



The range and accessibility of food aid provision in Bradford, and the impact of COVID-19

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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 (here 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 both the range and characteristics of food aid in Bradford and the extent to which COVID-19 has impacted the availability and accessibility of food support.
- Bradford District is a multi-ethnic, multi-faith area with high levels of socio-economic inequality; it has been particularly negatively affected by COVID-19.

Findings

- A rapid mapping exercise and survey, undertaken between August and November 2020, identified 169 community food assets operating in the Bradford District, of which 139 remained operational throughout the first lockdown period (March to June 2020).
- 59 food aid services were newly 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 services and soup runs (n=116 (83%)) were more common during the first lockdown than services providing non-emergency assistance with food e.g., community cafes (n=23 (17%)).
- Educational institutions played an important role in the provision of food aid during the first lockdown period: 42% of services which started their operations in response to the pandemic were school based.
- 86% of food aid services identified as operating throughout the first lockdown period (March to June 2020) were free to access (n=120), with the remaining 13% of provision at some cost to service users (n=18).
- Of the food aid providers known to be operational over the first lockdown period, 48% were secular (n=66), 42% were Christian (n=59) and 9% were Muslim. 1% of food aid provision was Sikh (n=1).

- 22% of organisations distributing food during the first lockdown were able to tailor their food provision to cultural preferences and dietary needs (n=31); 19% stated their ability was dependent on donations and available food supply (n=26); and 9% responded that they could only offer a standardised service (n=12).
- 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 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).
- Local authority to partner with key stakeholders to increase intelligence of the availability, positioning and objectives of community food assets to better understand and address barriers to inclusion, particularly related to ethnicity/religion¹.
- 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.
- Once able to, local authorities to support and assess the role of non-emergency food assets in addressing the root causes of food insecurity.

¹ During the production of this report, a new web-based access system for food projects in Bradford has been created by the Storehouse. This is an important resource facilitating understanding of and access to community food aid. See: <https://bradfordfoodbanks.org.uk/>

Introduction

There is currently limited understanding surrounding the distribution and inclusiveness of community food assets in Bradford. This report provides an overview of the range, characteristics and accessibility of food aid provision in the Bradford District and assesses how the availability of food aid, also termed 'community food assets', has altered in response to COVID-19.

This work builds upon existing 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 breadth of provision in the Bradford District (ii) the changing nature of food assets in the Bradford District since the first COVID-19 lockdown (March 2020 to June 2020) and (iii) the spatial relationship between the distribution of food assets in the Bradford District and the ability of current services to cater to dietary and cultural requirements.

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 reported a 177% increase in the number of food parcels distributed to individuals and families comparing May 2019 with May 2020 [11].

Food insecurity has long been 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 (January 2021), a third national lockdown is in place, involving severe restrictions on business and wider society, which may further exacerbate inequalities and related issues including access to high quality food.

Study aims

We worked in collaboration with the Bradford Metropolitan District Council and 'Feeding Bradford and Keighley', a multi-agency partnership which supports and helps coordinate 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 assess the state of current provision and explore the capability of current services to meet the needs of a diverse population. By so doing, it intended to support decision making to ensure community-wide equal access to food. This was achieved through the following objectives:

- To identify and map the range of existing community food assets in the Bradford District;
- To explore how food aid provision in the Bradford District changed as a result of COVID-19 through assessment of the implications of lockdown restrictions on service operations;
- To assess the religious demography of food aid provision in relation to the demography of the population in the Bradford District.

Setting

The population of Bradford is the fifth largest local authority in England in terms of population size after Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield and Manchester. In 2019, it was estimated that there were 539,776 people living in Bradford District, an increase of 3.2% and nearly 16,661 people since 2011. Bradford District is an ethnically diverse area, with the largest proportion of people of Pakistani ethnic origin in England and a large Muslim population. One in four people living in the District describe themselves as Asian / Asian British ethnic origin, compared to under 1 in 10 people on average for England as a whole. Table 1 sets out the ethnic demography of Bradford, according to the 2011 census.

Table 1. The ethnic demography of Bradford.

Ethnicity of Bradford's population					
Ethnic group		Number of people		Proportion of Bradford's total population (%)	
White	British	333628	352317	63.9	67
	Irish	2541		0.5	
	Gypsy or Irish traveller	433		0.1	
	Other White	15715		3.0	
Mixed/Multiple	White and Black Caribbean	4663	12979	0.9	3
	White and Black African	875		0.2	
	White and Asian	5677		1.1	
	Other Mixed	1764		0.3	
Asian/Asian British	Indian	13555	140149	2.6	27
	Pakistani	106614		20.4	
	Bangladeshi	9863		1.9	
	Chinese	2086		0.4	
	Other Asian	8031		1.5	
Black/Black British	African	4993	9267	1.0	2
	Caribbean	3581		0.7	
	Other Black	693		0.1	

Ethnicity of Bradford's population					
Ethnic group		Number of people		Proportion of Bradford's total population (%)	
Other	Arab	3714	7740	0.7	1

This description of Asian/Asian British origin is, however, quite nuanced and includes people from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, and other South Asian countries of origin. While the District itself is ethnically diverse, there is also wide variation across it. Some wards, including Toller, Manningham and Bradford Moor have a population of between 70% and 80% of people of Asian/Asian British ethnic origin. Other wards including Ilkley, Wharfedale and Worth Valley have a population which is predominantly of White ethnic origin.

The Bradford District is also a highly religiously diverse area. As shown in Table 2, almost half of Bradford's population is Christian (46%) and 24.7% of the population identify as Muslim, a proportion over five and half times greater than the UK average [13]. The Muslim population is the second most common faith in the Bradford District, closely followed by 'no religion' (21%). Christian, Muslim and Sikh faiths and 'no religion' account for 93% of all religion in Bradford.

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.

Table 2. The religious demography of Bradford.

Religion of Bradford's population		
Religion	Number of people	Proportion of Bradford's total population (%)
Christian	239843	45.9
Buddhist	1000	0.2
Hindu	4882	0.9
Jewish	299	0.1
Muslim	129041	24.7
Sikh	5125	1.0
Other	1686	0.3
No religion	108027	20.7
Not stated	32549	6.2

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. Organisations were initially identified via a scoping exercise and then contacted by email, telephone or both between 10th September and 9th November 2020. The extent and detail of responses varied considerably across all the survey interviews, largely dependent on the availability and role of the provider who was available to interview. Figure 1 outlines the data collection process and illustrates how information was derived from the council and Feeding Bradford and Keighley, hosted by Wellsprings Together (included in Figure 1).

