



## **Interim Report: The impact of COVID-19 on the provision of food aid in Bradford**

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### **Executive Summary**

#### Background

- Food insecurity is a major public health issue with detrimental implications for mental and physical health among adults and children.
- Existing inequalities in access to food have been highlighted and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The importance of food aid (also termed community food assets) to provide immediate food support to people experiencing poverty and hunger has been heightened by COVID-19 and the resultant economic fallout; however there is limited knowledge of how COVID-19 has impacted the availability of food aid as well as the accessibility and inclusivity of this support.
- Bradford District is a multi-ethnic, multi-faith area with high levels of socio-economic inequality and has been particularly negatively affected by COVID-19.

#### Findings

- A rapid mapping exercise and survey undertaken in Bradford between August and November 2020 identified 169 community food assets operating in the Bradford District, of which 139 remained operational throughout the first lockdown (March – June 2020).
- 59 new food aid services were set up during the first lockdown period, of which 79% delivered food (prepared meal or food parcels).
- Services categorised as emergency assistance (e.g. food banks, food delivery and soup runs) were more common during the COVID-19 lockdown than services providing non-emergency assistance with food (e.g. community cafes).



- Educational institutions played an important role in the provision of food aid during lockdown: 42% of services which started their operations in response to the pandemic were school-based.
- In line with previous research, the mapping and survey raised concerns about the cultural inclusivity of food aid in Bradford. Of the 116 services known to be operational over the lockdown period, 38% were founded or motivated by Christian principles and 11% identified as Muslim providers; this is unrepresentative of Bradford's religious demography.
- Food aid services experienced multiple challenges in responding to increased demand during the first lockdown, including difficulties of organising staff, volunteers and service users amid social distancing rules; reduced volunteer availability; and the need for additional funding to adapt their operations to adequately cater for vulnerable individuals shielding at home.

#### Recommendations

- Local authorities to improve the availability of local financial assistance schemes to reduce the need for food aid among people on a low income, considering the role of community food assets in raising awareness of cash grants.
- Local authority to partner with key stakeholders to better understand and address barriers to inclusion, particularly related to ethnicity/religion.
- Local authority to continue to provide financial support to community food asset organisations in the immediate period, working in partnership to ensure that services are culturally appropriate to meet the needs of the population (considering opportunities to do this with local SMEs).
- Once able to, local authorities to support and assess the role of non-emergency food assets in addressing the root causes of food insecurity.



## **Introduction**

This interim report aims to provide an overview of research progress to date on the current range and diversity of food aid provision in the Bradford District. The report assesses how the availability of food aid, also termed ‘community food assets’, and types of service have altered in response to COVID-19.

The research builds upon present knowledge and previous research of community food assets in Bradford, updating previous mapping exercises [1, 2]. Findings have been visualised to highlight and assist understanding of (i) the changing nature of food assets in the Bradford District since the first COVID-19 lockdown (March 2020 – June 2020) and (ii) the spatial relationship between the distribution of food assets in the Bradford District and the ability of current services to meet potential demand from the multi-ethnic, multi-faith population.

The findings are followed by a short discussion, setting out key weaknesses in the current emergency food aid supply in Bradford and critically assessing the methodology. The report closes by outlining a series of short- and long-term recommendations for improving the inclusivity and accessibility of community food assets in the Bradford District, and for reducing the need for food aid in the long term.

## **COVID-19 and food insecurity**

Food insecurity is a major public health issue with detrimental implications for mental and physical health in adults and children [3, 4, 5, 6]. There is clear evidence that food insecurity has increased across Europe since 2008, with the sharpest rise in countries with Anglo-Saxon welfare regimes such as the UK [7].

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to sharp increases in poverty and food insecurity across the UK, a consequence of mandated closure of hospitality and all non-essential businesses in an attempt to combat the spread of the virus, and severe restrictions on movement and physical contact, especially during the first lockdown between March and June 2020 [8, 9]. According to a national survey commissioned by the Food Foundation, three million people experienced food insecurity during the first three weeks of lockdown [10]. Reflecting such unprecedented levels of food insecurity, the Independent Food Aid Network (2020) reported a 177% increase in the year from May 2019 to May 2020 in the number of food parcels distributed to individuals and families [11].



