



**ERS**  
Research &  
Consultancy



# Pathways from Poverty Project

Final Evaluation Report – June 2021



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## *Introduction*

- 1.1 In April 2019 ERS was commissioned by Feeding Britain to support the multi-year evaluation of the Pathways from Poverty Project (referred to in this report as ‘Pathways’). The project was led by Feeding Britain, a charity established in 2015 by a group of cross-party MPs and peers concerned about rising levels of hunger in the UK.
- 1.2 The project aimed to ensure that people in food crisis have immediate access to quality advice and case advocacy to tackle the issues that made them vulnerable to hunger. The project was designed to deliver in four Feeding Britain pilot areas (Derbyshire, Bristol, Leicester and Bradford) covering 17 Community food projects, all part of the wider Feeding Britain local networks.
- 1.3 The project was set up to deliver a number of specific activities, including:
- Provision of professional paid Advice Workers in each location to provide specialist advice and support, working with partners to ensure successful outcomes. Their role also includes training, supporting and monitoring volunteers;
  - Recruitment, management and support of Community Advice Volunteers to act as a gateway service;
  - Specialist support from Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in the form of responsive guidance, tools and resources to the Advice Workers in each location. They were also to support the volunteer training; and
  - Establish a national network across the four areas for Advice Workers and volunteers to share learning, access peer support, and identify common issues and emerging trends.

## *About this report*

- 1.4 This report provides an assessment of delivery following the completion of the project in May 2021. Our methodology included:
- Desk based review of strategy and policy to understand the main delivery partners’ operations and the systems in place to deliver the project and record impact;
  - Delivering interactive training sessions on evaluation;
  - Developing the evaluation framework to ensure that appropriate data is collected;
  - Analysis of headline project data;
  - Interviews with key delivery staff, management and beneficiaries.

## 2. PROJECT DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT

### *Introduction*

- 2.1 This section of the report outlines the original rationale for the intervention, the intended outcomes and the role of key partners and management.

### *Project Rationale*

- 2.2 The rationale for the investment in additional, local advice work within community food settings, such as food banks, was clear. Locating Advice Workers in such settings at a set time each week removes barriers to access. Having a familiar face at a regular weekly time slot has encouraged people in very vulnerable and desperate situations to seek support. People know where they are, and how they can help. The advantage of the neighbourhood-based Pathways approach is that it delivers advice on the doorstep of those people who really need it, but are less likely to travel into city centre locations to seek help.
- 2.3 Many of the reasons why people require food aid are to do with the broader issues of poverty: benefits delays, debt, insecure housing or jobs, difficulty in accessing online services and more. Despite this, most people seeking help at emergency food projects do not have access to the advice they need to overcome these issues, and face barriers which make it difficult for them to access advice elsewhere.
- 2.4 Pathways was established to achieve four key outcomes:

- Outcome 1: People seeking emergency food support at 17 community food projects will have been able to address the underlying issue that made them vulnerable to hunger or food insecurity;
- Outcome 2: People receiving advice will have benefited from increased income, benefiting the household and the wider local economy;
- Outcome 3: Community volunteers will have developed skills and experience that can support them to enter mainstream employment if appropriate; and
- Outcome 4: Participating community food projects have seen reduced demand for repeat visits from people seeking emergency food support within 2 years.

- 2.5 Across the four outcomes were ten separate indicators with specific targets to achieve, mostly by the end of the project. The progress made is covered in Section 7.

### *Project Design*

- 2.6 Different community food venues were attended by people with different issues. For example, community cafes provided a place to eat food and meet others, so it was less about responding to emergencies, instead tackling social isolation. Regardless of the nature of the problem, the prevailing view is that beneficiaries benefit from sharing and unburdening their problems. Simply having someone to listen helps.

### *Management and Governance*

- 2.7 The project benefitted from having a Project Coordinator in post from the outset. This continuity has been important in managing a project across four locations with diverse ideas, approaches and internal infrastructure. The Project Coordinator worked well under the supervision of the Feeding Britain National Director and Finance Officer.
- 2.8 The Project Coordinator was responsible for managing the overall project on a day to day basis. This involved supporting each location with project planning, monitoring, data collection and the coordination of the evaluation. The Project Coordinator liaised with each of the pilot projects on a monthly basis to gather data and compile this into a whole project assessment.
- 2.9 The data compiled by the Project Coordinator was reviewed at Project Team meetings to identify areas where the project is behind schedule and to find solutions. Learning from evaluation exercises (carried out with volunteers and beneficiaries) also discussed in real time by the Project Team.
- 2.10 Each of the four pilot areas had an identified lead, with funding available through the project budget to resource part-time management at the local level. Each local coordinator ensured the project complemented local food poverty initiatives and advice services and built links with relevant local authority leads.
- 2.11 A national Project Team was established with senior representatives from Feeding Britain, CPAG and each of the Feeding Britain pilots. The intention at the outset was that the group would meet on a quarterly basis by conference call to review progress and provide support to address any challenges. Turnover of senior staff at Feeding Britain did affect the consistency of strategic oversight during 2019, but this did not impact negatively upon day to day delivery.



