in need e.g. by friends, families or neighbours.

⁷ http://www.demos.co.uk/files/476_1501_BA_body_web_2.pdf?1427295281 (p14)

⁸ http://www.demos.co.uk/files/476_1501_BA_body_web_2.pdf?1427295281 (p14)

For council to note

Emerge Manchester are seeking to expand their food distribution network further into the East of Greater Manchester- particularly linked to community facilities providing cooked meals- this may represent a good opportunity to work with them in providing more support within Oldham, and to 'grow' a community kitchen approach.

Food bank usage

The following statistics refer to Oldham Food Bank, and as such only represent a partial picture.

In 2014, Oldham Food Bank distributed food based on 2937 food vouchers, which fed 3708 adults (70%) and 1618 children (30%) (5326 total).

It is not clear to what extent the same individuals receive help more than once from food banks. However, as we know that sanctions are a key crisis which leads to food bank usage, and sanctioned individuals receive 1.16 sanctions per year⁹, we might assume as a best estimate that 4591 unique individuals received food bank assistance last year (approximately 1,394 of which were children). This equates to 18.7% of the total number of individuals estimated to be in food poverty.

Trends over time

Only 2 years figures are available. There is no significant change in vouchers issued between years: however, in 2014 vouchers appeared to be targeted slightly more at families and less at individuals.

Anecdotal information from Oldham Food Bank suggests that numbers accessing the service have 'plateaued', and it was stated that attendances resulting from sanctions have declined in recent months. DWP data supports there being some falls in sanction numbers, but there is a lag in release, meaning we cannot verify current trends.

Crisis Types

34.3% of vouchers are issued because of 'benefit delays'. A further 24.3% are issued due to 'benefit changes' (presumably indicating sanctions). The majority of vouchers are therefore issued in response to process issues around benefits.

After this, 'low income' accounts for 17.3%, and 'unemployed' for 4%. Thus benefits, employment and income levels account for around 80% of food bank support. Only very small proportions are attributed to other causes (sickness, homelessness, or domestic violence.)

⁹ Between October 2013 and September 2014, 4334 individuals received 5045 adverse sanctions, or 1.16 sanctions per person.

<https://sw.stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/dataCatalogueExplorer.xhtml>

Food bank user demographics

Age		Percentage of individuals fed	Percentage population (2012 snpp)
0-15	1618	30%	21%
16-24	552	10%	13%
25-64	3110	58%	51%
over 64	38	1%	16%

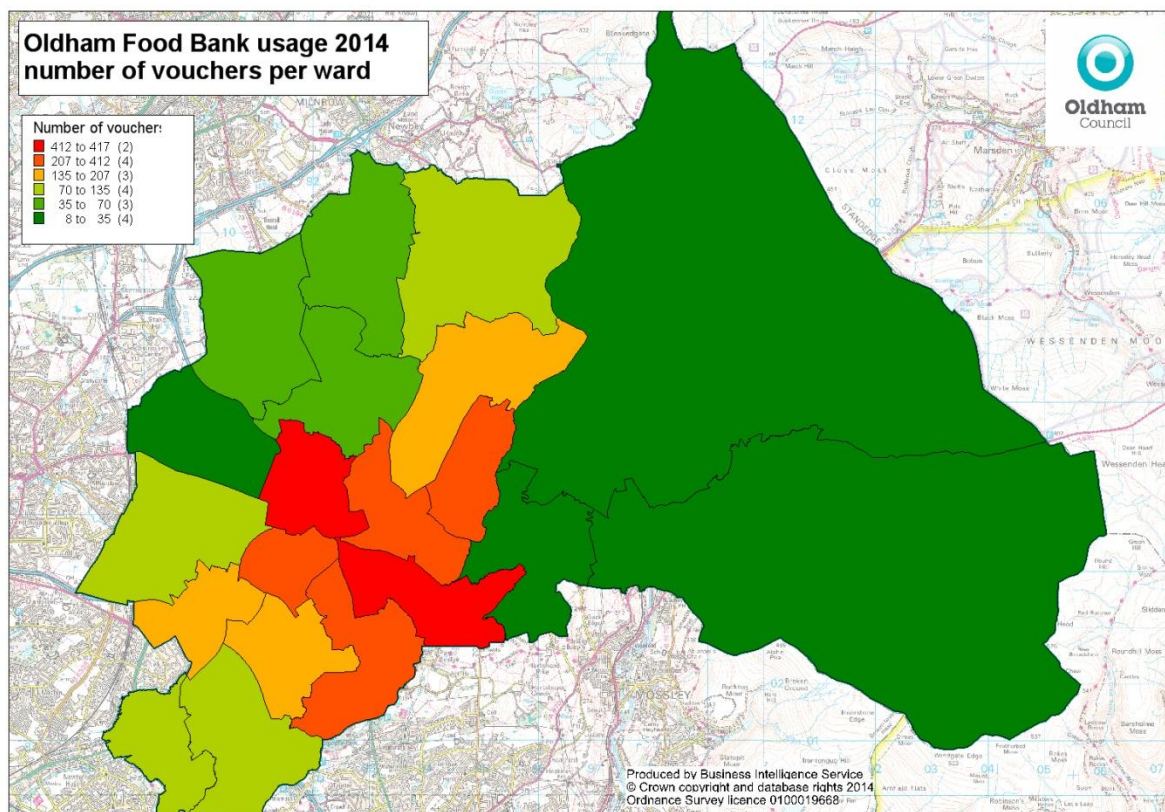
Couples	9%
Family	11%
Single Parent	13%
Single	64%
Other	2%