Food insecurity is a significant public health concern in the Bradford District: data from the Born in Bradford cohort indicates a higher prevalence of food insecurity than the national average among women with children in Bradford and, echoing findings from across the UK [5, 6], preliminary evidence suggests a sharp increase in food insecurity in Bradford since the first COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020 [12]. At the time of writing (November 2020), a second lockdown is underway, involving restrictions on business and wider society which may further exacerbate inequalities in access to food.

### **Community Food Assets in Bradford**

This research, planned before the onset of COVID-19 in the UK, aims to assess the current distribution, range and inclusivity of community food assets in the Bradford District, updating previous mapping exercises conducted in 2014-2015 [1]. The primary research commenced in August 2020 and, therefore, it was decided that an additional objective should be included, specifically to examine the impact of COVID-19 on community food assets in Bradford District. This additional aim is the main focus of this preliminary report.

Bradford District is a multi-ethnic, multi-faith area. It retains the most substantial percentage of people of Pakistani ethnic origin in the country, with over a quarter of the population identifying as Asian/Asian British. The most recent census illustrates that 24.7% of the population identify as Muslim, a proportion over five and half times greater than the UK average [13]. The incidence of COVID-19 cases in Bradford generally remained higher than the national average throughout the first lockdown period [14] and, as a consequence, prior to the implementation of a second national lockdown, Bradford was subject to more restrictive local measures. There is currently limited understanding surrounding the distribution and inclusiveness of current community food assets in Bradford.

### **Aims**

We worked in collaboration with the Bradford Metropolitan District Council and Feeding Bradford, a multi-agency partnership overseeing and coordinating food aid in Bradford, to conduct a service evaluation, exploring the roles and availability of community food assets in Bradford. This work was conducted to highlight the capability of current services to meet the needs of a diverse population during times of socio-economic hardship. By doing so, it intended



to support decision making to ensure community-wide equal access to food from a multi-ethnic perspective. This was achieved through the following objectives:

- identify the range of existing community food assets in the Bradford District;
- map the range and inclusivity of community food assets in the Bradford District;
- explore how food aid provision in the Bradford District has changed as a result of COVID-19 through assessment of the implications of lockdown restrictions on service operations.

## **Methods**

We applied a desk-based scoping exercise including internet searches and subsequent quantitative interviews with community food asset providers. In line with government guidance regarding social distancing measures, interviews were administered over the telephone and by email. All of the community food assets which had been identified via scoping were contacted by email, telephone or both between 10th September and 9th November 2020. Of those contacted, a total of 126 organisations provided information in some form. As the questions were voluntary, the extent and detail of responses varied considerably across all the survey interviews.

A broad audience of organisations was contacted. Information about food aid services that was not publicly available and insights into experiences of providers during the pandemic were obtained. Standardised questions were asked to all participants to avoid the potential for varying interpretations. Due to the dynamic situation, data regarding food provision services listed on an organisation's website was found during web searches to not always be relevant to restrictions. Speaking directly to organisations allowed the most up to date information to be collected.

Analysis of community food assets in Bradford over the March – June 2020 lockdown period followed application of a framework in a geographic information system (GIS). GIS maps were used to produce visual representations of the spatial distribution of organisations currently providing food aid services throughout the city. The geographic location of these services was overlaid across measurements of relative deprivation, religion density and ethnic density at Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) level. Data obtained from the 2019 Index of Multiple



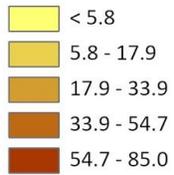
Deprivation was employed as an indicator of potential demand for food aid and aggregate data of individual religious affiliation and ethnic group recorded in the 2011 census as a measurement of possible variations in requests for culturally appropriate food aid provision. The impact of COVID-19 on food aid in Bradford has been visualised through GIS to indicate how provision changed as a result of initial lockdown restrictions. The location of organisations which have been forced to alter practices or operating capacity and the locality of new food aid services set up in response to the pandemic, have been mapped to demonstrate this.