### *Responding of Covid-19*

- 2.12 Effective management from Feeding Britain has ensured that the intervention continued to flex to emerging needs, especially once the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdown commenced.
- 2.13 The Covid-19 pandemic meant that the service had to be delivered differently. There was a significant spike in activity in early April 2020 as people impacted by changes in employment circumstances approached Advice Workers for guidance. Many people had not previously engaged with the benefit system and were anxious about their immediate income. Alongside the increased demand arising

from unstable employment, we have heard about increased referrals from victims of domestic violence and people in insecure housing, despite the restrictions on evictions.

- 2.14 Whilst the front-facing approach ceased during lockdown, referrals were driven from alternative sources. This included leaflets in food parcels and links established with different community food venues, schools, health services and police officers who refer people in need.
- 2.15 Whilst many people are confident enough to engage over the telephone, some people would only engage on a face to face basis. Many people simply don't possess the digital skills, kit or internet access to engage online. Advice Workers were flexible in their response to this by engaging people face to face as they collected food parcels.

### *CPAG Support*

- 2.16 As part of the project Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) was commissioned to provide support to frontline delivery across the four pilot areas. CPAG had a role in providing guidance, tools and resources to the advice workers in each location, ensuring they have the best and most up to date information and materials. They also supported the volunteer training and provided a backstopping service to Advice Workers through free access to an email and phone advice line. CPAG could also support Advice Workers to pursue cases to the Upper Tribunal and taking on the most complex cases, including possible legal test cases being taken up by CPAG solicitors.
- 2.17 A dedicated telephone advice line was available during the initial stage of delivery. It was largely accessed by the Bristol Community Engagement Workers, and the cessation of this staffing model from September 2019 meant that the advice line was used less frequently. There was also a dedicated email advice service, that was more often used.
- 2.18 CPAG held two training events. The first was a two-day training course in April 2019 titled 'Universal Credit and Challenging Decisions'. In advance of this session, CPAG undertook research to identify the knowledge of each Advice Worker to ensure that the training was pitched at an appropriate level. Some had little or no experience of welfare rights advice, whilst others were more experienced and were keen to receive training on the new changes and updates to the social security system. The second was a training and networking one-day event in November 2019. This day included two half-day training courses held concurrently titled a 'Whistle Stop Tour of Benefits' and 'UC Update Training'. This second session was well attended and valuable to those engaged.
- 2.19 CPAG provided spaces free of charge to Advice Workers at its conferences and seminars. Three attended the conference in London and one attended the Conference in Manchester. Two attended the seminar in Manchester in June 2019.
- 2.20 The intention at the outset was that Advice Workers (and volunteers) would be part of a national network across the four pilot areas to share learning, access peer support, and identify common issues and emerging trends. These would be taken up locally through Feeding Britain coalitions, which bring together local stakeholders to address hunger and poverty holistically, including local authorities, charities, community organisations and businesses. There was limited networking with other pilot areas beyond the project-wide events that have assembled staff in the same place to discuss progress.

## 3. ADVICE WORKERS

### *Introduction*

- 3.1 In three of the four pilot areas (Bradford, Derbyshire and Leicester), frontline delivery was underpinned by experienced Advice Workers, employed by local delivery partners, providing advice to beneficiaries at participating emergency food projects. Bristol adopted a different approach to delivery in response to the wider landscape of advice provision across the city. This is covered in Section 5.
- 3.2 The approach across Bradford, Derbyshire and Leicester has broadly aligned with the model agreed at the outset. The project piloted delivery from a range of different places. For example, in Bradford the project was delivered from four hubs, including a foodbank, a Salvation Army day centre and a 'pay as you feel' café. In a pilot project of this nature it was entirely appropriate that delivery in different types of setting is undertaken to identify lessons to inform future roll out. Having a familiar face at a regular weekly time slot encouraged reluctant engagers to seek support. The support was particularly welcome outside city centre locations, where many beneficiaries simply wouldn't travel beyond their own neighbourhood.
- 3.3 Pathways was proactive in responding to emerging delivery issues. For example, in Leicester the Advice Worker was resourced to increase their hours to full-time from 30 hours per week, enabling more client-facing activity to be undertaken since January 2020. Additional funding for administration support was allocated and this had a positive impact in relation to data collection from volunteers and beneficiaries.

### *The Advice Worker Role*

- 3.4 Advice Workers had a key role in supporting and empowering beneficiaries, and wider family members, who are often facing difficult circumstances. The role required a detailed understanding of the welfare system and underpinning processes, alongside commitment and determination to make a real difference for those needing help. The variation in issues people have presented with demonstrates the need for experienced Advice Workers. This covered Universal Credit and benefit issues; employment insecurity and wage delays; relationship and family issues, including domestic violence; debt and other consumer issues; housing and homelessness; health and wellbeing; and applying for services covering blue badge parking and school admissions. Simply put, the support increased people's freedom and independence from root causes of poverty.
- 3.5 In some locations the project approach provided a complete case management approach, working intensively with those in need for a long enough period of time to reach a resolution. The capacity to provide longer term case work and advocacy by the same worker differentiated Pathways from many other advice services.
- 3.6 In another pilot area, the Advice Worker undertook an initial diagnostic before signposting people to relevant support elsewhere. Pathways was therefore flexible to the circumstances in each local area.

