

S2 Food Poverty Network- Newsletter No 12, March 2025



Welcome to the twelfth newsletter. I make updates every couple of months following our Trustees'/ Managers' meeting.

I begin by repeating a plea made in each newsletter:-

- If you are a regular donor, please send your contact email address to me. Please also indicate whether you would like a personal invitation to see Food Bank at work. My email address is: jtrhull@outlook.com

This plea has already solicited supportive, interesting replies. Several long-standing donors have taken up my invitation to visit Food Bank and Shop and see them in operation. I now send a personal e-copy of this Newsletter to some 30 donors who have made contact.

The Trustees/Managers met in January and in February. The second meeting focussed on financial issues. This Newsletter will explain the issues and decisions.

1. Our rich data

We keep very good, but simple, data. We use the data to monitor our impact. My last Newsletter (No 11) gave summary of the full (2024) year.

1a. Incoming food and items to Food Bank and Shop (kilograms)

January 2025: 947.6 donated: 1153.9 sourced from Fareshare: 2069.8 purchased: Total 4171.3.

These totals, in each case, are slightly lower than January 2024.

1b. Numbers of clients being fed

The numbers below of children and adults "being fed" are calculated by the number of weeks a client comes to Food Bank or Shop and the number of people in their household. Thus a client with a family of 3 coming for 4 weeks counts as 12 "people fed".

In January 2025 we have "fed":-

	Foodbank	Community Shop	Total Fed
Jan	207 (193)	580 (468)	787 (661)

The figures in brackets are for January 2024. The number of clients being fed is greater than a year ago.

2. Reviewing numbers and reasons for referral

We had 43 new referrals in January 2025. 22 were from professionals and 21 were self-referrals. The pattern in the reasons for referral was similar to the recent past:-

15 cited money issues, 10 cited debts, 10 were unemployed, 4 had benefit issues, 2 were homeless, 1 had a disability issue and 1 was avoiding domestic violence.

18 declared a mental health issue and 5 a physical health issue.

3. Monitoring our attempts to address causes of food poverty

We reviewed our developed strategies. A condition of Community Shop membership is that each client explains clearly his/her reasons for food poverty and then agrees, if appropriate, to work with our debt mentors and/or with our benefit worker.

- **Debt Advice:**

We are currently working with 52 clients using the Community Money Advice systems. 18 Debt Relief Orders are now completed. The 3 DROs agreed in January, wrote off £36,375 of debt.

The 52 live cases show, collectively, a staggering £416,892 of debt. Of that figure we classify £131,588 as “priority debts”. These are debts (gas, electric, rent) which, if left unpaid, carry risk of eviction or disconnection. These must be addressed first.

Including the cases where Debt Relief Orders have been given, 30 cases were closed in 2024. A case closes when a realistic plan to manage remaining debts is agreed. £154,716 of debts from 18 cases were officially “written off” in 2024. We are still working on (£150,083) 10 cases.

Interestingly, over 60% of those we are advising on debt are female, 62% are aged over 40, and 9 have some employment.

- **Benefit Worker:**

Previously, we employed an expert Benefit Worker through a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Manor and Castle Development Trust. He looked into eligibility for Discretionary Housing Payments, Personal Independence Payments, Limited capability for Work allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Council Tax Support and Housing Support Fund.

The SLA was always seen, by us, as temporary and has now ended. We thank Steve, from MCDT, from whom we have learned a great deal. We shall

continue his work through the endeavours of our own volunteers. One volunteer will link with Household Support Fund; two will pursue fuel vouchers. We have a volunteer with legal background. He will help with Personal Independence Payment claims.

4. Community Shop update

Most often clients, on leaving Food Bank after 4 weeks' help, join the Shop. Thus in January there were 4 new shop members. 5 ex-Food Bank did not transfer. They declined appointments to which they would bring evidence of continued hardship.

5 clients left the Shop in January. 2 had gained PIP (Personal Independence Payments). 2 had found work. 1 moved out of S2.

Our Volunteers conducted in January 9 reviews of Shop members.

5. Overview of finances

Our budgeting year aligns with the calendar year. Donations of food are lower now than last year and the number of clients we help is fairly stable.

For the last two years (2023-4) we set deficit budgets. We did not want to "sit on" reserves we had built up during Covid. In 2024 we had spent additionally on equipping and refurbishing the new Community Shop, on expert staffing to secure benefit entitlements, and on supporting other food-related initiatives across our S2 area ("extending our reach"). In retrospect, we believe that we have delivered well on our strategic objectives of better addressing the underlying causes of food poverty in our area.

In the coming months, we know we shall face financial pressures. Food costs rise, National Insurance costs rise, utility costs for Shop and to the Church will rise. Trustees are, however, very clear: we want to safeguard the high quality food offers of Food Bank and Shop.

We have agreed a, more modest, deficit budget for 2025. The Trustees, meeting in early February, looked closely at budget and reserves. These are four key decisions:-

- a. To pursue with Sheffield Council a move to a "peppercorn rent" for the Shop premises. Currently we pay £6,000 rent for the shop premises.
- b. To establish a Finance and Resources Group of Trustees. This will meet in the month between our full Trustee bimonthly meetings. It will focus on key performance indicators and sustainability.
- c. To ask John Hull and John Le Corney to pursue grants from relevant charities.

- d. To develop a “succession” plan for the anticipated retirement of three key colleagues in January 2026.

6. A little more on pursuit of grants

Our finances were healthy as we emerged from Covid. We have set now the third deficit budget. We have, however, spent significantly on establishing and maintaining the Shop. We see this initiative, with the work on debts and benefits access, which address the underlying causes of the food poverty, as major priority.

We have decided that now is the time to resume the pursuit of grants. We are seeking help with upkeep (fuel, rent, rates, maintenance) of the Community Shop.

We benefit already from the **Coop Local Community Fund**. We have submitted an application to the **National Lottery Awards for All**.

We have submitted applications to five other charities with local roots: **Sheffield Town Trust, Graves Trust, Sheffield Church Burgesses, Freshgate, and Brelms Trust**.

Quite rightly these charities work together and confer. They expect applicants to submit severally. They set (usually quarterly) different submission dates. We now await their judgments.

My Newsletter will keep you posted on the responses.

JTRH, 1st March 2025.