	vouchers	Percentage of vouchers issued	Percentage of population (2011 Census)
Asian	150	5%	18%
Black	118	4%	1%
Mixed	72	2%	2%
White	2502	85%	78%
Total	2937		

As can be seen, food banks are disproportionately feeding children, and almost never feeding older people (40% of those fed are aged 24 and under). The latter is not unexpected as pensioner incomes have performed well under the present government. Likewise, it is not unexpected that single people make up the majority of recipients: single people are more vulnerable to loss of income, and tend to have higher fixed housing costs per person, leaving less residual income for other essentials.

There are significant differences in ethnic group make-up between Oldham's population and Food Bank recipients. There are very low numbers of Asian recipients, and yet mosques in Oldham periodically ask for donations to food banks. Discussion with Oldham Inter Faith Forum suggests that South Asian households will usually buy rice, oil, pulses and other staples in bulk. By doing so, they have some resilience against crisis points, as there will always be enough staples in the home to survive for one or two months without external support. Further, there tend to be strong family support networks which will also increase resilience.

Food bank geographic spread



There is a real concentration of demand from Oldham District, particularly from Alexandra and Coldhurst wards, with additional highs in Hollinwood and Chadderton South.

Even taking into account deprivation levels within central Oldham, the ratio of vouchers from a low of 8 (Saddleworth South) to a high of 417 (Alexandra) is extraordinary.

Reasons for the differentials might hypothetically include

- Difficulty in accessing the food bank from some locations (travel costs from Failsworth and Saddleworth are not insubstantial to someone who cannot afford food.)
- Food insecurity in Saddleworth being masked by strong and supportive personal networks-as well as a local tradition of independence/self-reliance.
- Referral routes may be more difficult in some areas- it is notable that many services distributing vouchers are 'Oldham-centric' and thus perhaps less likely to be attended by those further out. It may well be that only those centres with extreme profiles of hardship are sufficiently well-versed in the voucher system to be effective distributors.
- Failsworth residents attending Manchester food banks, if these are seen as more accessible.
- Social acceptability of food bank use may well vary between districts of Oldham, and between communities.

Types of organisation distributing vouchers

A range of organisations receive food vouchers from Oldham food bank, and then distribute vouchers to those in need, who must then travel to the food bank to redeem the voucher. The following table shows vouchers distributed.

type	Number
Housing/Homelessness	745
Of which:	
FCHO	327
Threshold	210
Great Places	63
CAB	446
Salvation Army	405
Job Centre Plus	399
Probation	349
Drugs and alcohol	316
Of which:	
Gateway	152
ADS	107
Health (predominantly NHS)	230
Of which:	
Mental Health	95
GP	75
Social Care	217
Children	186
Of which:	
Children's Centres	163
Positive Steps Oldham	162
Churches	109
Criminal Justice system	73
Disability	57
Early help	52
Other	47
Local Welfare Provision	26
Domestic violence	10
Older People	10

Classification of organisations is challenging- for example, a 'children with disabilities' team would fall into 3 of the categories. However, the figures do paint a useful picture.