- 3.7 The Advice Workers received training and capacity building from CPAG, benefitting from their vast experience in technical advice services around Universal Credit, etc. especially for complex cases. However, our research has identified that the success of the approach depends on more than just technical expertise. Advice Workers established a good reputation on their local patch and this assisted in attracting people requiring support. Advice Workers recognised the value of the community-based approach i.e. to build up relationships to encourage people to identify their issues.
- 3.8 Advice Workers were also responsible for providing training, supervising and capacity building for community volunteers, and monitoring that the quality of the advice provided was appropriate. It is worth highlighting that delivering everything in the demanding job description was always going to be challenging.

### *Beneficiary Characteristics*

- 3.9 The circumstances of beneficiaries attending individual food hubs varied considerably. For example, some venues had a significantly greater proportion of people with substance misuse issues, who often required more intensive support. Regardless of the nature of the problem, the prevailing view is that beneficiaries benefitted from sharing and unburdening their problems. Simply having someone to listen helped.
- 3.10 There have been some notable successes in terms of beneficiaries being supported to claim their full benefit entitlement. However, in Leicester the majority of beneficiaries were claiming their appropriate means-tested benefit amounts, but it is deductions and sanctions, largely in line with established procedures, that are causing hardship. Many participants were not accessing disability benefits that they eligible to receive.
- 3.11 In Leicester, the majority of people supported were severely disadvantaged. The 'working poor' who have some earned income are significantly outnumbered at foodbanks by those totally reliant upon welfare benefits. The majority of beneficiaries present with either (or both) mental and physical ill health.
- 3.12 There were no short cuts to establishing beneficiary needs at the first interaction, and an extended period of time was often required to fully understand the issues, and to work through a solution. For some beneficiaries the support provided by the Advice Worker was more targeted but had a significant benefit. Examples include form filling to apply for a disabled blue badge or for school places for their children.
- 3.13 There remains a continued need for the project given the scale of need. In Bradford it was reported that there has been an influx of vulnerable people moving into the city, largely due to the availability of low rent housing. We heard how many arrive without any support network, and the role of the Advice Worker has been critical in establishing a level of organisation in peoples' lives. In Bradford many of the people need support with claiming the appropriate Universal Credit entitlements. There is an ongoing need to support people with digital skills. The Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced this view.

## 4. COMMUNITY ADVICE VOLUNTEERS

### *The Volunteer Role*

- 4.1 The intention at the outset was that volunteers would have direct experience of food poverty and using emergency food services. The volunteers were to be located within community food projects, where they would be able to build informal relationships with beneficiaries and provide support in a non-threatening environment. The volunteers were to help people access information and resolve problems themselves, including supporting digital access. They were also to offer referral and signposting to professionals where needed.
- 4.2 Community volunteers were to work alongside the Advice Worker to provide 'triage' support to users of the community food projects. This would include signposting people to different types of support available, encouraging people to take up the advice services on offer and helping them make appointments, supporting people to get online and fill in forms, as well as social interaction and encouragement. We have heard some good examples of where this is working well.
- 4.3 The plan at the outset was for volunteers to be trained and supervised by Advice Workers, with materials and support provided by CPAG. The volunteers were to be provided with clear guidance on their remit and clear signposting and referral pathways to ensure beneficiaries access accurate and high-quality advice at all times. The agreed aspiration was too ambitious. The volunteers were simply not trained to the level where the Advice Workers would feel confident in the quality of the advice. While the Advice Workers enabled Pathways to support the number of people that had been forecast at the outset, a much diminished role for volunteers had a significant impact on the project capability to achieve the main targets agreed with the National Lottery Community Fund. The limitations of face to face delivery during the pandemic meant that volunteer support was curtailed further.
- 4.4 There was a variation across each of the pilot areas as to who had responsibility for recruiting and managing volunteers. For example, one area assumed this to be their full responsibility whilst others have pragmatically assumed that existing volunteers at each point of delivery were to have a role in delivering the function, largely overseen by the funded Advice Worker.



- 4.5 In the initial year of delivery, the actual number of volunteers recruited has been limited in the majority of locations. The one exception to this is Derbyshire. This is largely due to the choice of location i.e. venues that have traditionally been well served by pre-existing volunteer programmes. Whilst this has certainly contributed to assisting delivery of Pathways, the original aim of volunteers being people who have utilised foodbanks previously, required advice and support, etc. has not been delivered.

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- 4.6 In Leicester, limited private space for meetings had an adverse effect on the number of volunteers that were recruited i.e. as there was no place to work confidentially with beneficiaries. Another issue was that volunteers required significant training and support in order to deliver the role as expected. On reflection, the common view is that for volunteers to fulfil the role as intended, an additional full-time supervisor would have been required to ensure that the information and advice provided was of the required quality.
- 4.7 The volunteer role in Leicester evolved from one of providing direct support to shadowing. The Advice Worker approached local higher education institutions and established a link with De Montfort University. Ten week 'shadow' volunteer placements were offered to degree students on their Health and Wellbeing in the Community course as part of a specific module. Two third-year students commenced these placements in foodbanks in January 2020. As referenced earlier, the Covid-19 pandemic impacted upon the longer-term delivery of such roles.

## 5. THE BRISTOL APPROACH

### *Introduction*

- 5.1 The approach in Bristol was different from the outset. At the time of project conception, it was evident that Bristol was relatively well served by advice worker-type roles, so the emphasis for Pathways had a slightly different focus than other areas. There was less direct advice to be provided, instead having a focus upon engaging those most in need to help ensure that people were acting upon advice provided.
- 5.2 This approach aligned closely with many of the indicators for the project i.e. an emphasis on making a real, lasting change in peoples' lives. Four months into the project it was evident that this approach needed to be adjusted so as to meet better the needs of families accessing each community food setting. As the project was newly established, it didn't have a track record, necessary to gain the trust of potential referral partners. To some extent this should have been expected, and greater perseverance may well have generated the credibility required. A short-term two-year project was not ideal for this.

