

Mind the Gap

**A Study looking at the impact of the
cost of living crisis on people using
Bognor Regis Foodbank**

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***'In an affluent society, how does this
Happen?'***



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Acknowledgements

Our heartfelt thanks go to everyone who has supported us:

Our Clients

Foodbank staff, volunteers & Trustees

Our Local Partners

The CPAR team

We Couldn't have done it without your help!



Introduction

It has been widely acknowledged that the cost of living crisis that has followed the Covid 19 pandemic has caused a steep rise in poverty across the country. In the last financial year Foodbank use in Bognor Regis was up by 25% on pandemic levels, with 'rising cost of essentials' being cited as a reason for referral in just under 43% of vouchers.

Research co-authored by the Trussell Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that essentials for a single person would cost around £120 per week leaving a gap of £35 for someone receiving Universal Credit (*The Essentials Guarantee, 2023*)

We have also seen a rise in homelessness or insecure housing being given as a reason for referral in Bognor Regis of just over 190% on pre-pandemic levels. Although this is partly due to a new dedicated day facility opening locally, it is clear that adequate housing has become a much bigger issue in our locality.

It was against this backdrop that we sought the opinions of our clients on what is impacting most on their lives right now and what improvements to systems both locally and nationally could be most helpful to them.

Our Situation

We were preparing to begin our data collection at the beginning of 2024 expecting to be moving into a bigger premises.. Within the space of a week the move was off and staff had been issued with redundancy notices with a date to close the Foodbank altogether set for mid-February. Immediately our energies were turned towards saving this much needed resource.

The decision to close was reversed but it has left a residual uncertainty amongst our stakeholders as well as a complete change of Trustees and general governance leaving us in a state of limbo

Methodology

We chose to use a blended method in our approach to this research using a quantitative questionnaire which we posted online with a link from our facebook page or invited customers to complete during their visit to the Foodbank. We followed up with a few unstructured interviews in which we asked people who had used the foodbank to tell us more about their journey.

The vast majority of the questionnaires were filled out in person at the Foodbank, where we were also able to go through them verbally if required, only 2 online submissions were made, but 43 paper questionnaires were completed.

A few people asked to take their questionnaires away for completion although none of these were actually returned. Some respondents added written information which was generally of a more qualitative nature which we have used to enrich our findings. As a final question we asked people to add contact details if they would be prepared to meet us for a qualitative interview.

Unfortunately when it came to it, only one of the people who had given contact details actually managed to meet with us. This meant that we were obliged to reach out again to our clients past and present for volunteers to come forward for an interview. Ultimately we completed 7 interviews at a local coffee shop. We took informed consent for participation, use of data and recording so we had an accurate record of what was said.

Our Findings

'Do you put it on the gas? Do you put it on the electric? Or do you buy food?'