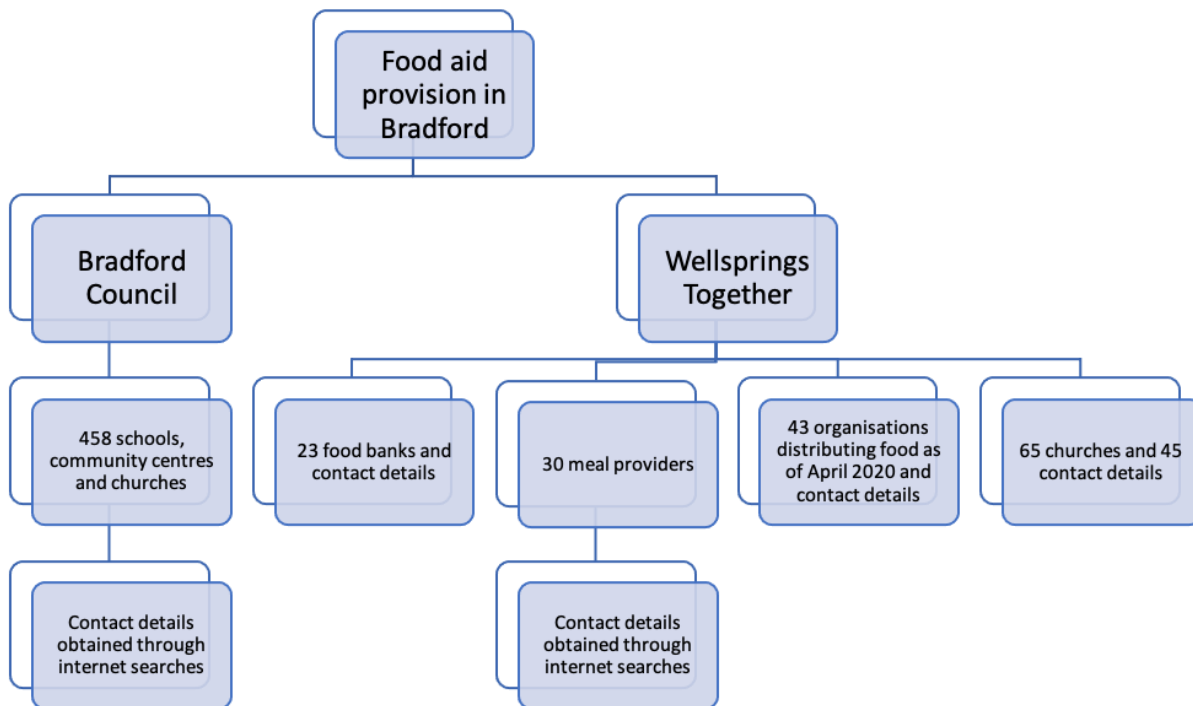
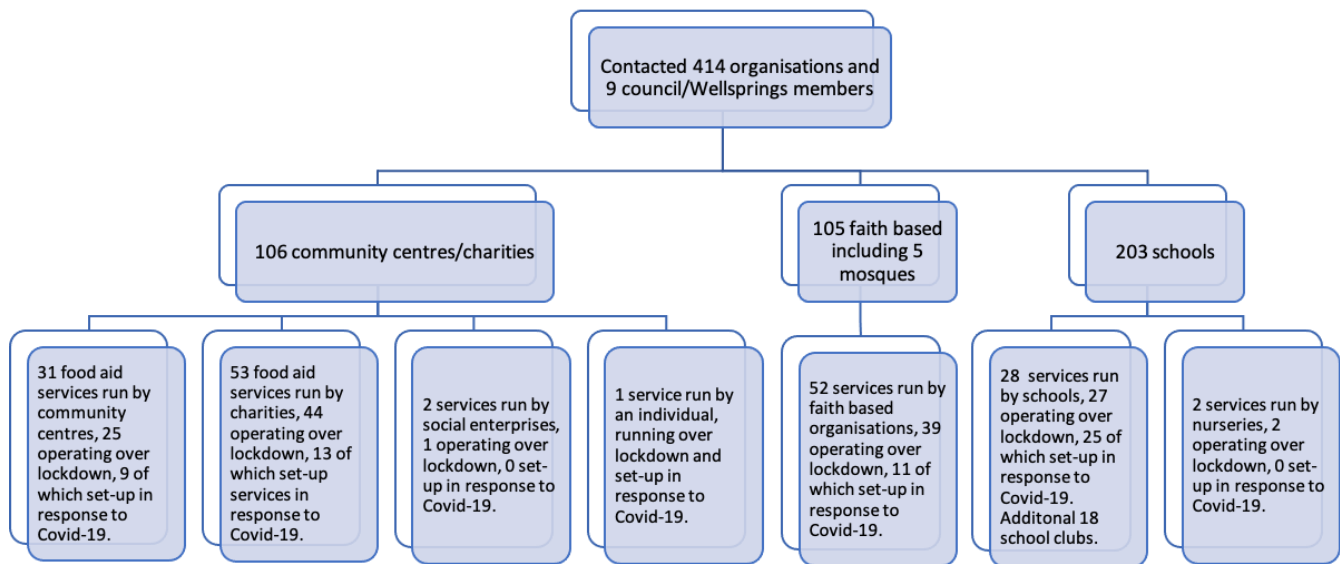


Figure 1. Method of data collection.²

² Wellsprings Together hosts the Feeding Bradford and Keighley campaign.

A broad audience of organisations was contacted including 203 schools, 106 community centres or charities and 105 faith-based organisations. 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 to 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. The impact of COVID-19 on food aid in Bradford was 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, were mapped to demonstrate this. 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.

Results

Overview of community food assets in the Bradford District

Our initial scoping exercise identified a total of 414 organisations that offered food insecurity assistance in Bradford. Of these, we were able to make contact with 169 organisations. 139 remained operational throughout lockdown and 30% (n=126) provided information in some form. Table 3 provides an overview of the food aid provision identified as available during the lockdown period March to June 2020 and the type of organisation providing services. Figure 2 displays the spatial distribution of these services.