### *The Children's Kitchen*

- 5.3 An alternative use for the project funding was proposed and agreed with the National Lottery Community Fund. The Children's Kitchen project (TCK) commenced on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2020 after a three-month period of non-activity. By working closely with the Early Years teams at Bristol City Council, TCK has been able to set up a delivery model that has recognised the areas and individuals that will benefit the most from the project. Alongside the Project Director, five Project Development workers build relationships with new and existing partners in order to deliver the five core project aims:

- Encouraging young children to develop a taste for fresh produce through exploring food in their own way, following their interests and senses rather than recipes.
- Developing Food Hubs within Children's Centres who will then influence other early years settings across Bristol.
- Supporting onsite growing and links to surplus produce for children to eat and explore, and for families to take home.
- Enabling Early Years Practitioners to develop skills specific to working with young children and food, working alongside the Food for Life Early Years Awards.
- Supporting existing initiatives such as FOOD Clubs to provide cookery activities for families. Not just increasing skills but also providing free, or nearly free, produce for families on low incomes.

- 5.4 The project engages with large state-funded early years nurseries, and works with FOOD Clubs to offer demonstrations, workshops, and low-price food to families in Bristol. The nurseries are run by Bristol City Council, with more focus on a curriculum, as opposed to a care-centred approach adopted within private nurseries. TCK and partners are able to introduce the topic of food into these settings in a fun way, with the hope of instilling cultural change in practitioners and children.

### *Response to COVID-19*

- 5.5 Throughout the pandemic, TCK has been able to continue its activity and increase its presence in Bristol. During lockdowns, the project was unable to continue face-to-face work with children in nurseries. FOOD Clubs were able to expand and continue cooking outside, following the appropriate safety regulations with fewer families present at one time and tables far apart. Online content has also been regularly updated, home learning sheets have been given to children, and boxes of food have still been sent into nurseries even without the project team being able to be present.

### *Achievements*

- 5.6 Overall, the project has reached thousands of people through its work. This includes:
- The nursery strand, reaching approximately 900 children across ten of the 12 council-run nurseries in Bristol. There are plans, once Covid-19 restrictions lift, to reach at least another 250 children through already engaged and the remaining two nurseries.
  - Through its partnership with FOOD Clubs, the project has reached at least 810 people in the summer of 2020, across 45 family food sessions. Weekly, 120 families are provided with recipes and attend cookery demonstrations, reaching another 360 people each week. 2,000 family recipe booklets were distributed over the school holidays in 2020/21 via the FOOD clubs. 750 FOOD Club families (approximately 2250 people) were supplied with resources including seeds, pots, ingredients, and easy-to-follow recipes.
  - 140 early years practitioners have received hands-on training, with more to be reached via an online course.
  - In partnership with Bristol Sport Foundation's 'Active, Healthy, Happy' campaign, TCK has provided recipes and cooking videos within a new app intended for children, achieving 6,000 downloads. So far, across the campaign, there has been 10,000 online views of TCK cookery videos, and a further 3,000 recipe booklets distributed to families in areas of high food insecurity.
- 5.7 TCK carefully selects partner organisations to collaborate with to expand and diversify its existing services, plug gaps, and tailor activities to fit with existing services. For example, the project has partnered with Travelling Kitchen to extend their cookery workshops for school age children to now cater for early years children. TCK run and co-lead events with partners, for example, incorporating healthy food with physical activity by conducting cookery workshops for families attending a series of events with Bristol Sport Foundation. The project also addresses shortcomings in existing services. For example, one consultee felt frustrated that food banks are only able to supply emergency food parcels for families but often they do not know what to do with the ingredients provided. TCK plugs this gap and teaches families how to cook.
- 5.8 The project has been successful in utilising the specialist skills, expertise, and local knowledge of partners to create a model that works well for the communities it serves. Specialist partners are able to work with TCK to tailor activities based on their understanding of the beneficiary group, considering what already works, and focusing on what is likely to get a positive response and high engagement.

- 5.9 Partners benefit from often being able to build close relationships with families and can therefore refer families to TCK if they think they will benefit.

*“It’s always an open conversation and making sure we’re not repeating stuff, we make sure we know what each of our roles are. Everyone’s experts in different things.” – The Children’s Kitchen consultee*

*“The collaborative approach is great. We’re really utilising the experts across the city and what they’re particularly good at, they’re leading that. This makes the project so much stronger when all these organisations’ strengths are realised and put to use... We can get the most out of the communities we work in and are most familiar with.” – The Children’s Kitchen consultee*

- 5.10 Despite the very short time the project has been running, there is already clear evidence of wider impact. Many consultees described how the project does vital work in tackling the public health crisis of child obesity and poor nutrition amongst children, reporting that they feel the project will improve longer term health of beneficiaries by encouraging a healthier diet. Numerous consultees said they felt that the project will reduce demand for emergency food and reduce food insecurity for the families it supports. Some consultees also felt that the project will alleviate poor mental health amongst beneficiaries, by increasing happiness and wellbeing through its activities.