- Very few schools are involved, even in the most deprived areas
- Most organisations distributing vouchers are centrally based rather than district based, and few voluntary groups are involved (although faith groups are). The central nature of distribution supports the potential for unmet need in some districts.
- There are clear differences in Children's Centre behaviour- Alexandra (in an area of high food bank use) only issuing 1 voucher, Royton and Saddleworth none at all. Others issued up to 26 vouchers.

- Equally, there are major differences within internal council services as to support for vouchers. Some teams that might be expected to be at the forefront of distribution don't do so, whereas others may give vouchers at inappropriate times.

These findings suggest that support on a district basis could be improved.

For council to note

It appears that crisis support via food banks may not be meeting need uniformly across Oldham, either geographically or socially. Through better use of district working and children's centres, the council could ensure more equality of access. This could be supported by qualitative research into the behaviours leading to inequalities in access.

Voucher Take-up

83 organisations or teams gave out vouchers in 2014. Some organisations are more successful than others in identifying need, which can be measured by take up of vouchers issued. The variance suggests that there is also likely to be unmet need.

Organisations/Teams with zero take-up of vouchers issued

- Pennine Care (0 take-up from 30 vouchers)

Organisations/Teams with less than 50% take-up

- After Care Team
- Contour Homes
- OMBC Boxing & Personal Development Centre (sic)
- Oldham Children's Social Care
- Primary Care Mental Health Service
- Regenda Group
- St Barnabas Church
- St. Mary's Medical Centre

Organisations issuing 10 or less vouchers have been excluded from the above.

In a sense, this is not an issue in that nothing is lost by issuing a voucher which isn't used. It would tend to indicate that there are differing levels of expertise in identifying need, and perhaps therefore that there is unmet need.

Donations

125 organisations donated to Oldham Food Bank, including churches, schools, housing associations, businesses, police, and Oldham Council staff. Tesco and ASDA have made particularly significant donations, and individual public donations are very high. A firm called Die Cast Models has donated over 7000Kgs of food, and Oldham Council staff have also donated over 2000kg through the internal Donation Station food appeal since 2012.

Feedback from the Oldham food bank highlights the concern that there are limited donations of fresh fruits and vegetables as donations are typically, by request for storage purposes, non-perishable food (e.g. tinned).

Other action on food in Oldham

Food banks help address the crisis-point aspect of food poverty within Oldham. However, a number of other projects or types of support are or have been in place.¹⁰ Some projects will cross types, and details are often sketchy or anecdotal.

Destitution/Crisis Support

- **Soup Kitchens**- one soup kitchen run by Zaffa's Mosque. Proposals for another mosque-run soup kitchen in the Coppice area.
- **Oldham Unity/One World Centre**- working to support destitute asylum seekers and refugees.
- **One World Suspended Café**- Café where some people pay extra so that a homeless person can have free food. Further services being developed from April onwards.
- **Christ Church Chadderton**- soup and sandwiches

Affordable Food

- **Impact Community Project**- Food Share: discounted food parcels for £2. (believed to be at Colliers Hill Community Centre)
- **Tree of Life**- Discounted food parcels for £2, Hollinwood.
- **Fare Share Community Café**-Chadderton Community Church

Food independence/resilience/health

- **Get Oldham Growing**
 - **Growing ambassadors** - Growing Ambassadors are local people recruited to support local food growing activity at all levels in the community, providing a visible, 'on the ground' point of contact for the Get Oldham Growing programme.
 - **Growing Hubs** – GOG is working towards establishing a food growing hub site in each of the districts. These will be community led and focus on increasing the amount of local food grown, eaten and sold by residents.
 - **Skills for community enterprise** – support to increase the amount of enterprise around local food and opportunities to learn new food growing skills
 - **Community projects** – supporting community projects through grants and ongoing support. Grants have been distributed for healthy cooking projects, community food growing, community kitchens and volunteer engagement work.
- **Digging for Health** is an initiative run through the Health improvement Service. Offering training to help people learn how growing their own food will help them eat more healthily and be more active.
- **Sholver Allotment Society**. A community allotment society for Sholver residents, wanting to get the community involved in "grow your own food schemes."
- **Other allotment projects** exist within Oldham but are beyond the scope of this paper,

