

S2 Food Poverty Network- Newsletter No 1, May 2023



Let me introduce myself. I am John Hull and I am the Chair of the S2 Food Poverty Network. I am privileged to work with our wonderful, dedicated volunteers and to help the good people of S2.

There are two very good reasons for starting to post regular reports on our work. First, it is simply to keep you better informed about issues, strategies and progress.

It is, secondly, to address a problem. When beginning, some seven years ago, we did not collect email addresses when we encouraged people to set up standing orders. So now, we have no means of contacting people to say, "Thanks".

If you are a standing order 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

Our Network Management Group meets every two months. From now on I plan, after each meeting, to update this "post" so you can read about our decisions and issues. We last met on 15th May 2023.

At each meeting we review key comparative monthly data. In April S2 Food Bank helped 466 clients as compared to 267 in April 2022 and Food Club had 314 members as against 105 in April last year. You can therefore see that demand is very much "up".

Whilst demand is increasing, donations are somewhat down. In April 2022 we received 2387kg in donations. This April the figure was 1177kg.

Our financial position is secure. We have adequate financial reserves. The health of these reserves reflects both a reduction in demand during COVID lockdowns, when other sources of food were provided nationally and locally, and our very effective pursuit of enhanced grant fundings both before and during the COVID period.

We are very much trying to find the right balance between funding strategic innovation and holding onto reserves whilst demand rises unpredictably and inflation is stubbornly high. Therefore, we set a deficit budget for 2023 expecting, over this year, significantly to reduce our reserves but in a careful fashion.

Setting the deficit budget gave us facility to help many clients who last winter experienced, as well as food poverty, fuel poverty. We know our clients well: we identified carefully those eligible. We spent £5830 in gas/electric top-ups. We have sufficient reserves to provide similar support next winter.

Let me say a little now about strategic innovation. We keep good data on numbers helped, size and shape of households, and on the causes, for each client, of how they were tipped into food crisis. We are determined, as far as possible, to address the causes of these food crises. By far the greatest tipping factor is debt.

Our two-fold innovation is:

- (a) to open a Community Food Shop across the road from St. Swithun's Church, which will provide subsidised food both as a follow-on from Food Club provision and may also act as a preventative alternative in some cases to referral to the Food Bank
- (b) to provide effective debt mentoring and budgeting advice. We are working with Community Money Advice (CMA) to train selected Food Bank volunteers as debt mentors.



There are strong reasons for choosing to work with CMA. It provides a new alternative to working with Citizens' Advice, formerly a good service that is now in difficulty. Citizen's Advice is currently understaffed, has problems recruiting and has a training backlog.

We need, however, to continue to be careful with our reserves for two reasons. We have unpredictable costs in establishing and running the new shop. Secondly, we are seeing a real spike in demand.

My main aims in making this report were to establish lost contact with some of our many fine donors and to explain briefly current new initiatives giving some financial context. I'll add a little about other items on our May agenda.

We are currently conducting an audit on our use, and recycling of, plastics. We also discussed early learning from the newly opened Food Shop. We discussed the formal opening of the Shop planned for mid-June.

John Hull, 18th May 2023