Table 3. Provision of food aid available March to June 2020.

Count of food aid provision operating over lockdown								
Service type	Community centre (n=25)	Charity (n=44)	Faith based (n=39)	School based (n=27)	Nursery (n=2)	Social enterprise (n=1)	Individual (n=1)	Total (n=139) (%)
Food bank (n=37)	1	17	14	5	0	0	0	27
Soup kitchen (n=21)	6	11	4	0	0	0	0	15
Parcel delivery (n=44)	7	9	8	18	0	1	1	32
Meal delivery (n=14)	6	3	2	3	0	0	0	10
Community café (n=5)	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	3
Community supermarket (n=8)	3	1	2	0	2	0	0	6
Community kitchen (n=0)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Food bank collection point (n=10)	0	2	7	1	0	0	0	7
Total (n=139) (%)	18	32	28	19	1	1	1	100

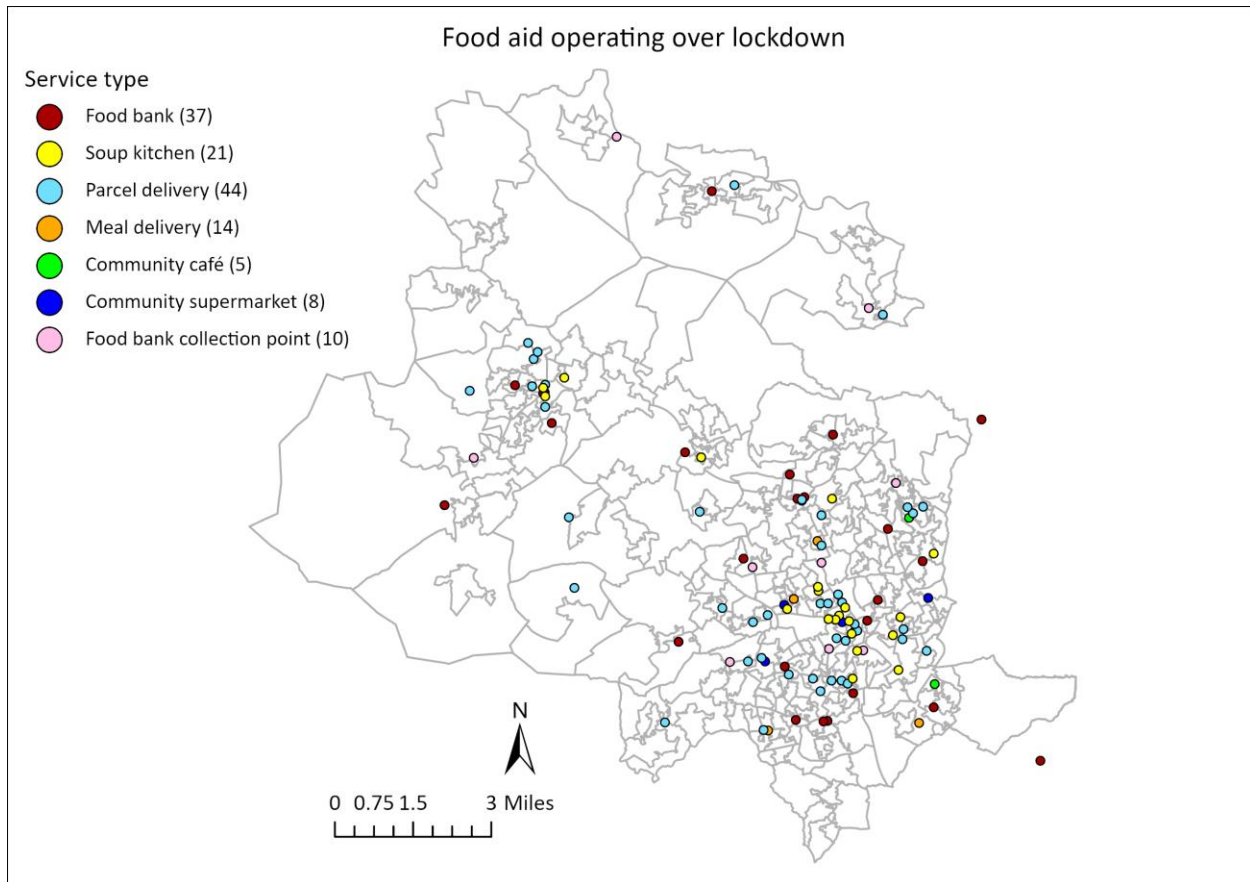


Figure 2. The geographical distribution of organisations providing food aid in Bradford March to June 2020 categorised by service type.

Table 3 provides a summary of the type of community food asset provided by organisations who continued to offer food provision in lockdown. Food banks (n=37), soup kitchens (n=21) and food delivery in the form of a parcel (n=44) or a meal (n=14) accounted for 84% (n=116) of food provision available over the lockdown period March to June 2020. Community kitchens (n=0) and community cafés (n=5) were the least common form of food provision available during the first lockdown representing only 3% of total services.

Charities and faith-based organisations, compared to schools and community venues, were the most common type of organisations offering food aid during lockdown (n=83, 60%), running 84% of food banks (n=31). Additionally, 52% of soup kitchens were provided by charities (n=11), 41% of parcel deliveries were offered by school based organisations (n=18) and 43% of meal delivery services were run by community centres (n=6). 70% of food bank collection points were operated by faith-based organisations during lockdown (n=7).

