

Issues affecting emergency financial support providers and service users during the Covid-19 pandemic, Evidence Note 3

Providers of emergency financial support and assistance are at the frontline of responding to Covid19. This briefing highlights some of the key challenges and issues that frontline organisations, such as councils, charities and other agencies are facing during this time.

The issues presented have been gathered from the responses to an online issue collection form for emergency financial support providers and reflect three key emerging themes. They relate to both the challenges faced by providers in delivering their services and the challenges facing service users.

Those experiencing a financial crisis have turned to foodbanks and other organisations to provide food and other necessities during the Covid-19 pandemic. Demand has risen sharply with many other organisations now providing food for their clients. Issues around food, from the supply and distribution to future planning, have been common issues in the responses to the evidence collection form. This third evidence note highlights the development of this situation.

We will continue to collect and analyse responses through the Coronavirus pandemic. We encourage multiple responses as new and additional issues arise, so that we can capture as much evidence as possible as the situation changes. Please help us [by completing the evidence collection form and sharing across your networks.](#)

Theme 1 – Food supply and provision

In some of the initial responses from emergency support providers, concerns were raised in relation to the supply of food, with restrictions imposed by supermarkets (many of which have now been lifted) and issues of food supplies not being used efficiently by organisations, with concerns around duplicating provision as a result of a lack of coordination between services.

A school providing a site for a foodbank reported that:

“Access to material goods has been severely hampered by caps on purchasing imposed by Government and supermarkets. Rice, Pasta and staples are a particular challenge to acquire in the quantities we need.”

Another foodbank stated their concern over equitable access to stocks between different organisations:

“Stocks may run out if this continues long term, while other [foodbanks] may have too much because they are not known about and so [are] not being used.”

Many of these responses suggest that a more mainstreamed and coordinated mechanism for food provision is needed to ensure that supplies can be easily distributed and accessed.

In recent responses providers have expressed less concern on this issue and placed greater emphasis on fears over the sustainability of supply meeting demand as the crisis continues.

Theme 2 – Providing food to clients

Numerous responses raised issues around vulnerable groups accessing food and the suitability of food provided to clients.

A London based organisation supporting migrants highlighted the logistical factors that are acting as a barrier to migrant families accessing the voucher scheme provided in lieu of Free School Meals:

“Food vouchers provided in lieu of school meals for eligible children are for a particular store depending on the school. This store in some cases is a few miles from where people live with no access to transport, no cash to get there and often they do not know where the store is as they never go to this supermarket.”

A mental health charity relayed concerns about the food that homeless clients - living in B&Bs without access to cooking equipment – were receiving from foodbank packages:

“They are eating food straight out of the packet, like biscuits and crisps, which isn't good for their physical or mental health.”

While there are many new and arising challenges in delivering services in the context of Covid-19, it is crucial that vulnerable groups are able to easily access the support they need, particularly in relation to essentials such as food.

Theme 3 – Future and sustainability

As it becomes clearer that lockdown and social distancing measures are likely to continue for a prolonged period of time in some form, the sustainability of providing support has been another frequently discussed key issue. Concerns around funding, staffing and providing support over the long term were all raised.

A foodbank expressed concerns that the current levels of financial support available might change in the future:

“There is a question of sustainability, donations e.g. commercial support is generous at the moment but we can't expect this to go on.”

Another Foodbank based in the Midlands echoed this concern:

“Food donations locally have been amazing - but that may not continue.”

The same two foodbanks expressed worry over the future availability of volunteers. Of concern was that a high proportion of these volunteers were of retirement age (some of which are likely to be advised to shield for some time) and that those who weren't would only be able to provide support on a temporary basis. This uncertainty over volunteers raises questions of sustainability as well as the potential need for additional staffing support from elsewhere to meet service demand:

“If the foodbank is to continue to serve the two council wards allocated, it may require staffing support from the council.”

“Volunteer numbers will be limited when temporary volunteers return to studies or work and over 70's are still barred because of age. Shortage of volunteers will severely limit what our foodbank can offer.”

A response from another foodbank relayed similar concerns regarding staffing and volunteers, as well as sustaining a service for which demand is likely to increase in the long term:

“At the moment food and volunteers are adequate but if the lock down is extended it could become a greater problem. The need is likely to grow anyway as people become unemployed.”

Another response conveyed similar expectations of a future increase in demand:

“Numbers of people needing help are increasing significantly - we anticipate September will be a crunch period”

Issues relating to logistics were also raised. There was a concern that spaces currently being used to meet increased need might not be available in the future once services begin to re-open:

“If this level of support is still needed (in a situation with eased lock-down but in conditions of recession) it will not be easy to restore the previous community activities hosted in the building.”

All these responses conveyed the issue of transitioning services that were set up/adapted for an immediate short-term increase in demand to what is now considered a prolonged change of circumstances.

With thanks to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation who have helped analyse the data collected from the emergency financial support providers evidence collection form. Any views expressed or recommendations derived do not necessarily represent the position of the organisation.

For more information about this briefing, please contact Rebecca.Jacques@childrenssociety.org.uk