¹⁰ With thanks to Voluntary Action Oldham and Oldham Inter-Faith Forum. Some information is the result of research in 2013, so changes are possible.

- **Cooking on a budget.** Course offered by Lifelong Learning service.

Food for community cohesion

- **Iftar Meals-** provision of a meal at Iftar during Ramadhan, regardless of faith.

Advice, guidance and support

- **Early Help-** the All Age Early Help Offer measures diet and weight as part of its assessment process, and offers individual advice on these topics, including health trainers, as well as wider advice on managing finances which should increase resilience.
- **NHS Health Check** programme via GPs (and within the next year pharmacies)
- **School nursing service**
- **Oral health** (focussing on avoidance of sugary drinks and snacks)
- **Infant feeding** (mainly focussing on promoting breast feeding)
- **Diabetes prevention** (currently being scoped)
- **Health at work** (currently being scoped)

A workshop focussed on '**Fair Access to Food**' in Oldham to be held in Summer 2015. The session aims to help identify current, proposed or potential projects in Oldham involving food and discuss whether this activity could (or should) be brought together in a co-operative approach to the food agenda. It's intended to bring together a range of organisations involved with food including; food banks, local community cafes/kitchens, social supermarkets, charities and suppliers.

The projects that are in place above are extremely disparate. While the Get Oldham Growing programme is bringing some activities together, it is clear that even with that programme, there are substantial activities which are not benefitting from co-ordination, and probably also other strategies that could be applied with more co-ordination in place.

For council to note

There is a lack of intelligence about the full breadth of initiatives which will impact on food insecurity in Oldham. It is suggested that an asset mapping exercise be undertaken to more fully understand the breadth of support that is already in place. Such an asset map would have to be carried out co-operatively, with district teams having a pivotal role to play.

For council to note

Explore with groups involved with food across Oldham whether there is a need for an Oldham Food Strategy to bring together the range of disparate activity and help establish a consistent and coherent approach.

It is also clear that proportionately most activities are about crisis management rather than building resilience. As a co-operative borough, focused on community and self-efficacy, there could be more consideration of other measures to fundamentally improve food security.

Potential further activities

A recent report, “Feeding Britain”¹¹ carried a series of recommendations to tackle food poverty and related issues. A discussion paper¹² presented some implications of these recommendations for Oldham.

Some key recommendations or opportunities identified include

- The opportunity to **map food banks and other food projects**, leading to better co-ordination and greater effectiveness.
- Consideration of the potential for a **community shop**, aligned around co-operative values.
- Cooking education: consider the potential for **community kitchens**, and also for **more cookery training**, perhaps linked to this or school meals services.
- Expand the **compostable caddy-liner scheme** to improve awareness of food waste, highlighting the disparity between wasted food and food poverty and encourage residents to think about food produce and surplus re-distribution.
- Provide **greater access to land for growing**, perhaps with agreement that some food produced is redistributed to those with greatest need. This might take the form of an **Oldham Food Farm**.
- Link to **independent retailers** to encourage waste food repurposing.
- Work on the **wider determinants of food insecurity**, including campaigning for assistance for those on **pre-pay meters**.
- Using **local food hubs** like Waterhead Park to produce good volumes of food. The sale of this could create a **local food dividend**, which in turn could create a provision for local people in food poverty, or **supplement food banks**.

Any approach would need to consider how we could work together with our partners and local community organisations to ensure that we are tackling food poverty co-operatively and supporting fair access to food in Oldham for everyone.

¹¹ ‘Feeding Britain; The report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom’, 2014

¹² An Oldham Perspective: *‘Feeding Britain; The report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom’*, 2015