



## **Referral pathways between emergency food provision and Local Welfare Assistance Schemes: Norfolk**

This report covers referral pathways between emergency food provision, Local Welfare Assistance, and the information and advice services in Norfolk. Specifically, it aims to examine the links between the Norfolk Assistance Scheme (NAS), the local welfare assistance scheme delivered by Norfolk County Council, and wider support available across Norfolk, including food provision and wraparound services such as advice. It also aims to understand the perception of the NAS among support providers in the VCS.

This is based on the work of the Norfolk Community Advice Network (NCAN) which has worked with the Coordinated Community Support (CCS) Programme to continue to build capacity of a Norfolk-wide digital referral system. The system aims to facilitate more effective referrals between agencies working to support people across Norfolk by providing wraparound accountable referrals.

This survey aims to gather information about the referral pathways between emergency food provision, Local Welfare Assistance and the information and advice services in Norfolk. Specifically, we wanted to investigate links between the NAS and wider support, including food provision and wraparound services like advice, and understand perception of the NAS among support providers.

CCS collected data from over 80 agencies and organisations with referral links to Trussell Trust Food Banks across Norfolk. Both statutory and VCS organisations were surveyed. Data was collected between November 2021 and February 2022.

### **Awareness of and access to the Norfolk Assistance Scheme:**

There is a good level of awareness amongst survey respondents of what the NAS is, with 72.6% of respondents reporting that they are 'fully aware' of the Norfolk Assistance Scheme.

However, the number of respondents actually making claims to the NAS was significantly lower - just under half (47.6%) of all respondents had made an application on behalf of a client to the NAS since January 2020. Of those who had made applications, 27.5% reported all were successful and a further 42.5% reported most were successful.

While there is a good level of awareness of the scheme across the county, just over 25% of respondents were either 'not aware' (10.7%) or had 'heard of it [but did not] know much about it' (15.5%). This indicates a need for the NAS to increase its effort to reach out to organisations to ensure knowledge of the scheme and make support available to more Norfolk residents. NCAN, as per its aims to connect residents to more support by expanding awareness of and access to services, could support with work to increase awareness across the borough.

Trussell Trust also have a role to play in supporting the development of closer links between agencies and county-wide sources of support like the NAS. Much of the outreach needed would benefit from being targeted to smaller or more rural organisations which may have less reach into wider forms of support.

*Why were NAS applications unsuccessful?*

The most common reason for rejected applications was that clients were unable to provide correct and/or sufficient evidence to be awarded support. Other significant reasons were that applicants did not meet criteria due to not being on the right benefit<sup>1</sup> and applicants having already received a reward within the last 12 months.

There is an opportunity for the NAS to consider how to better support applicants, and the organisations working with them, through the process of seeking local welfare assistance. Some respondents raised the question that whilst some of their clients may be unable to provide evidence, they were eligible. The NAS could increase access and support for Norfolk County residents by considering alternate routes to prove eligibility.

**Reasons for seeking support in Norfolk**

The primary reason people have required support from the NAS is chronic low income, followed closely by debt problems. Changing in housing circumstances and changes to benefit entitlement are also high on the ranking of why people seek support. Most reasons respondents referred to local welfare assistance was to address issues generated by long-term poverty. This suggests a wider challenge for Norfolk, as support is needed to sustain residents beyond short-term income shocks.