- 5.11 To create longer term impacts, consultees felt that beneficiaries must have access to sessions on a regular and continual basis. As children move into school, they are likely to carry learning from the project with them, retaining a positive connection with healthier food, and associate food with fun. It is therefore vital, if impacts are to continue, that food related education also continues in subsequent years i.e., in primary school education.

- 5.12 Early years practitioners have learnt how to lead food and cookery sessions independently, and most consultees reflected that this is key to the project legacy, and sessions could continue without the support of TCK practitioners. It is therefore crucial that nurseries have sufficient budgets and resource to enable the continuation of food education in early years settings.

- 5.13 Consultees discussed ways in which the project could be expanded, these included expanding and replicating the model to include privately run nurseries, other early years services, other cities (Nottingham taking an interest via Feeding Britain), and other vulnerable groups such as those experiencing homelessness.

*“The lasting impact is that the city won’t let it finish, we have proved that this approach works well and is already having an impact on families as well as children.” – The Children’s Kitchen consultee*

## 6. CASE STUDIES

### *Introduction*

- 6.1 This section of the report outlines the progress made via summary case study examples, based on interviews with beneficiaries.

### *Case Study 1*

- 6.2 The Advice Worker provided support to a beneficiary with their Universal Credit application. She'd just emerged from an abusive relationship and was living in temporary accommodation with her young son. The beneficiary now receives an additional £341 per month. Following the beneficiary moving into her own home, additional support was provided with setting up Council Tax, payments and a successful application to a charity to access white goods. The support has also benefitted the client's mental health.

*"I know I can go to him for help. Life is more organised. Also, there's no judgement there. Explaining mental health stuff can be really hard sometimes and he makes me feel really comfortable. Having someone that genuinely will give you support and cares."*

### *Case Study 2*

- 6.3 Another beneficiary was on furlough and was struggling to access food for the family. She had received an overpayment of child tax credit and had no idea how this would be paid back. Following support, she now has an improved understanding of how resolve these problems.

*"I really needed help as I was on Universal Credit and it was a benefit I had never been on before and didn't really understand. She helped break it down for me and understand it. I'm definitely feeling more optimistic."*

### *Case Study 3*

- 6.4 The Advice Worker supported a beneficiary with a learning disability and long-standing mental health issues to successfully access a discretionary housing payment to avoid rent arrears due to the 'bedroom tax'. When his son moved out of his property the client's housing benefit payments were reduced, due to the now spare bedroom, leaving a shortfall in rent payments for the beneficiary to top-up; however, the beneficiary was unable to afford the rent top-up due to already experiencing significant financial hardship having been refused PIP on transfer from Disability Living Allowance (a decision that the advice worker is now also supporting the beneficiary to challenge).
- 6.5 The Advice Worker supported the beneficiary to apply via the local authority online portal and upload essential documents as evidence, as well as understand and act on further communication received by the local authority in relation to the claim. The beneficiary was awarded a discretionary housing payment that covers the shortfall in housing benefit for a six-month period, during which time the advice worker is supporting the beneficiary with the housing exchange process that he is keen to pursue to enable him to move to a one-bedroom property and avoid further hardship in the future due to the financial impact of having a spare bedroom.

#### Case Study 4

- 6.6 One beneficiary received help in several ways including debt relief management, foodbank support and materials for his daughter's bedroom. As a result of the support, the beneficiary is in the process of a debt relief order and highlighted real improvements in terms of her mental health.

*“When I met up (with the Advice Worker) we discussed my situation and made a plan. I was really depressed and stressed getting letters left right and centre. I'd take a picture of the letters, email them to her and she understands that they mean and what to do. I wouldn't have been able to do it without her support.”*

#### Case Study 5

- 6.7 One beneficiary supported first heard of advice and support from a letter from his son's school providing information on the foodbank and support offered. When the beneficiary visited the foodbank, he sought advice for several issues such as paying for his water bill and has since received help from an Advice Worker. As a result of the support provided, the beneficiary has been able to solve the issue related to his water bill and successfully applied for blue disability badge. In February 2021 he had a fall and was admitted to hospital. The Advice Worker stepped in and provided help and support, sometime making calls on his behalf.

*“If he wasn't there, I wouldn't get all the help I needed. He's contacting lots of people on my behalf. For example, I originally applied for a blue badge but my GP said I wasn't entitled. I'm so grateful that (the Advice Worker) helped with the application and within two weeks I got my blue badge. I am so grateful.”*

#### Case Study 6

- 6.8 The Advice Worker supported a beneficiary with complex and long-standing mental health issues to make a new application for Personal Independence Payment (PIP). The beneficiary had previously made three unsuccessful applications for PIP, the most recent being two years previously, and was in severe financial hardship. The beneficiary had been unable to access support with her previous PIP claims due to issues of mistrust, low confidence and extreme anxiety that prevented her from travelling to city centre locations where this support was provided. By building trust with the beneficiary through interaction during attendance at several foodbank sessions over a couple of months, the Advice Worker was able to successfully engage with the beneficiary and discuss how they could support her to make a new PIP application.
- 6.9 The beneficiary was supported with making the initial phone call, completing the form, and gathering relevant medical evidence to support the claim. The beneficiary was extremely anxious about attending the usual face-to-face assessment following previous negative experiences and support was to also be provided for this. However, due to the strength of the application and the supporting medical evidence, no face-to-face assessment was required and PIP was awarded. This decision also then resulted in the beneficiary being eligible for a disability premium on their Employment and Support Allowance. The total increase of annual income achieved was in excess of £9,000 and the beneficiary no longer needs to access emergency food provision.