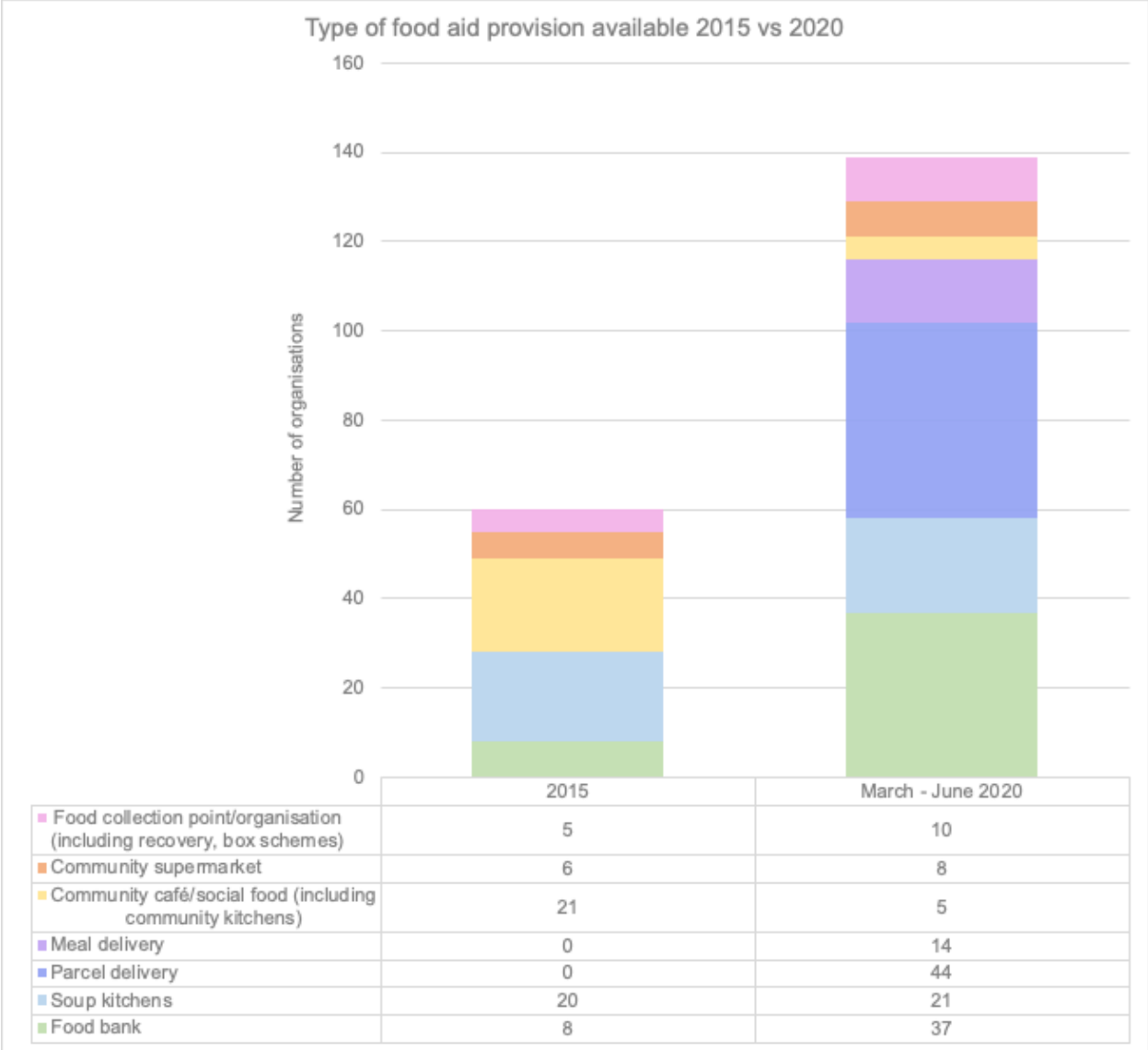


Figure 3. The change in food aid service types 2015-2020.

Figure 3 highlights the provision of food aid in Bradford during lockdown. This 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 (n=116, 83%)) were more common in COVID-19 lockdown than services providing non-emergency assistance (n=23, 17%) with food (e.g. community cafes). Food parcel delivery services (n=44), food banks (n=37) and soup kitchens (n=21) were particularly common, accounting for 78% of provision available (n=102). A large majority (71% (n=99)) provided people with grocery items intended for home cooking. The number of organisations providing clients with food items over lockdown

(n=99), far outnumbered organisations providing emergency and non-emergency food aid in the form of prepared meals (29%, n=40). 86% of food aid services identified as operating throughout the lockdown period March to June 2020 were free to access (n=120), with the remaining 13% of provision at a cost to service users (n=18).

Weekly availability of food aid

There was considerable variability of the availability of different types of food aid operational during lockdown, as set out in Table 4. Thirty four percent of services were only available to clients once a week (n=47) and this was most common among emergency provision: food banks (n=15), soup kitchens (n=14) and parcel delivery services (n=12) represented 87% of services running once a week. Albeit it is worth noting that food banks and parcel deliveries usually offered a food supply for three or more days. Twelve percent of food aid organisations were available 2 to 3 days a week (n=17); 18% were operating over 4 days a week (n=24); and 9% of services had no fixed opening hours and were available to services users as and when they were needed (n=23). This was particularly common in the case of food parcel delivery services (n=8).

Table 4. The availability of food aid provision by service type.

Availability of food aid services over lockdown							
Availability a week	Infrequent (n=1)	1 day (n=47)	2-3 days (n=17)	4-5 days (n=12)	6-7 days (n=12)	When required(n=13)	No response (n=37)
Food bank (n=37)	0	15	5	3	3	4	7
Soup kitchen (n=21)	0	14	5	1	1	0	0
Parcel delivery (n=44)	1	12	1	1	4	8	17
Meal delivery (n=14)	0	2	3	4	4	0	1
Community cafe (n=5)	0	0	1	2	0	0	2

Availability of food aid services over lockdown							
Availability a week	Infrequent (n=1)	1 day (n=47)	2-3 days (n=17)	4-5 days (n=12)	6-7 days (n=12)	When required(n=13)	No response (n=37)
Community supermarket (n=8)	0	4	1	0	0	0	3
Community kitchen (n=0)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Food bank collection point (n=10)	0	0	1	1	0	1	7
Total (n=139) (%)	1	34	12	9	9	9	26

Changes in food aid provision as a result of COVID-19

Figure 4 displays the geographical location of the services indicated in Table 3 and 4, categorised by the impact of lockdown restrictions on operating ability in relation to the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation, which 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 based on the assumption of greater prevalence of poverty equating to higher demand for food support, a contention supported by existing research showing a clear association between low income, benefit receipt and food insecurity in Bradford [15] and nationally [16].