## **Results**

### *Community food assets*

We identified 169 community food assets offering food insecurity assistance in Bradford, 139 of which remained operational throughout lockdown. Figure 1 displays the geographical location of these, categorised by the impact of lockdown restrictions on operating ability in relation to the spatial distribution of Bradford's Pakistani population. Figure 2 displays the same data in relation to the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation and is utilised here as indicator of potential need for food aid. Preliminary observation of the spatial distribution of community food assets in Bradford visualised, would suggest that the overall provision of food aid is well placed to meet demand due to the location of a majority of services in areas reporting the highest levels of deprivation. This is of course based on the assumption of greater prevalence of poverty equalling demand for food support; however this is well supported by existing research showing a clear association between low income, benefit receipt and food insecurity in Bradford [15] and nationally [16]. Nonetheless, it is also recognised that the services forced to close (n=30) were in areas of potentially greatest need.

**Pakistani ethnic density (%)**



**Food aid service operations**

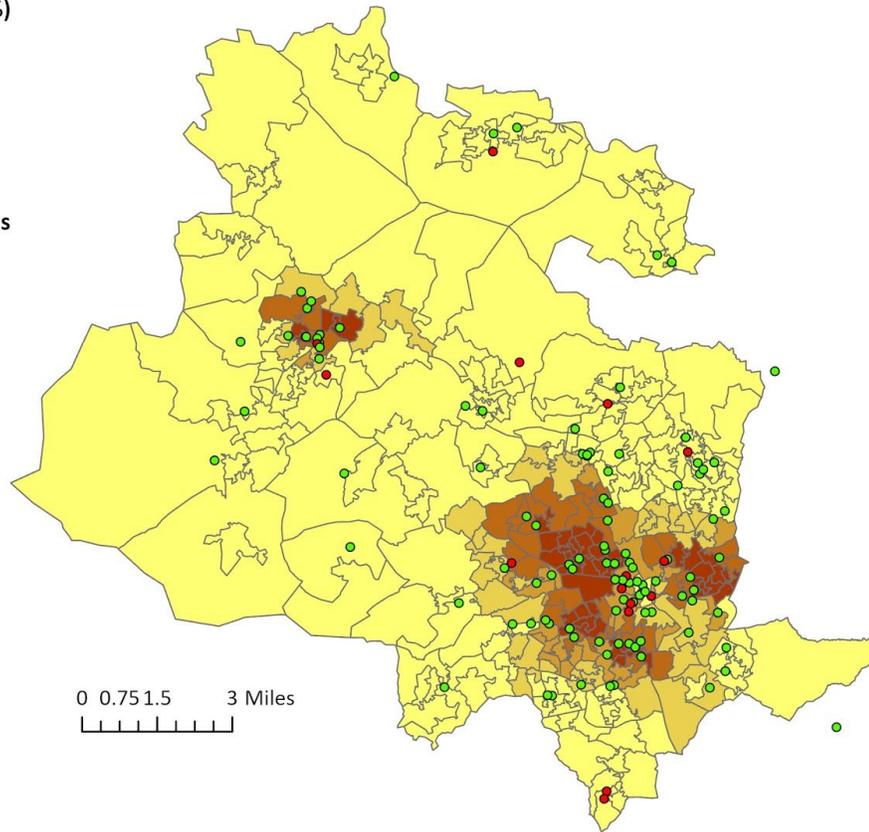
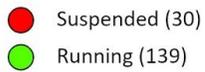


Figure 1. The geographical distribution of Pakistani ethnic density at Lower Layer Super Output Area level in Bradford and the spatial allocation of organisations providing food aid forced to suspend services during lockdown.