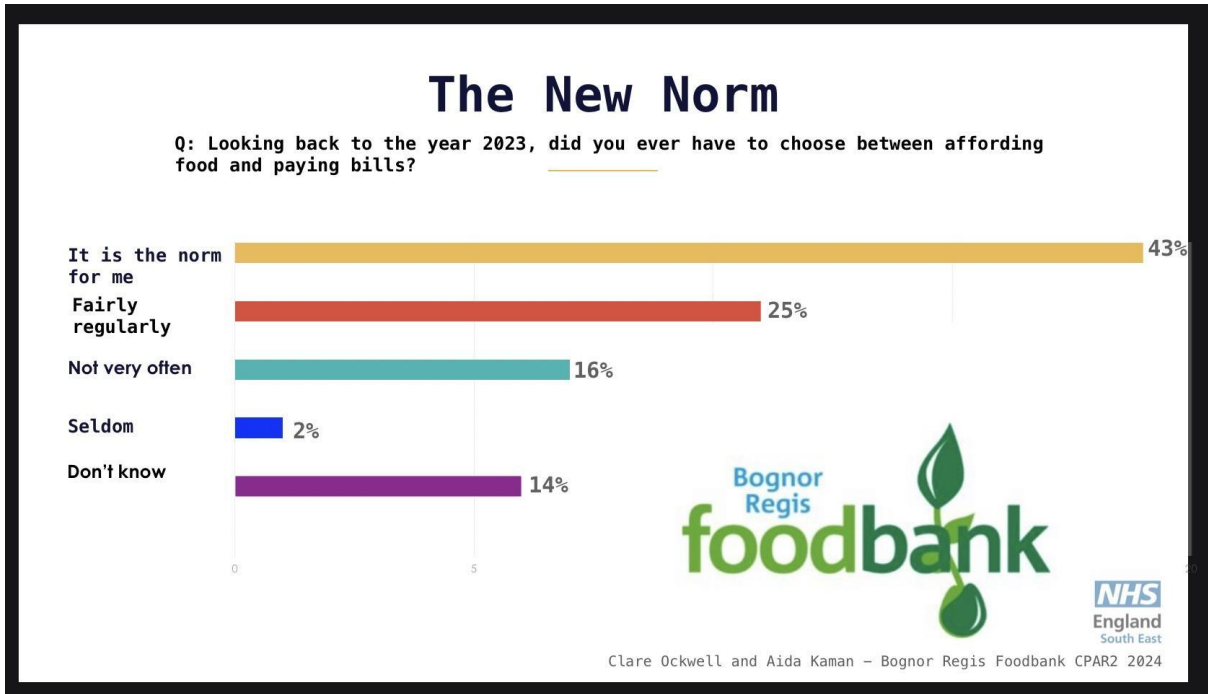


Table 1: Frequency of having to make the choice between buying food and paying for power

‘Lack of money paid doesn’t pay the bills and food shopping with the cost of living making everything more expensive than it should be’