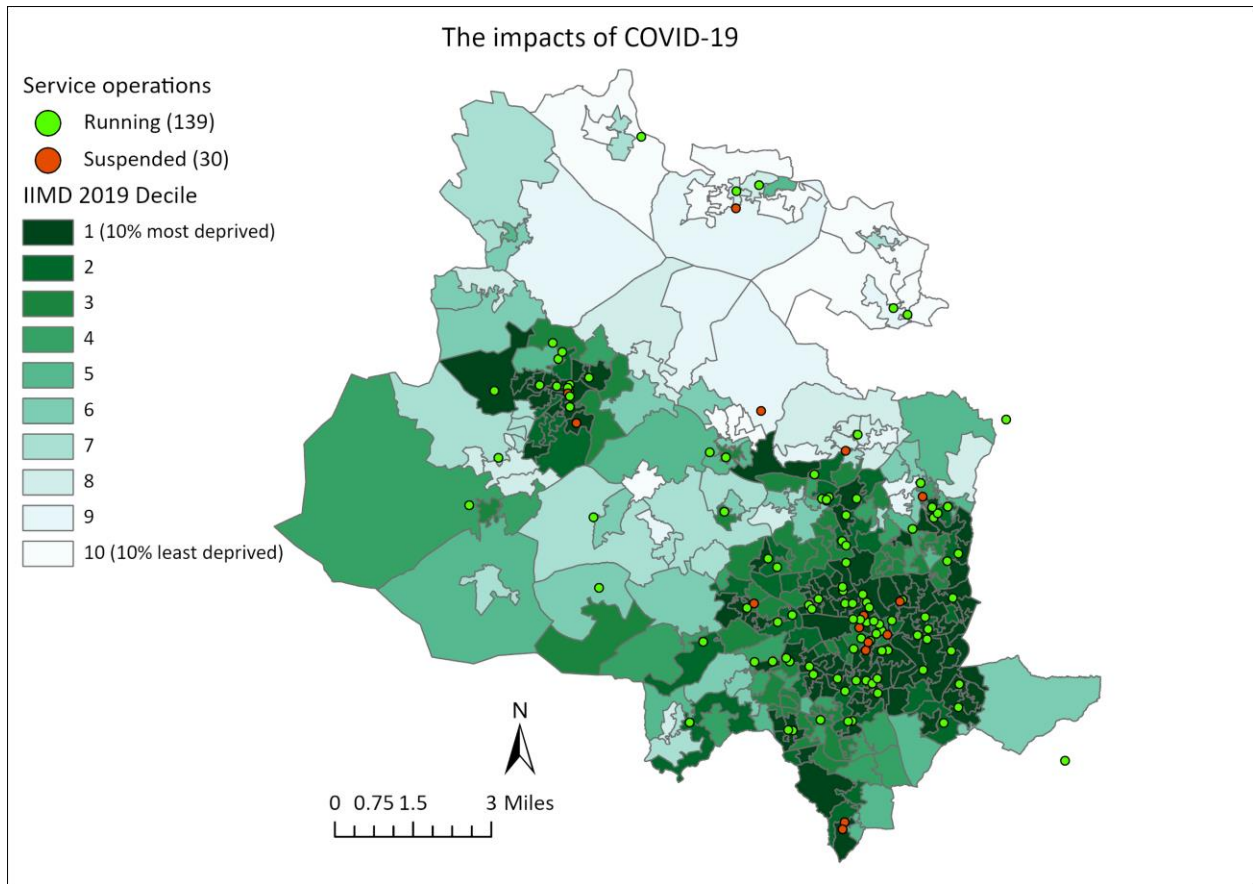


Figure 4. The geographical distribution of deprivation measures at Lower Layer Super Output Area level in Bradford and the spatial allocation of organisations providing food aid forced to suspend services during lockdown.

Based on the data collected, 30 organisations offering food aid provision were forced to suspend their services in line with government-imposed lockdown restrictions (18%). It is also recognised that services forced to close were in areas of potentially greatest need, as reflected in Figure 4. Analysis of responses to the survey questionnaire revealed widespread mobilisation of additional emergency food insecurity assistance in reaction to COVID-19 and the first lockdown. Even with a quarter of responses unaccounted for ($n=31$), 42% ($n=59$) of organisations surveyed who were operational throughout the lockdown period, had implemented new pandemic response services. Figure 5 indicates the breakdown of the new community food assets set up in reaction to COVID-19 and those forced to suspend operations March to June 2020.