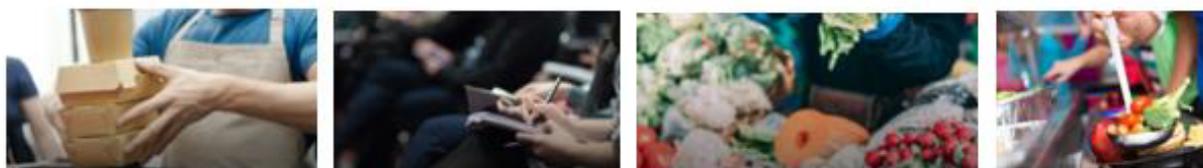
### Case Study 7

- 6.10 One beneficiary reached for support following receipt of a letter confirming he was ineligible for carers benefits. The Advice Worker provided support with reapplying and then writing a letter of reconsideration following a second refusal. The persistence paid off as the beneficiary received £4,000 in backdated benefits, as well as an increase in his pension from £26 to £64 per week and a backdated pension payment.

*“The Advice Worker knew the ‘ins and outs’ of the system and the benefit secured will make a significant impact to my quality of life.”*

### Case Study 8

- 6.11 An Advice Worker supported a beneficiary who had an unfortunate accident and was unable to work. He had previously been informed by Jobcentre Plus that he was not entitled to Universal Credit as he was in receipt of Statutory Sick Pay. However, a benefit check identified that he was entitled to Universal Credit and could also claim a single person discount on his Council Tax. His Universal Credit allowed him to get free prescriptions.



### Case Study 9

- 6.12 An Advice Worker supported a beneficiary who had suffered a heart attack in October 2018 and was now unable to work. He had previously unsuccessfully applied for Universal Credit on multiple occasions before this was awarded in May 2019. With the support from the Advice Worker he was successful in appealing the earlier decision and was awarded over £7,000 of backdated benefits.

### Case Study 10

- 6.13 An Advice Worker supported a beneficiary who had not received Universal Credit. On review, it was evident that the claim had not been submitted and some of the details were incorrect. The claim was completed after a benefit check and it emerged that the beneficiary was entitled to Carers Allowance. A backdated payment of almost £800 was received alongside the additional weekly payment of £66.15.

### Case Study 11

- 6.14 The Advice Worker supported a recent widower who had received a notice to seek possession due to rent arrears. It transpired that the beneficiary had informed Universal Credit he was moving to Wales to care for his elderly mother but sadly she passed away and he did not update this on his Universal Credit Journal so no housing related benefits were made. The Advice Worker assisted in establishing the Alternative Pay Arrangement enabling the rent arrears to be paid and the notice was suspended.

## 7. PROGRESS TOWARDS ACHIEVING PROJECT OUTCOMES

### *Introduction*

- 7.1 This section of the report outlines the progress made so far towards the agreed outcomes alongside wider successes achieved. It also provides a summary of the emerging issues that have influenced progress.

### *Project Outcomes*

- 7.2 Pathways was established to achieve four key outcomes:

- Outcome 1: People seeking emergency food support at 17 community food projects will have been able to address the underlying issue that made them vulnerable to hunger or food insecurity;
- Outcome 2: People receiving advice will have benefited from increased income, benefiting the household and the wider local economy;
- Outcome 3: Community volunteers will have developed skills and experience that can support them to enter mainstream employment if appropriate; and
- Outcome 4: Participating community food projects have seen reduced demand for repeat visits from people seeking emergency food support within 2 years.

- 7.3 Across the four outcomes were ten separate indicators with specific targets to achieve.

### *Appropriateness of Outcomes/Indicators and Challenging Targets*

- 7.4 It is important to recognise that projects such as Pathways that 'plug into' wider service have a natural lead in time before they are operating on full capacity. Feeding Britain was correct in expecting that the majority of people supported would occur in Year 2.
- 7.5 Our research has identified that the 'working poor' who have some earned income were significantly outnumbered at foodbanks by those totally reliant upon welfare benefits. However, we know that since April 2020 the economic impact of Covid-19 has meant a new cohort of people – the recently unemployed – were more susceptible to food insecurity and are therefore utilising foodbanks. Demand increased from April 2020 and is expected to continue increasing into 2022.

### *Challenges of Data Collection*

- 7.6 At the outset we prepared an evaluation framework that identified the data to be collected to inform the impact of Pathways. We shared this at an early stage with each of four pilot areas leads. Whilst much of the data has been collected, there remain some gaps. Ideally a common data management system across the project would have been implemented, enabling access to data by the Project Coordinator. We have also found that the data required to evidence the impact of this project doesn't dovetail with the corporate systems used by a number of pilot leads. Closer joint working at the project design stage is required on future projects, to identify opportunities to coordinate project and organisational approaches.

7.7 One issue is the length of time it takes for a positive outcome to be achieved for particular beneficiaries. For example, the extended length of time taken for decision-making by the DWP e.g. 4-6 months on new disability benefit claim; up to a year on a challenged benefit award decision, limits the outcomes (issue resolution and increased income).