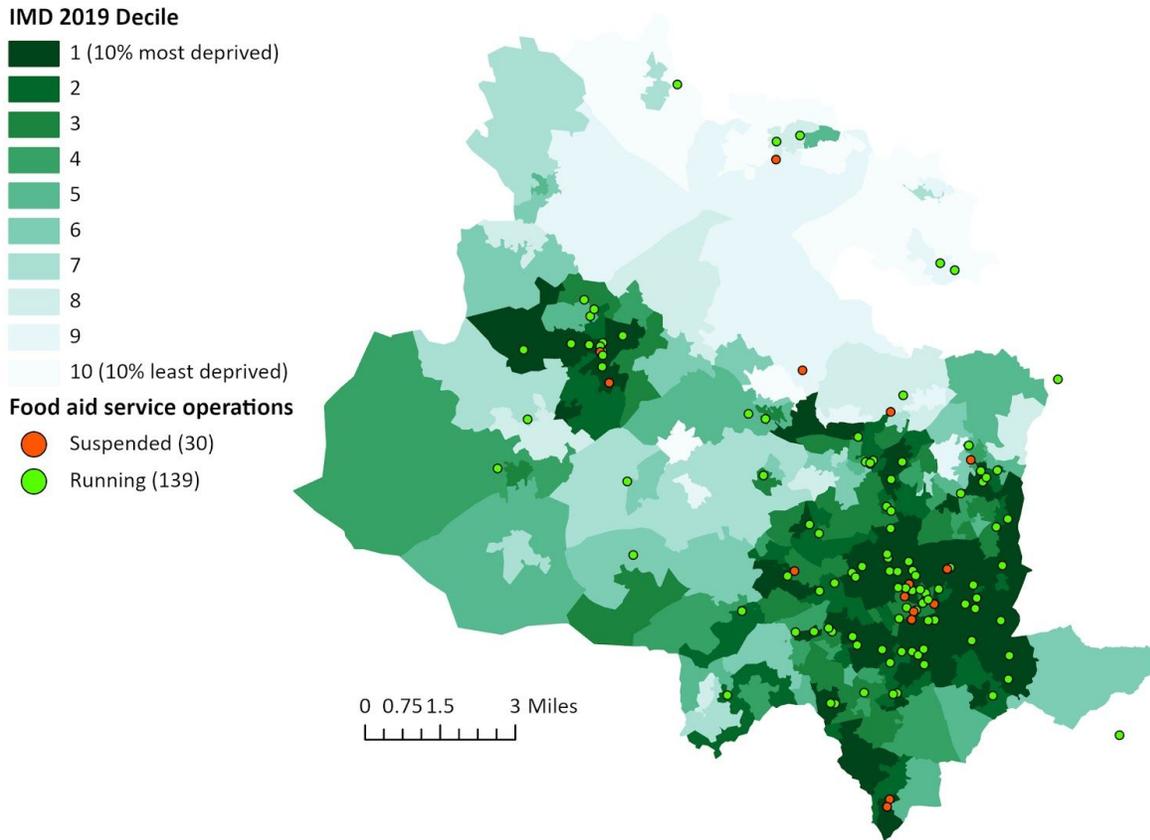


Figure 2. The geographical distribution of deprivation measures at Lower Layer Super Output Area level in Bradford and the spatial allocation of organisations providing food aid forced to suspend services during lockdown.

Table 1 provides a summary of the type of community food asset provided by organisations who continued to offer food provision in lockdown, indicated by the colour green in Figure 1. The provision of food aid in Bradford during lockdown included 116 community organisations whose primary stated motivation was to provide emergency food assistance for vulnerable individuals and those at risk of food insecurity. Services categorised as emergency assistance (e.g. food banks, food delivery services and soup runs) were more common in COVID-19 lockdown than services providing non-emergency assistance with food (e.g. community cafes). Soup kitchens, food banks and food parcel delivery services were particularly common. A large majority (71% (n=99)) provided people with grocery items intended for home cooking. The number of

organisations providing food items over lockdown (n=99), far outnumbered organisations providing emergency and non-emergency food aid in the form of prepared meals (n=40).