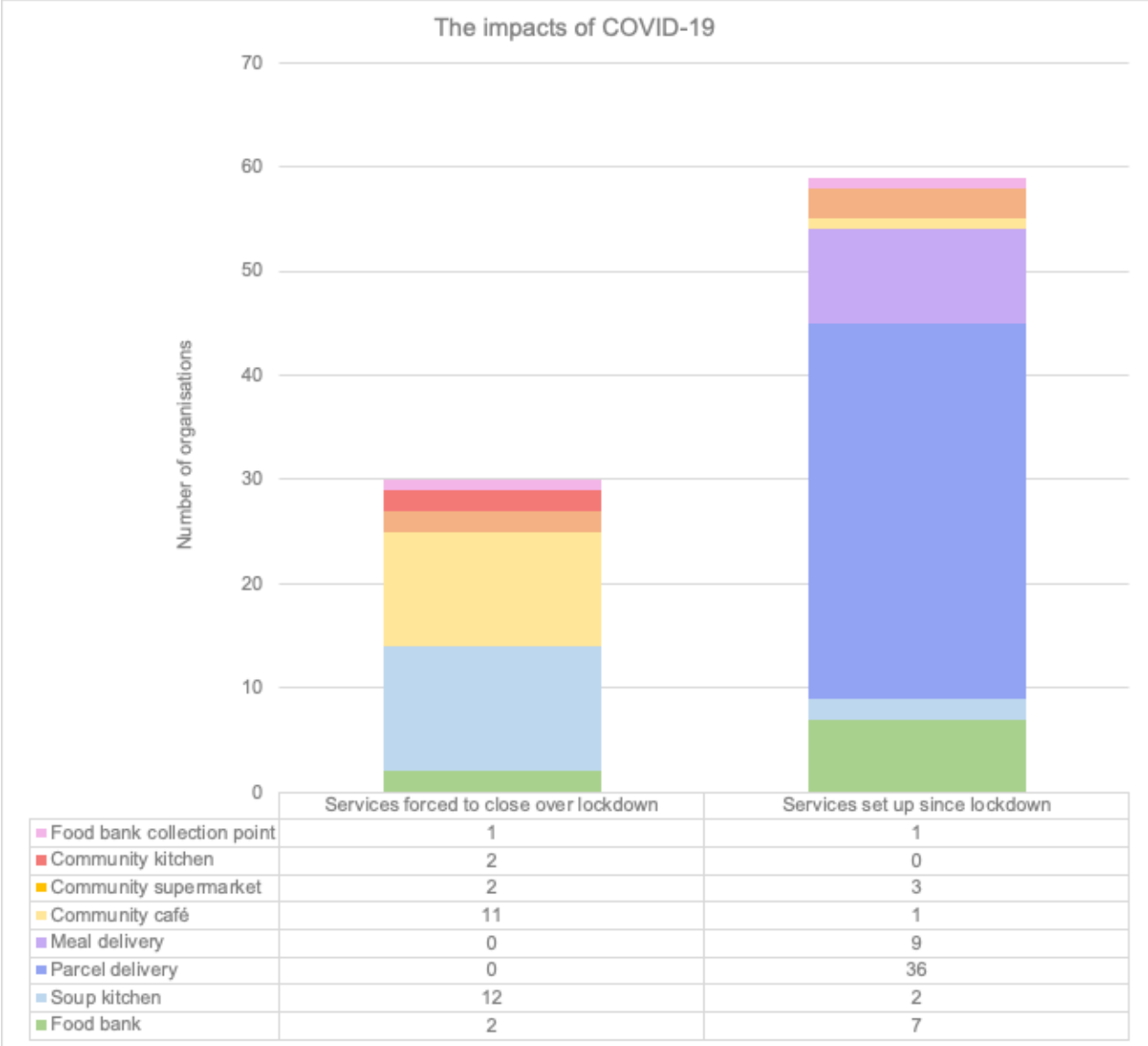


Figure 5. Changes to the range of community food assets in Bradford due to COVID-19.

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 operated on-site provision and instead were 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. Faith based organisations represented 44% (n=13) of organisations forced to

suspend food aid services. Food banks were one of the least common types of emergency food aid forced to close during lockdown (n=2, 6%). No parcel or meal delivery services were unable to distribute food during lockdown.

Forty three percent (n=59) of services operating over lockdown (n=139) were set up in response to COVID-19. Seventy six percent (n=45) of the 59 services set up during lockdown provided food aid for clients through the delivery of either a meal (n=9) or food parcels (n=36). Deliveries of a parcel of food items represented 61% of response services. The vast range of available delivery services is reflective of changes in the needs of the population following the pandemic outbreak [8] [10]. Forty one percent of response services were set up by charities (n=13, 22%) and faith-based organisations (n=11, 19%).

Educational institutions fulfilled a significant role in the development of food aid provision responding to the lockdown situation. Forty two percent (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, 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.

Religious affiliation of food aid providers

The Bradford District is a highly ethnically and religiously diverse area, encompassing a large Christian and a large Muslim population. Across many different religious traditions, there are shared commitments to the reception of food as a gift from the divine (or divines), to its utility in defining boundaries of the community, and to its significance as a means for participation with each other and the natural world. Accordingly, religious involvement has been a notable feature of contemporary forms of community food aid across the United Kingdom.

Food aid in Bradford District incorporated provision by multiple faith groups. Table 5 provides a summary of the religious affiliation of organisations providing food aid over lockdown. Forty eight percent of food aid were secular (n=66), 42% were Christian (n=59) and 9% self-identified as Muslim. One percent of food aid provision is Sikh (n=1), which is representative of the Sikh population in Bradford (1%). Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist faiths are not represented by religious affiliation of the provision identified. Over half of food aid services unable to run due the pandemic were affiliated with the Christian faith (n=17, 57%), 36% were secular (n=11) and 7% were Muslim associated (n=2). Sixty one percent of food aid provision which was set up in response to the pandemic, were secular (n=36), 31% Christian (n=18) and 8% Muslim (n=5). No Sikh affiliated food aid was identified as being established in response to the pandemic or forced to close.

It is notable that food aid identified in this scoping exercise appears to under-represent Bradford's Muslim population (25%). There is some geographical variation to this: only 3% of Bradford East's food aid provision over lockdown was Muslim (n=1) despite 33% of the population being Muslim. In Bradford West, 15% of the ward's provision over lockdown was Muslim (n=6); in contrast 36% of the ward's population is Muslim. Bradford South has the smallest share of total food aid provision available over lockdown of all wards (n=16, 12%). Twenty five percent of the Bradford South population is Muslim but only 6% of local provision over lockdown was Muslim (n=1). In Keighley, however, the proportion of Muslim associated provision outweighs the Muslim population: 18% of food aid provision is affiliated to Islam (n=4) and 17% of the population is Muslim. This example of good practice in Keighley is worth noting. Here, existing partnerships were strengthened between local mosque and their leaders and the main food banks. This allowed mosques to share opportunities about accessing food if needed, breaking down barriers to using these services and advice, and providing support for the food banks on appropriate foodstuffs to be included in standard food parcels.

Table 5. Religious affiliation of organisations providing food aid over lockdown.

Faith of food aid provision operating over lockdown by ward									
Ward	Secular			Christian			Muslim		
	N	% provision	% pop	N	% provision	% pop	N	% provision	% pop
Bradford East	21	62	18	12	35	41	1	3	33
Bradford South	4	25	21	11	69	45	1	6	25
Bradford West	21	51	16	13	32	39	6	15	36
Keighley	11	50	23	7	32	52	4	18	17
Shipley	9	38	24	14	58	54	1	4	13
Pudsey, Morley and Outwood³	0	0	28	2	100	62	0	0	1
Bradford total	66	48	21	59	42	46	13	9	25

Table 6 further breaks down the religious affiliation of food aid providers by service type. It shows that secular organisations provided 48% of food aid services between March and June 2020 (n=48), (in particular, parcel delivery services (n=31)). Forty three percent of charities providing food aid over lockdown (n=19) were secular. Secular providers were most common across community centres (n=21, 84%) and school based (n=23, 85%) food aid providers.