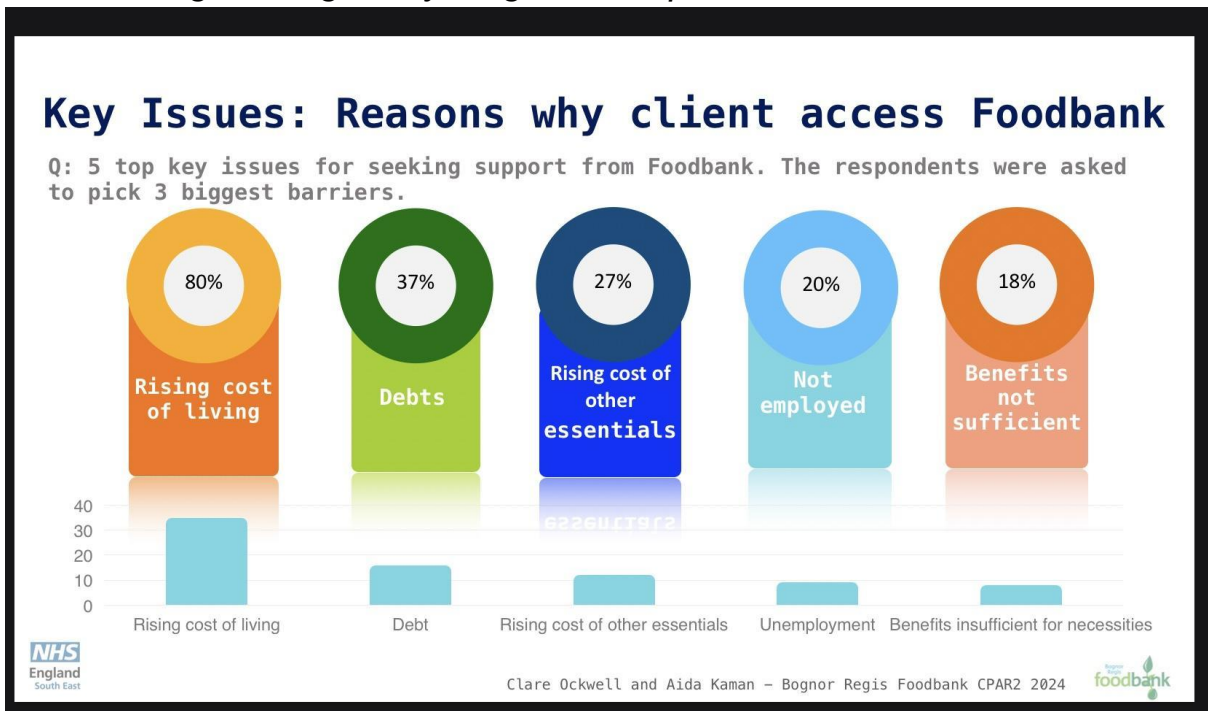


Table 2: Reasons for needing to use Foodbank

‘I was in temporary accommodation, my marriage had just broken down.’

'I was sleeping in my car'

'If you have rent arrears they (housing association) won't do anything'

'I lost everyone he was controlling me so much'

'The cost of living has made food shopping even harder than it already was, even cheaper buying non-branded food'

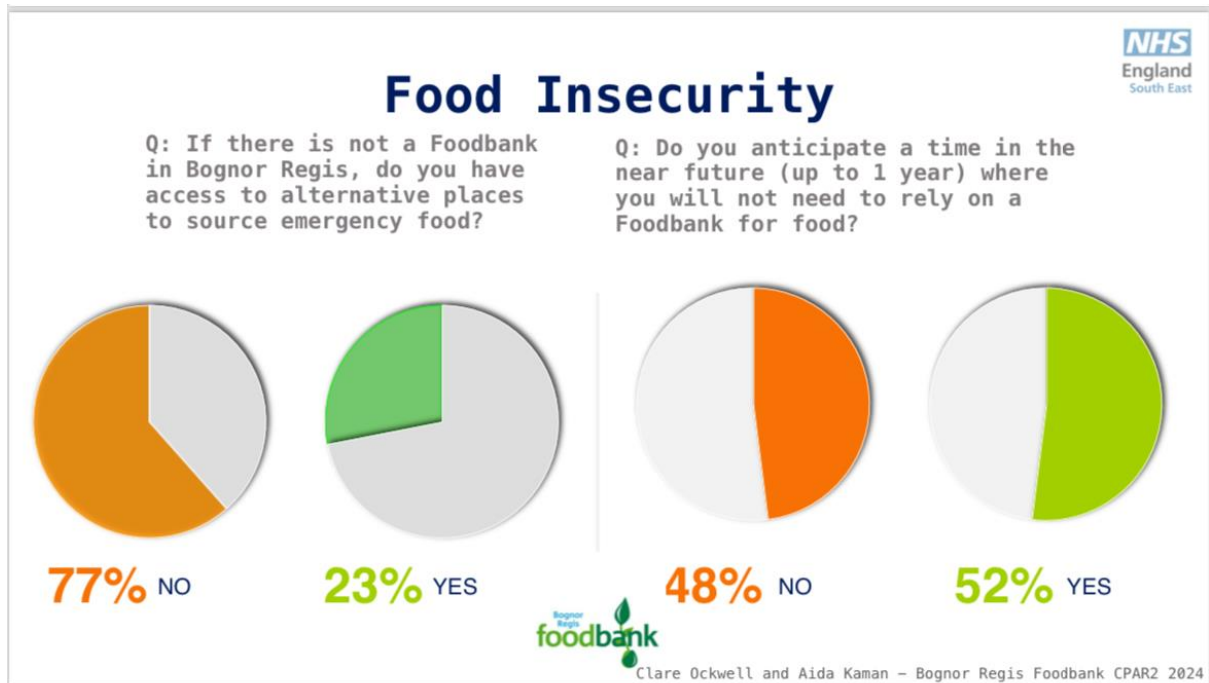


Table 3: Food insecurity

Only just over half of those served could envisage a time when they would not need a foodbank.