Based on the data collected, 30 organisations offering food aid provision were forced to suspend their services in line with government-imposed lockdown restrictions. Analysis of responses to the survey questionnaire revealed widespread mobilisation of additional emergency food insecurity assistance in reaction to COVID-19 and the lockdown. Even with a quarter of responses unaccounted for, 42% (n=59) of organisations surveyed who were operational throughout the lockdown period, had implemented new pandemic response services. Table 2 indicates the breakdown of the new community food assets set up in reaction to COVID-19.

Table 1. The range of community food assets Bradford available during lockdown.

	Provision type	Service	2017		COVID-19 / lock-down	
<b>Emergency assistance</b>	Meals	Soup kitchens (onsite or collection/takeaway)	20	<b>20</b>	21	<b>35</b>
		Meal delivery	0		14	
	Food items	Food bank (collection)	8	<b>8</b>	37	<b>81</b>
		Parcel delivery (delivery)	0		44	
<b>Non-emergency assistance</b>	Meals	Community café/social food (including kitchen)	21	<b>21</b>	5	<b>5</b>
	Food items	Community supermarket	6	<b>11</b>	8	<b>18</b>
		Food collection point/organisation (incl. recovery, box schemes)	5		10	

Table 2. Changes to the availability and range of community food assets in Bradford due to COVID-19.

Services forced to close over lockdown		Services set up since lockdown	
Food bank	2	Food bank	7
Soup kitchen	12	Soup kitchen	2
Parcel delivery	0	Parcel delivery	36
Meal delivery	0	Meal delivery	9
Community café	11	Community café	1
Community supermarket	2	Community supermarket	3
Community kitchen	2	Community kitchen	0
Food bank collection point	1	Food bank collection point	1
Total services	30	Total services	59

Community food assets centred around the communal provision of food, such as soup kitchens and community cafés, were the most impacted by lockdown restrictions, representing 77% (n=23) of the food aid provision in Bradford which was unable to operate due to the pandemic. These providers, largely offering food to be consumed on-site, were severely impacted in terms of operating practices, as the nature of service provision contradicted government instruction regarding social distancing measures. Many services no longer operate on-site provision and instead have been re-purposed to provide food via delivery only or collection at the door for takeout, reducing the social interface of food provision and any 1-1 in-person advice services formerly available.

76% (n=45) of the 59 response services which were set up during lockdown provided food aid for clients through the delivery of either a meal or food parcels. The vast range of



available delivery services is reflective of changes in the needs of the population following the pandemic outbreak [8] [10].

Educational institutions fulfilled a significant role in the development of food aid provision responding to the lockdown situation. 42% (n=25) of services identified as beginning operations since the pandemic began were school based. Many schools wanted to ensure that pupils and their families had access to food provision which would have been accessible had it not been for the partial closure of schools over lockdown. A lack of a free school meal replacement scheme during the beginning of lockdown represented a significant motivation for schools to offer emergency food assistance.

Our findings suggest that, despite significant obstacles, existing community food assets were largely able to adapt to the new circumstances of COVID-19 and tailor services towards the needs of many people unable to leave their homes due to vulnerability. However, despite flexibility, services were often unable to cater to varying dietary requirements or cultural needs. The extent to which community food assets operating during the first lockdown in Bradford were inclusive of varying dietary requirements and cultural preferences is addressed in the following section.

### *Inclusivity*

The map in Figure 3 highlights the religious orientation of food aid providers operational throughout the Bradford District during the first lockdown. This is contrasted with religious density data taken from the 2011 UK census and a previous mapping exercise of food aid provision in the Bradford District [1].