Ninety two percent of the faith based organisations identified as offering food aid during lockdown were Christian (n=36). Thirty four percent of charities were Christian (n=15). Twenty

³ Includes areas of Leeds.

one percent of charities providing food aid over lockdown were Muslim (n=9). Muslim associated charities represent 69% of total Muslim provision identified (n=13). Eight percent of faith-based organisations were run by Mosques (n=3). The one Sikh food aid provider was a charity based organisation (n=1).

Food bank provision in particular is highly connected with the Christian faith. Fifty nine percent of food banks were of associated to Christian groups (n=22), 30% of food banks were secular (n=11) and 11% Muslim (n=4). 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. This is evident in Table 6 with 80% of food bank collection points associated with the Christian faith (n=8). In addition, in March 2020, a spontaneous alliance between food providers, local Mosques, Hindu Temples and Sikh Gurdwaras led to the delivery of emergency hot food for a range of shielded and more vulnerable households.

Table 6. Religious affiliation of food aid services.

Faith of service type operating over lockdown										
Service type	Secular	%	Christian	%	Muslim	%	Sikh	%	Total	%
Food bank	11	30	22	59	4	11	0	0	37	27
Soup kitchen	9	43	7	33	4	19	1	5	21	15
Parcel delivery	31	70	10	23	3	7	0	0	44	32
Meal delivery	7	50	5	36	2	14	0	0	14	10
Community café	2	40	3	60	0	0	0	0	5	3
Community supermarket	4	50	4	50	0	0	0	0	8	6
Community kitchen	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Faith of service type operating over lockdown										
Service type	Secular	%	Christian	%	Muslim	%	Sikh	%	Total	%
Food bank collection point	2	20	8	80	0	0	0	0	10	7
Total	66	48	59	42	13	9	1	1	139	100

Provision of food tailored to dietary requirements and cultural preferences

The ability of current services to meet potential demand from the population for nutritionally and culturally adequate food was explored during the survey interviews. Organisations were asked if they were able to tailor their food provision to potential dietary requirements and cultural preferences, including halal and vegetarian food. Table 7 displays these findings.

Table 7. The ability of organisations to tailor food provision.

Catering ability for dietary requirements and cultural preferences by faith of provider					
Ability	Secular (n=66)	Christian (n=59)	Muslim (n=13)	Sikh (n=1)	Total (n=139) (%)
Yes (n=31)	15	7	9	0	22
No (n=12)	6	6	0	0	9
Dependent on food supply (n=26)	9	17	0	0	19
No response (n=70)	36	29	4	1	50

Twenty two percent of organisations distributing food during lockdown were able to tailor food provision for cultural preferences and dietary needs (n=31), 19% stated their ability was dependent on donations and available food supply (n=26) and 9% responded that they were unable to or only offered a standardised service (n=12). Food banks (n=10, 33%) and parcel delivery services (n=9, 29%) represented 61% of provision who said that they were able to cater

for cultural preferences over lockdown. Of the 37 food banks operational over lockdown, 27% (n=10) confirmed an ability to offer culturally appropriate food, 16% (n=6) were unable to, 35% (n=13) stated their ability was dependent on donations and 22% (n=8) did not provide a response. Twenty three percent of secular (n=15), 12% of Christian (n=7) and 69% of Muslim (n=9) services were able to cater for dietary needs and cultural preferences. Twenty nine percent of Christian services were dependent on donations for their ability to tailor provision (n=17).

There was considerable variation in the opening hours of food aid able to cater to cultural preferences and dietary requirements, set out in Table 8.

Table 8. The availability of culturally appropriate food during lockdown.

Availability of food aid services able to tailor provision for cultural preferences and dietary requirements		
Weekly availability	Number of organisations	% of provision (n=31)
Infrequent	0	0
1 day	11	35
2-3 days	4	13
4-5 days	5	16
6-7 days	4	13
When required	3	10
Unknown	4	13

Based on data collected, 35% (n=11) of services able to offer culturally appropriate food when requested were only available one day a week during the period March to June 2020. Twenty nine percent of services were available to clients over four days a week (n=9) and 10% when required (n=3). The spatial distribution of services identified as operating during lockdown and

able to tailor food aid provision for varying cultural preferences and dietary requirements is displayed in Figure 6. This is contrasted with religious density data taken from the 2011 UK census. Figure 6 suggests that food aid providers able to offer culturally appropriate food are highly limited in their availability.