### *Progress Towards Achieving Outcomes*

7.8 Table 7.1 demonstrates the progress made towards each of the indicators across Outcome 1.

<b>Table 7.1: Outcome 1 - People seeking emergency food support at 17 community food projects are able to address the underlying issue that made them vulnerable to hunger or food insecurity</b>		
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Actual 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021</b>
Beneficiaries at emergency food projects will have met with a professional advice worker to seek help on a specific case	680 people per year	2,228
Beneficiaries at emergency food projects will have met with a trained community volunteer to help them access advice and other services	2,040 people per year	283
70% of beneficiaries receiving support from advice workers and volunteers will report that the issue they sought help with has been resolved or is on its way to being resolved	4,284 people by end of Year 2	2,139 (based on 96% known cases)

7.9 The total number of people at emergency food projects who have met with a professional advice worker to seek help on a specific case is 2,228. In total, 283 people have met with a volunteer. Clearly, this is lower than expected due to the limitations of engagement during the pandemic and the overly optimistic expectations on volunteers set at the project design stage.

7.10 The number of beneficiaries receiving support from Advice Workers and volunteers will report that the issue they sought help with has been resolved or is on its way to being resolved is 2,129 based on a 96% rate for known cases. Given the challenges faced, this is impressive delivery.

7.11 The range of support provided is diverse, reflecting the demand for the service and the capability of Advice Workers to respond. Data shows that the type of support covered: Benefits: 24.1%; Debt: 12.1%; Health: 9.2%; Emergency support: 8.2%; Relationships: 8.0%; Employment related issues: 5.4%; Housing and homelessness: 5.3%; Utility bills: 3.1%; Other issues 24.6%.

7.12 Table 7.2 overleaf demonstrates the progress made in relation to Outcome 2.

**Table 7.2 Outcome 2 - 70% of people receiving advice have benefited from increased income, benefiting the household and the wider local economy**

Indicator	Target	Actual 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2021
70% of beneficiaries receiving advice services support will report increased income	4,284 people by end of year 2	£636,594 for 171 people
25% of beneficiaries receiving support through the project will have increased income by more than £750 per year	1,360 people by end of year 2	171 people reported increased income

7.13 The evidence gathered to date to inform progress towards achieving Outcome 2 is limited. From a data management perspective there is a significant issue in securing exit questionnaires from beneficiaries benefitting from the support. To a large extent the original business case was overly optimistic about the propensity for beneficiaries to engage in providing updates on their circumstances. Beneficiaries often have no mobile phone or credit; some don't answer their phone due to being chased by creditors/other reasons; substance misuse issues; no permanent address; no email usage or internet access, etc.

7.14 This comes as no real surprise to us given the nature of the beneficiary group but does present an issue in terms of being able to accurately assess the impact across a number of areas, including evidencing that 25% of beneficiaries receiving support through the project will have increased income by more than £750 per year. The evidence presented at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 is that 160 beneficiaries have had their income increased by a cumulative value of £636,594. This is an average of over £3,723 for each client.

7.15 Table 7.3 below outlines the progress made towards delivering Outcome 3.

**Table 7.3: Outcome 3 - 102 community volunteers have developed skills and experience that can support them to enter mainstream employment if appropriate**

Indicator	Target	Actual 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2021
Community volunteers have participated in training	102 people by Year 2	64
80% of community volunteers who engage with the programme will report improved skills, experience and confidence relevant to employability	82 people by end of Year 2	37 (58% of volunteers)
75% of volunteers who wished to improve employment prospects report that within 1 year of volunteering they have been able to move into paid employment or improve job prospects	46 people by end of Year 2	7

7.16 Outcome 3 of the project relates to the number of volunteers that developed skills and experience that supported them to enter mainstream employment if appropriate.

7.17 This target has not been achieved. Overall a total of 64 individual volunteers have been engaged and trained. Covid-19 was a key limiting factor. Another contributory factor was the characteristics of the volunteer cohort, with the motivation for many volunteers being to simply help rather than using it as a stepping-stone to employment. Related to this was the relative gap in resource within the project to proactively identify, train and intensively support new volunteers who don't work, but could.

7.18 Table 7.4 below shows the progress made in relation to Outcome 4. It should be noted that both indicators mirror those for Outcome 1, albeit with different targets to achieve.

**Table 7.4: Outcome 4 - Participating community food projects have seen reduced demand for repeat visits from people seeking emergency food support within 2 years**

Indicator	Target	Actual 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2021
Beneficiaries at emergency food projects will have met with a professional advice worker to seek help on a specific case	1,530 people by end of Year 2	2,228
Beneficiaries at emergency food projects will have met with a trained community volunteer to help them access advice and other services	17 projects by end Year 2	13

7.19 The total number of people at emergency food projects who have met with a professional advice worker to seek help on a specific case is 2,228. This target has therefore been achieved. In terms of the number of venues, there has been a reduction overall given the variation in Bristol from the Community Engagement Worker model to The Children's Kitchen approach.

7.20 A common view is that many beneficiaries benefit from sharing and unburdening their problems. Having someone to listen helps. Key successes include: a wider range of services, such as schools and NHS, now refer people to the Advice Worker; and beneficiaries return for advice, not food parcels. Project data shows that 205 long-term users across Bradford and Leicester have been recorded as having a reduced need for emergency food. Given the challenges presented by Covid-19 this is a positive finding.