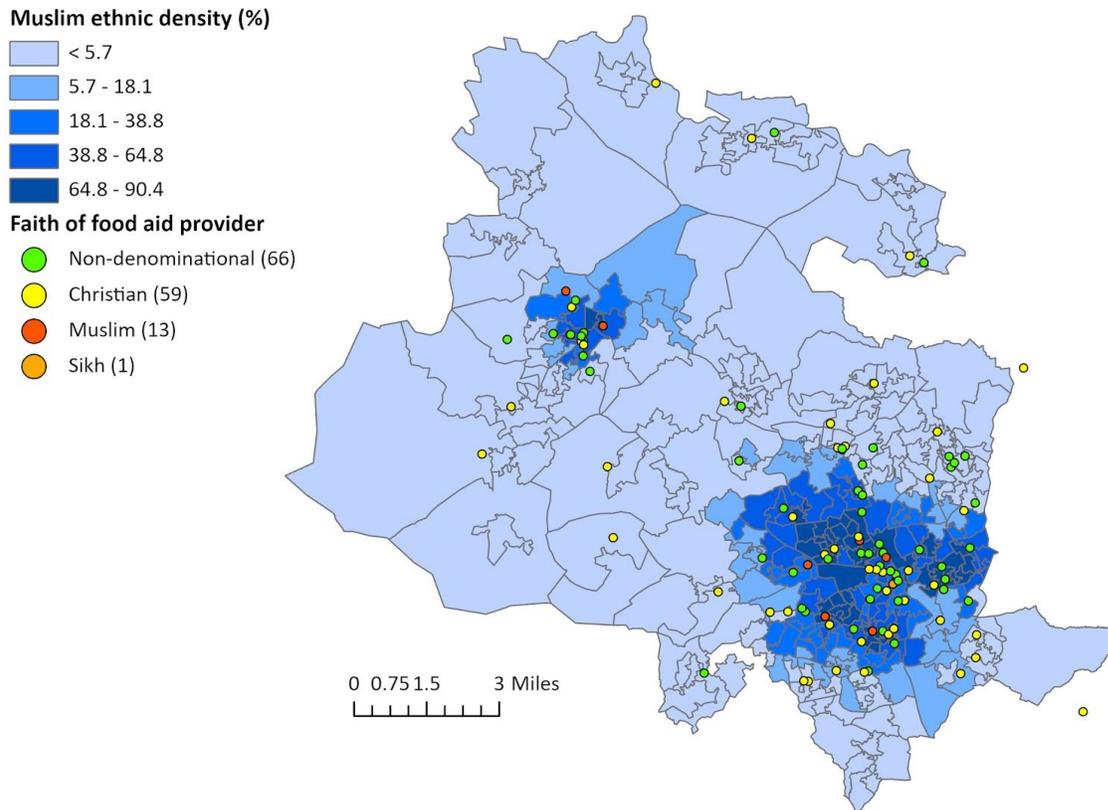


Figure 3. The geographical distribution of Muslim ethnic density of Lower Layer Super Output Areas in Bradford and the spatial allocation of organisations providing food aid following lockdown, categorised by religious orientation.

It is clear from Figure 3 that the limited availability of Muslim food aid providers is inconsistent with the spatial distribution of the Muslim population within Bradford. Of the 116 services known to be operational over the lockdown period, 38% were founded or motivated by Christian principles and 11% identified as Muslim; this unrepresentative of Bradford's religious demography in which 25% of the population describe themselves as Muslim (see Table 3). One additional Sikh organisation was identified.

Table 3. Religious association of emergency food aid assistance available during lockdown [12].

	Muslim %	Christian %	Non-denominational %	Sikh %
Food bank (n=37)	11	59	30	0
Soup kitchen (n=21)	19	33	43	5
Parcel delivery (n=44)	7	23	70	0
Meal delivery (n=14)	14	36	50	0
Total emergency provision (n=116)	11	38	50	1
Bradford population	25	46	21	1

As evident from Table 3, food bank provision in particular, is highly connected with the Christian faith: 59% of food banks operating during lockdown in Bradford described their founding and/or motivating principles as Christian. In addition, and not shown by Table 3, the survey found that in the context of COVID-19, Christian churches often worked in partnership with Christian food banks by acting as donation points.