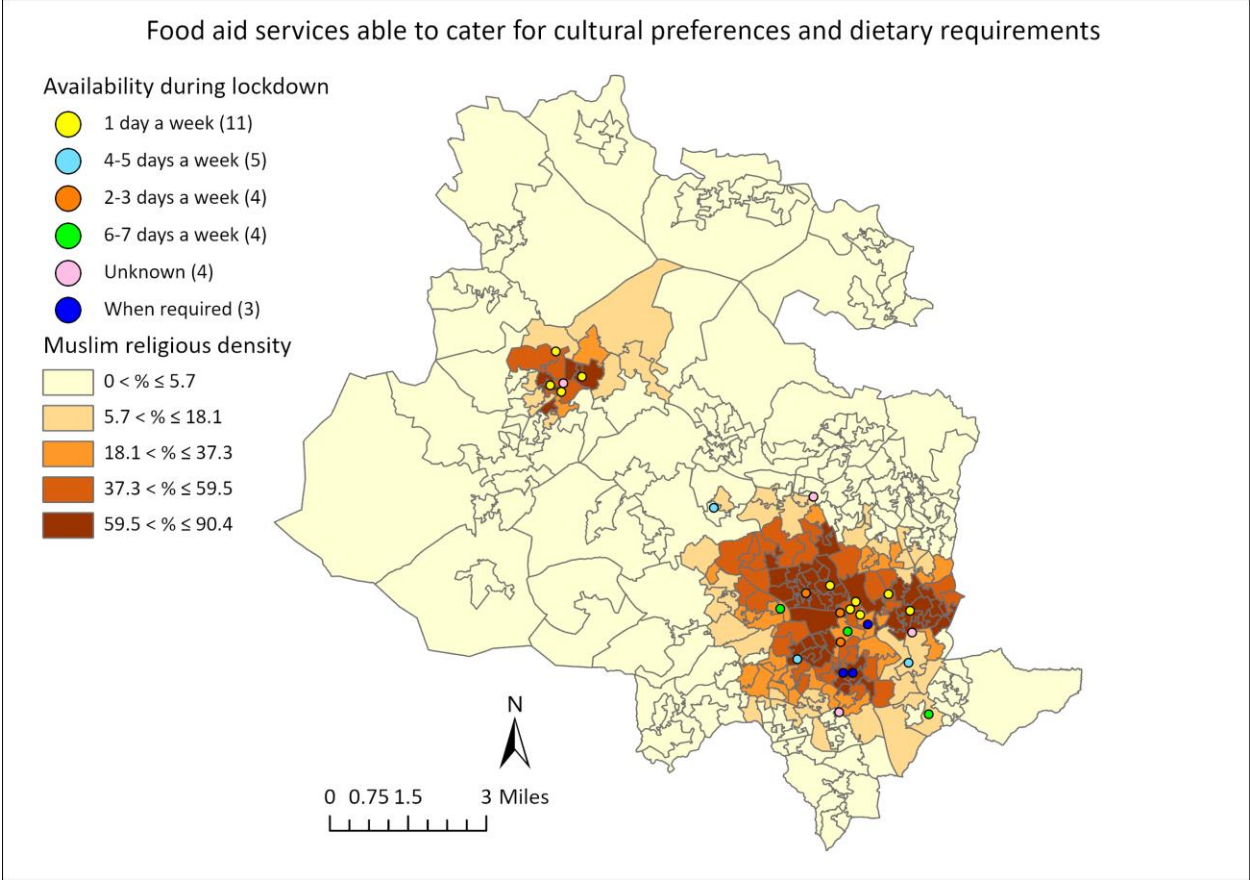


Figure 6. The geographical distribution of Muslim ethnic density of Lower Layer Super Output Areas in Bradford and the spatial allocation of organisations with an ability to offer culturally appropriate food.

In the LSOAs with the greatest Muslim religious density, there was a disassociation between the needs of the local population and the availability of culturally appropriate food aid provision, particularly in the most populated central areas. Despite a quarter of Bradford’s population identifying as Muslim, just 9% of food aid services identified were Muslim. Additionally, other faith-based and secular food aid providers were unable to confirm a reliable ability to offer food provision according to dietary requirements or cultural needs. Forty nine percent of Christian organisations (n=23) stated no ability to provide culturally appropriate food or that ability was dependent on donations. 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 other vulnerabilities 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 setting 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 to 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 limited.

Limitations of method and implications for data collected

Given the current dynamic situation, the data outlined in this 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 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), 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 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. For instance, it is unknown whether 22% (n=31) of services operating during lockdown were set up in response to the pandemic or whether they existed pre-COVID-19. Additionally, no information regarding the specific availability of 26% (n=37) of services was obtained during survey interviews, in particular regarding the specific operations of parcel delivery services (n=17). Only 50% of organisations surveyed provided a response regarding their ability to provide culturally appropriate food leaving the catering ability of 69 organisations unknown. The findings outlined in this report may, therefore, not reflect the precise extent of operations responding to food insecurity in Bradford, the specific details of their availability, or their ability to tailor food provision to cultural preferences and dietary requirements.

The data which informed this service evaluation was derived from Bradford Metropolitan District Council and Feeding Bradford and Keighley. It is likely the organisations included in the datasets provided are of those which follow a reliable structure of food provision and are formally recognised. The basis of who to contact in regard to investigating Bradford's provision of food aid was often dependent on common knowledge of the organisations that the research team spoke with. For instance, the team had less communication with Mosques compared to Churches, possibly resulting in the under-representation of Muslim food aid provision. In addition, our ability to make contact was dependent upon obtaining details through internet searches. The use of online forms as a method of communication resulted in poor response rates. Moreover, the number of community food assets surveyed was subject to the availability of a phone number or email address connected to the organisation. A lack of formal communication and/or a language barrier could be contributory factors to findings potentially

ignoring smaller-scale, ad-hoc, informal provision, possibly provided by or targeted towards the South Asian community. Faith-based organisations known to the council and Feeding Bradford were predominantly White and Christian and therefore intelligence of alternative organisations to contact in order to uncover other potential food aid providers was limited. Thus, findings outlined in this report may not represent the true range of food aid provision in Bradford.

It is further noted that the most recent census was conducted nine years ago with a total population estimate for the Bradford District of 522,452. More recent ONS data suggests the total population size was 539,976 in 2019, an increase of 3% [17]. The ethnic and religious proportions in the Bradford District illustrated throughout this report may not reflect population changes since the last census was conducted. Whilst this report outlines variation between the religious affiliation of food aid and the religious demography of the local population, it is worth noting that the inclusiveness of a type of food aid service or organisation cannot be concluded without sufficient information regarding the actual service users of food aid, the types (and mechanisms) for referral, and the degree to which users feel able to access their preferred service.

Conclusion and recommendations

This report offers an overview of community food assets in Bradford, including how they 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 Bradford District, of which 139 remained operational throughout the first lockdown (March to June 2020). Organisations most likely to close were those providing social and 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.

Fifty nine 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 extent to which food aid was representative of and able to meet the needs of the local multi-ethnic, multi-faith population.

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 restrictions, recommendations based on this 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

- 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 and promoting awareness of differing cultural needs).
- Increase intelligence (alongside stakeholders and informal and formal food aid providers) to better understand food aid provision, including availability and geographical positioning, referral pathways, funding needs and the degree to which assets meet the needs of Bradford's multi-faith population.⁴

⁴ A new web-based access system for food projects created by The Storehouse is an important resource facilitating understanding of and access to community food aid. See: <https://bradfordfoodbanks.org.uk/>

- Improve the availability and awareness 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.
- Develop a long-term strategy to improve the availability of welfare advice within the food aid setting to tackle the reasons for food aid use.
- 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

- Where possible, improve provision for dietary and cultural needs; work with multiple faith groups to improve understanding of and address barriers to inclusion.
- Work in partnership with the local authority to reduce reliance on food aid, for instance by partnering with other agencies to provide advice and support with benefits within the food aid site.

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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?