'The Food bank is a lifeline truly'

'Still got the same amount of money coming in but with the cost of living it feels a lot less'

'We are worse off because of the cost of living.....you learn to try and manage'

'DLA is deducted from universal credit'

'I'm actually worse off working than on universal credit because of childcare costs'

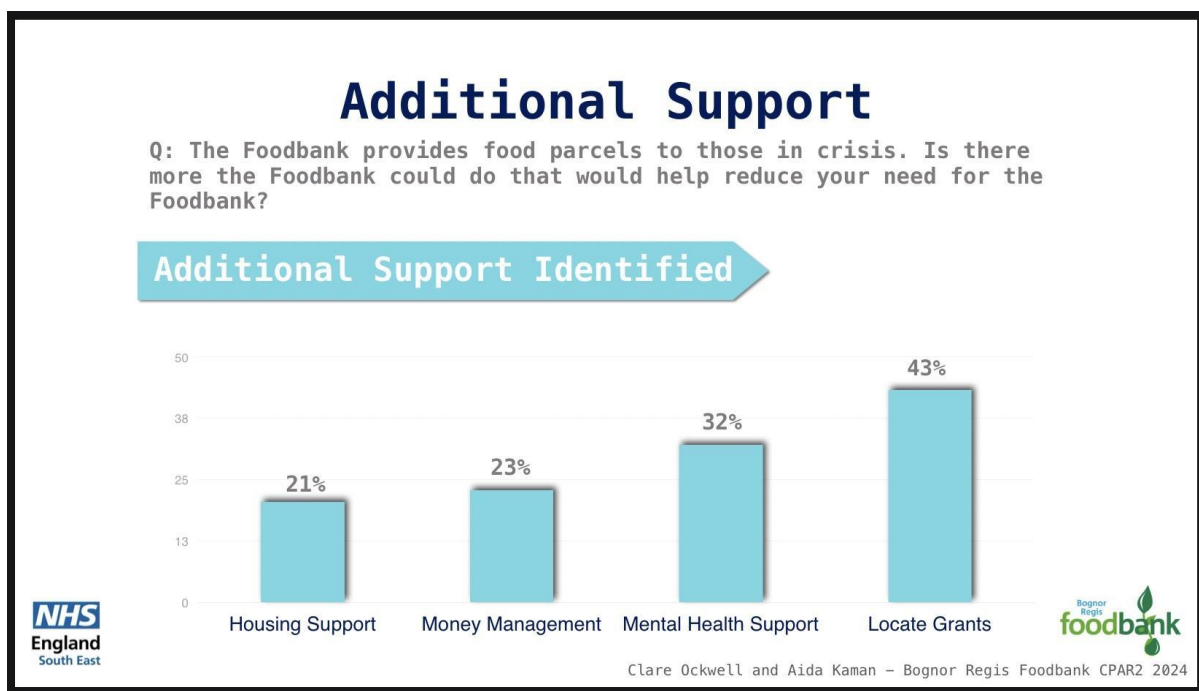


Table 4: Additional advice clients would like to be offered

'I have mental health issues with PTSD, anxiety and depression'

'I look at a form and all the words start eating me'

'I was in a really bad place...with finances and mental health'

Barriers to Foodbank Access



Table 5: Barriers to accessing extra help

'We're living in a time of massive division'

Reflections

We have been on a huge journey which has taken us in directions we never expected. The title 'Mind the Gap' came to us before we knew what we would find, but with the generous help of our clients we have found many gaps. Their generosity with their experience and views has been humbling.

Looking back, were we to do the research again we would have included a question about the stigma of using as this was pointed out by everyone we spoke to

'People judge you'

Hearing this from our interviewees was particularly telling. Although they had all encountered multiple major life traumas that had brought them to use the Foodbank all were motivated to overcome these.

We are committed to working further with them to create more practical solutions.

Recommendations

1. *'Benefits to be escalated to a payment that will not leave me in this position'*
2. *'You get passed around so many people'* - Simplify access pathways by developing a one stop community resource with all kinds of service available in one place
3. *'There needs to be more done to access mental health support'*
4. Need for kindness and sensitivity - *'The council don't want to know'*
'The Job Centre sanctioned me when I had just come out of hospital'
'Talking to the helpline I might as well have banged my head against a brick wall'



What next?

Recommendations highlighted from conversations with clients