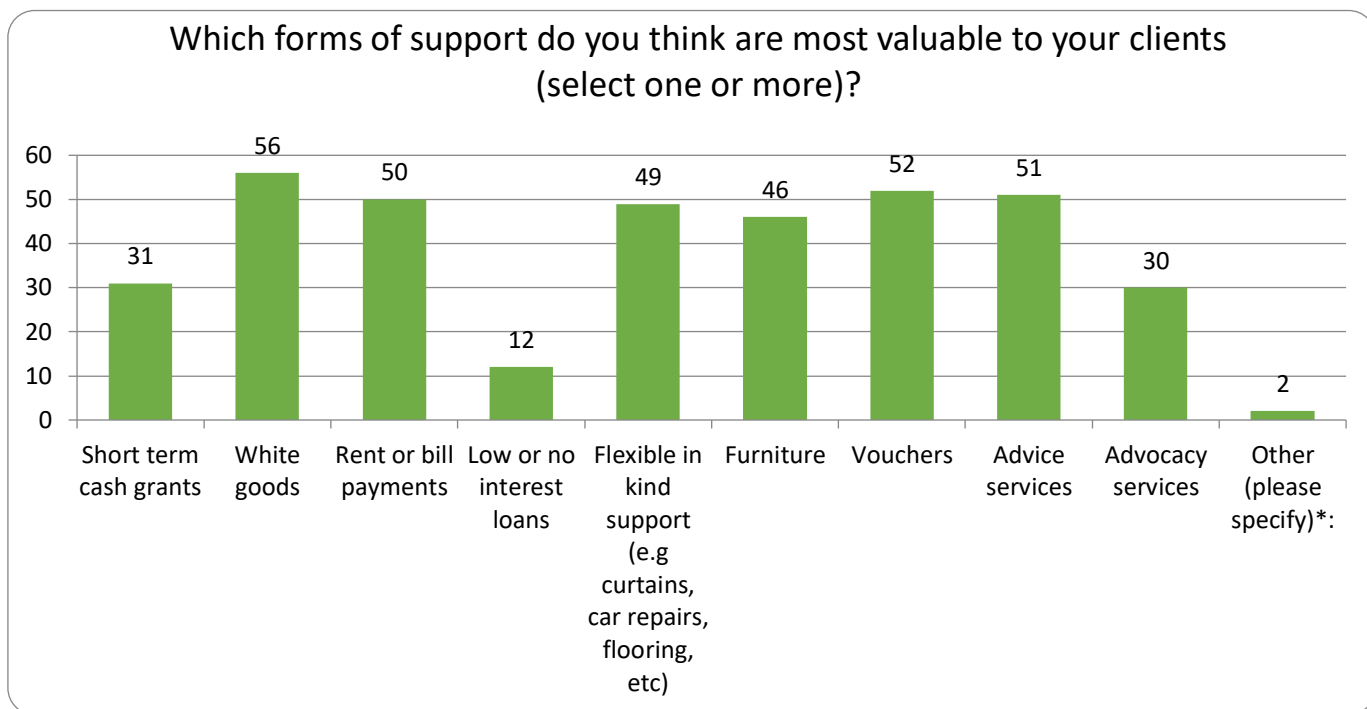
*Table 1. Reasons clients seek support ranked in order of importance by survey respondents (below)*

<b>Chronic low income</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Debt - personal</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Debt - utilities</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Change in housing circumstances</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Change in benefit entitlement</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Debt - housing/rent arrears</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>COVID-19 - Isolation/illness</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>COVID-19 - Loss of employment</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Domestic violence</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Providing care for others</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Disability causing hardship</b>	<b>11</b>

There is a wide range of support available for Norfolk residents, ranging from cash-based grants to advocacy services to vouchers. Survey respondents identify vouchers (food), white goods and advice as most valuable to their clients although many forms of support were rated highly (see Figure 1). There was support for flexible in-kind support, support with rent/bill payments and furniture. Cash-based grants were not rated very highly. However,

<sup>1</sup> There needs to be some kind of explanation in footnotes of NAS eligibility criteria – to be added.

some respondents in feedback indicated they were not aware cash payments are provided by the NAS, which may have affected overall responses.

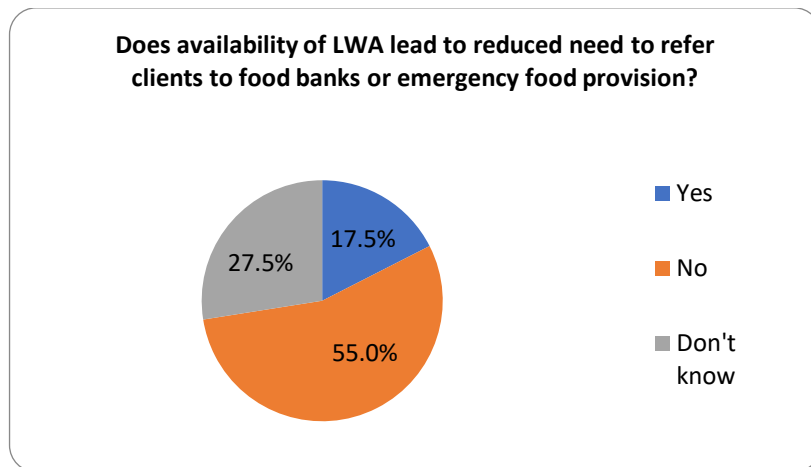


**Referral pathways:**

When referring clients to Local Welfare Assistance Schemes, 65% of respondents also referred clients to additional, wraparound support (including other Local Authority services, advice agencies and other VCS organisations). In contrast, most respondents stated that food bank referrals they made were ‘usually standalone’ (69%). Only 27.6% respondents made a food bank referral in conjunction with one or more other referrals.