Despite a quarter of Bradford's population identifying as Muslim, just 11% of emergency food aid services were Muslim. Additionally, other faith-based and non-denominational food aid providers were unable to confirm a reliable ability to offer food provision according to dietary requirements or cultural needs. This advances concerns regarding the possible exclusion of ethnic and religious minorities from food aid provision in Bradford raised by previous analysis [1]. Food aid organisations explained that they were only able to provide a standardised service or highlighted the absence of halal food in the food donations they received. The survey found that the majority of food aid, in particular emergency assistance, was reliant on community



donations or partnerships with local businesses or supermarkets to fund food distribution. In particular, in the Bradford District, the supermarket chains Morrisons and Co-op were identified by many providers as a key player in the donation of food aid supplies.

## **Discussion**

### *Challenges of food aid provision during the pandemic*

Multiple organisations reported challenges regarding capacity to meet the surge in demand for food aid over lockdown. Pressures were intensified by social distancing measures restricting the number of volunteers or staff members allowed to mix within organisational settings. The capacity of organisations to cope with demand was further undermined by a significant number of volunteers self-isolating due to illness, age or vulnerability to COVID-19. Changing government guidance over the summer regarding working from home fostered additional uncertainty surrounding volunteer availability.

COVID-19 has given rise to a new subset of the population vulnerable to food insecurity: individuals who contract the virus and are required to self-isolate; and individuals required to 'shield' as a consequence of age or health status. The ability of services to alter operations to meet the needs of this newly food insecure population was found to be highly dependent on funding. For instance, provision of home delivery services to cater to self-isolating individuals requires access to a private mode of transit and the ability to cover wider costs, like vehicle insurance. As a whole, there was widespread recognition among the individuals and organisations we spoke with of increased generosity from the wider community in supporting organisations providing food aid throughout Bradford since the first lockdown. However, simultaneously, there was also a keen sense that the capacity of local community food assets to respond to high and potentially increasing food insecurity was finite.

### *Limitations*

Given the current dynamic situation, the data outlined in this interim report regarding community food assets is only correct as of the date and time an organisation was able to provide information regarding their services (September to November 2020). Accuracy of information is also dependent on the knowledge of the individual responding to the interview and it is possible that their opinions and experiences of food aid are unrepresentative of the organisation as a



whole. The voluntary nature of people who often responded to interview questions resulted in some questions left unanswered in cases where individuals did not have any prior knowledge, perceived themselves as unauthorised to comment, or felt unable to provide sufficient data. Moreover, the depth of data collection regarding each food aid service varied, with the possibility of questions about the catering ability of an organisation to satisfy any demand for culturally appropriate food to be interpreted differently or even subject to a respondent's bias. Questions that were administered via email to organisations as a result of: the absence of a working phone number; difficulty getting through on busy lines; or respondent's time constraints or personal preference, frequently had low response rates. This also means it is possible for supplementary information regarding the food aid services outlined in this report to be uncovered at a later date. The number of community food assets surveyed was subject to the availability of a phone number or email address connected to the organisation. Findings are therefore unlikely to reflect the precise extent of smaller-scale, ad-hoc and informal food aid provision not widely advertised in Bradford.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

This interim report offers an overview of how community food assets in Bradford have adapted in response to the first lockdown implemented in March 2020. The conclusions and recommendations are based on evidence collected over a short time period (September to November 2020) in one city and may therefore be limited in their applicability to other areas in the UK.

The rapid mapping exercise and survey identified 169 community food assets operating in the Bradford District, of which 139 remained operational throughout the first lockdown (March – June 2020). Organisations most likely to close were those providing social, communal support (e.g. community cafes). Such organisations provide an important mechanism to reduce social isolation, reduce depression and enhance social cohesion and their loss may have wider implications for mental health and wellbeing.

59 food aid services were set up during the first lockdown period, of which the majority delivered prepared meals or food parcels. Educational institutions played an important role in the provision of food aid during lockdown, indeed 42% of services which started their operations in response to the pandemic were school based. In line with previous research, the mapping



and survey raised concerns about the cultural inclusivity of food aid in Bradford. Of the 116 services known to be operational over the lockdown period, just 11% identified as Muslim providers; this unrepresentative of Bradford's religious demography.