## 8. KEY FINDINGS

### *Project Design*

- 8.1 There was a clear rationale for the project. The selection of four pilot areas, each offering different models of delivery, was entirely appropriate. In the majority of locations the local infrastructure was in place to make a quick start to delivery, beneficial to those people accessing the project support.
- 8.2 The Advice Worker model worked well across Bradford, Derbyshire and Leicester. Experienced staff provided all the necessary support to the diverse requests from beneficiaries. The type of issues arising vary across each patch, in part due to the availability of alternative advice but also due to the 'typical' characteristics of people accessing each of the delivery centres.
- 8.3 The success of the volunteer model has been variable. In those locations where a volunteering approach was well established, opportunities have been capitalised upon to support the project. It has been much more difficult to establish any meaningful infrastructure where this wasn't already in place. The approach in Leicester of engaging with higher education partners to initiate relevant volunteering opportunities for students is interesting and opportunities for adopting similar approaches in other projects should be considered.

### *Project Management*

- 8.4 The project has been well managed by the Feeding Britain. It has been advantageous that the Project Coordinator has been in post since the commencement of practical operations, enabling a degree of continuity within Feeding Britain.
- 8.5 Additional value would have been achieved with improved coordination of networking across locations, involving staff from each of the 13 delivery locations.
- 8.6 The advice services offer from CPAG have been well received but under-utilised.

### *Impact Generated*

- 8.7 In total 2,228 people have sought support through the Pathways project. Advice Workers supported and empowered beneficiaries, and wider family members, who are often facing difficult circumstances. Those accessing support benefitted from sharing and unburdening their problems. Having someone to listen helps.
- 8.8 There have been some notable successes in terms of beneficiaries being supported to claim their full benefit entitlement. Some quick wins were achieved, whereas other complex cases have taken months to resolve. The Advice Workers have supported 160 people to increase income to an overall combined value of £636,594. The data demonstrates that as a consequence of project support a total of 205 long-term foodbank users now have a reduced need for emergency food.
- 8.9 Pathways has served to reduce the burden on other advice services locally, enabling a greater number of people to be seen quicker than otherwise, although in some areas this still meant a two week (or longer) wait to meet an advisor. Pathways enabled people to be seen much sooner than this, important given that often their situation is at a critical point.

- 8.10 Data, evidence, and case studies presented in 2020 enabled Feeding Britain to pursue specific recommendations with MPs, Peers, Select Committees, and civil servants, which resulted in a major reform to the Universal Credit deductions policy in the 2021 Budget. This reform will put £265 million back into the pockets of Universal Credit claimants in the six months between April and October 2021 and, in the process, address one of the key drivers of hardship which resulted in people having to seek help from food banks.

### *Achieving Outcomes*

- 8.11 The indicators underpinning each of the four outcomes are relevant to the project activity. However, the targets agreed at the outset were too ambitious. It was unrealistic to expect the collection of data from the majority of beneficiaries who have benefitted and no longer engage at the venue where they sourced support. The fact that Bristol is delivering a different type of project means that the targets levels relate to three, not four pilot areas, making the targets even more challenging to achieve.
- 8.12 Ideally a common data management system across the project would have been implemented, enabling access to data by the Project Coordinator. We have also found that the data required to evidence the impact of this project doesn't dovetail with the corporate systems used by a number of pilot leads. Closer joint working at the project design stage is required on future projects, to identify opportunities to coordinate project and organisational approaches.

### *Benefit to Participating Delivery Partners and Wider Partners*

- 8.13 There has been a wider benefit to those organisations leading delivery across each pilot area. One partner cited that they now have a much greater awareness about support services that are available and the gaps that exist. This has benefitted the organisation in how it delivers wider services in its community.
- 8.14 The Pathways project had a clear emphasis upon encouraging conversations and learning across the project. There is a clear legacy in relationships that have been established across localities will outlast this round of funding.
- 8.15 There is a need to share good practice on how Pathways has assisted people. A number of community food venues we have interviewed see the real value in bringing additional services, such as Pathways, into their facility. Moreover, a growing number of regions across the Feeding Britain network are embracing the Pathways model due its effectiveness in maximising people's incomes and reducing long-term dependence on food banks. However, there is a reluctance from other community food hubs to consider hosting an Advice Worker, despite these being venues where significant added value could be achieved. There is a need therefore to improve marketing and publicity to more comprehensively communicate the advantages.

### *The Benefit of Extended Delivery*

- 8.16 Pathways is a project that benefits from a long lead in time. People often need time to feel confident to approach for help, and a track record shared by word of mouth is important in triggering



engagement across many of the participating venues. It will be much more efficient and effective for the current Advice Workers to achieve this, rather than cease and restart another project.

8.17 The expectation is that demand for Pathways will continue to increase from this point forward given:

- The ongoing uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic and the impending impact upon the economy and the health and wellbeing of people across the country;
- The commencement of 'normal' DWP operations in relation to Universal Credit job search, sanctions, PIP assessments, etc; and
- The lifting of restrictions on people from being evicted.

8.18 There is clear evidence that the approach works and that the model is transferable to other parts of the country. The value of a longer-term project, rather than 'here today, gone tomorrow' is clearly beneficial to those current pilot areas, given the known demand and the clear foothold the project has worked hard to establish over the previous 18 months.