These findings imply that agencies that consistently apply to the NAS are already linked in with wider forms of support and regularly refer clients to multiple places concurrently. However, it indicates that organisations who primarily refer to food banks to support clients may have less awareness of the wider range of support available. Again, this may apply primarily to rural areas with a lower degree of awareness of what may be on offer.

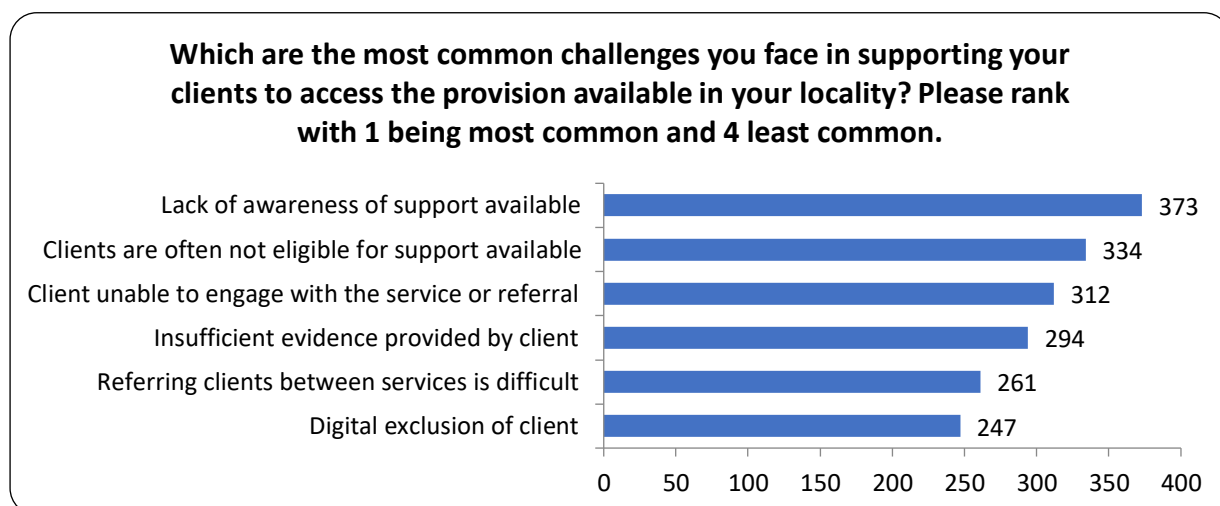
Table 2



Only 17.5% of respondents agreed that the availability of Local Welfare Assistance schemes led to a reduced need to refer clients into emergency food provision (see Table 2). This would imply that the NAS, while undoubtedly being a crucial source of support, is not meeting all the needs of people in Norfolk or reducing reliance on food banks.

**Challenges to accessing support:**

There is also a challenge around application processes; as mentioned briefly above, issues around clients being unable to engage/provide evidence suggests a need for advocacy services to support for application processes to be simplified to ensure greater accessibility for those in need of support. Clients being unable to provide sufficient evidence or being ineligible suggests that the NAS may need to re-examine eligibility criteria and/or look to work more closely with referring organisations across the VCS to support clients more effectively by supplying greater flexibility and access to local welfare assistance.



Overall, feedback from respondents on the NAS and NCAN are positive. NCAN in particular was praised for increasing coordination and awareness of the services available to support residents in the area. There was praise for the joint-working approach between VCS and statutory services.

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However, more work can be done to increase awareness of the NAS scheme generally. There is also work to be done to promote cash-based solutions that are offered by the NAS.

NCAN and the NAS can work together to support awareness raising about support available, through information-sharing and/or training sessions. Both NCAN and the NAS itself could do more outreach to organisations. Specifically, smaller organisations were shown to be more likely to refer to emergency food provision alone. Outreach to these organisations, to ensure awareness and knowledge of wider support in Norfolk, would ensure those accessing foodbanks are looped into the wider range of support available in Norfolk.

The NAS could also take steps to ensure the greater accessibility of the scheme. By working with referral partners across the VCS, the NAS could identify where there is need for greater flexibility in the application process and work together with referrers to increase access to local welfare assistance.