Food aid services experienced multiple challenges in responding to increased demand during the first lockdown, including difficulties of organising staff, volunteers and service users amid social distancing rules; reduced volunteer availability; and the need for additional funding to adapt their operations to adequately cater for vulnerable individuals shielding at home. There was widespread appreciation of community commitment and generosity to meet the needs of poor and vulnerable households through the provision of food during COVID-19, but simultaneously a keen sense that community-based services were not a sustainable response to food insecurity in the long-term.

In the light of the ongoing pandemic and second lockdown, recommendations based on this interim report are intended to improve the inclusivity and accessibility of community food assets in the short-term but also to address the systemic drivers of food insecurity in the long-term. Given the local level focus of this report, these recommendations are principally intended for community-based food aid and the local authorities.

## **Local authority**

### *Short-term*

- Provide grant funding for local-level food aid providers to fund necessary operational changes during COVID-19 and to enable purchase of culturally appropriate foods.
- Work with emergency and non-emergency providers to ensure local authority policy and practice is congruent with on-the-ground food aid services.
- Work with partners in local SMEs to enhance mutual aid among local food producers and individuals in need of support.

### *Long-term*

- Improve the availability of local financial assistance schemes to reduce the need for food aid among people on a low income, considering the role of community food assets in raising awareness of cash grants.



- Work in partnership with non-emergency food assets to ensure they are able meet diverse needs and address the causes of food insecurity in their practices.
- Support and assess the role of non-emergency food assets in providing benefits advice and support, preventing isolation and tackling mental ill-health.

## **Community food assets**

### *Short-term*

- Where possible, improve the availability of culturally appropriate foods and work with multiple faith groups to improve understanding of and address barriers to inclusion.

### *Long-term*

- Work in partnership with the local authority to reduce reliance on food aid, for instancing by partnering with other agencies to provide advice and support with benefits within the food aid site.

## **Acknowledgement**

This work was carried out in collaboration with the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council and was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council, the UK Prevention Research Partnership (UKPRP) and the N8 AgriFood programme. UKPRP is an initiative funded by UK Research and Innovation Councils, the Department of Health and Social Care (England) and the UK devolved administrations, and leading health research charities.

<https://mrc.ukri.org/research/initiatives/prevention-research/ukprp/>



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## Appendix

### **Interview questions**

Firstly, are you aware of any services currently being offered by your organisation which support people to access food? For example, running a food bank, distributing food parcels, operating a soup kitchen, a community café, breakfast club etc?

If so,

- What kind of food is available and how would you describe the organisation's motivation for providing the service? (Prompts: hot meal/food parcel, non-perishable/fresh - education or training, relief of food poverty, tackling isolation, improving community cohesion, religious motivation, etc).
- Is the service able to cater for varying cultural food preferences and dietary requirements or is a standardised service available to all? (Prompts: halal, vegetarian, vegan, gluten free, allergies, etc).
- When and how does the service run and is there a cost? (Prompts: days a week, operating times, collection/takeout, delivery, on-site – free, low cost, PAYF).
- Are there any specific demographics the service is targeted towards in particular? (Prompts: ethnicity, gender, age, location, open to all etc).
- How is the service funded and is it run on a volunteer basis? (Prompts: community donations, partnerships, council, surplus food, etc).
- During lockdown, how did Covid-19 influence how services operated and did the organisation continue to provide food support? (for example impacts on opening times, location of service, target audience, user numbers, food supply, distribution method, costs, etc)
- Was the service set up in response to Covid-19 and does the organisation intend to carry on delivering the service for the foreseeable future?



- Is the organisation currently facing any challenges or barriers in terms of providing the service? (Prompts: costs, donations, food supply, location of service, distribution, demand, staffing, etc).

If the organisation is currently not offering any services:

- Were services offered in the past and are there any particular reasons for the organisation currently not offering food provision?
- Can you see the organisation supporting people with access to food in the future?

And finally, do you know of any other organisations or schools providing food support to people in Bradford who you would recommend we talk to?

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