

Food insecurity in Suffolk

November 2021

Contents

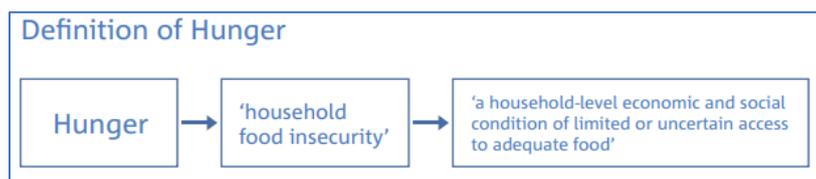
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Introduction

Food insecurity refers to limited access to nutritionally adequate and safe food. This may be due to a variety of reasons but is often largely driven by financial circumstances. Food insecurity can be associated with increased in cost of living and people living in relative poverty, and where the cost of participating in societies social norms is beyond reach. As poverty increases there is a notable increase in the numbers of foodbanks/providers and food crisis support as the demand placed upon such organisations. Food insecurity can range in severity from worry about the ability to obtain food (classified as 'mild food insecurity'), to reduction of food intake, skipping meals and hunger (moderate and severe food insecurity). Food insecurity is often interlinked with other factors. For example, people reporting poor health were six times more likely to be food insecure than people reporting 'excellent' health¹.

The Trussell Trust State of Hunger report has defined hunger as 'household food insecurity' (see image below). In doing this, hunger captures a range of experiences falling under the categories of severe or moderate household food insecurity.

A broad definition of hunger²:



Who is most likely to experience food insecurity?

Food insecurity is a symptom of poverty, particularly deeper poverty. However a lack of food as just one aspect of wider poverty rather than as a stand-alone phenomenon². There are certain groups that are more likely to be experiencing food insecurity, these are summarised below:



- The prevalence of overall food insecurity was **highest among adults aged between 25 and 34 at 9.4%**.
- People of **pension age had a lower risk of being food insecure** (2.4% among people aged between 65 and 74, 0.8% among people aged over 75).



- **Food insecurity was highest among lone parents** (9%), followed by single people living alone (8%), couples with children (4%) and couples without children (2%). The pattern was the same for severe food insecurity.



- **Food insecurity was higher among unemployed people (10%)** than among the employed or self-employed (4%).
- **Food insecurity was higher among ethnic minority respondents (8%)** than among white respondents (4%).



- People reporting poor health were six times more likely to be food insecure than people reporting 'excellent' health.
- **Food insecurity was also higher among people with a long-term health condition (6%)** than among people without (3%). The pattern was the same for severe food insecurity.

Source and image credit: ¹

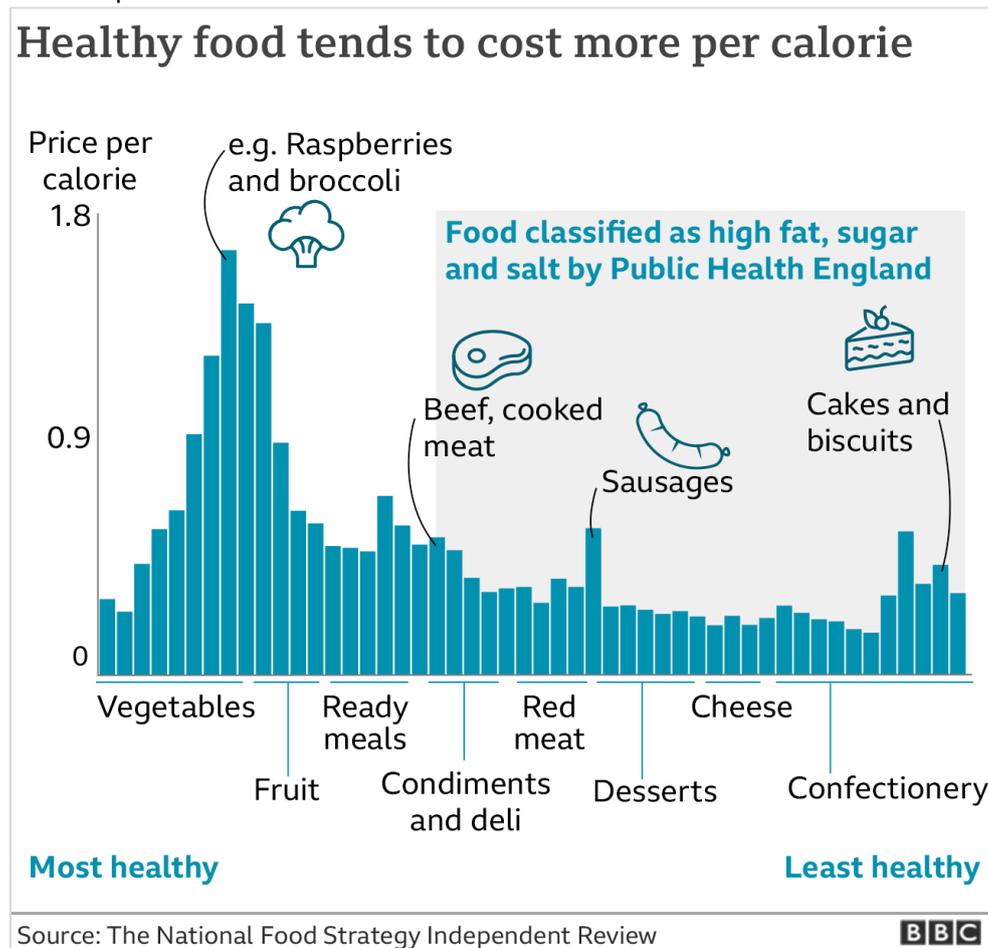
It is also acknowledged that for many, their food 'budget' may be seen as having more flexibility than other bills. For example, if a household has a sudden reduction in income, outgoings in terms of paying council tax or heating are often less flexible than spending on food. Therefore, food spending is often the first thing to get cut, resulting in either lower food consumption, and/or compromising on the healthiness of food. An increase in applications for Free School Meals (FSM) is also associated with an increase in the cost of living. Children on FSM in Suffolk have increased by over a third in the last 18 months.

Findings from the National Food Strategy Independent Review show that calorie for calorie, highly processed foods – high in salt, refined carbohydrates, sugar and fats, and low in fibre – are on average three times cheaper per calorie than healthier foods³ (also see BBC visualisation below).

The National Food Strategy asserts³:

“... obesity sometimes co-exists with hunger. Bad diets are, per calorie, much cheaper than healthy diets. The same households that cannot afford to eat healthily may sometimes find themselves struggling to put food on the table.”

The cost per calorie of different foods:



Source: ^{3,4}

The National Food Strategy also notes that the economic disruption caused by the pandemic has increased the number of households struggling to put food on the table. Asserting that these people cannot wait around for the food system to be fixed: they need help now, with the first priority being children.

Food insecurity and COVID-19

The impact of COVID-19 must be considered in relation to food insecurity. For many, food insecurity and COVID-19 were managed alongside other challenges such as: job insecurity/job loss, caring responsibilities, declining or poor health/mental health, domestic violence and debt⁵.

The Food Standard Agency (FSA) conducted qualitative research into the lived experience of food insecurity under COVID-19 in June 2020 and their report states⁵:

“COVID-19 rapidly worsened insecurity for those who were already missing meals and/or compromising nutritional quality previously, and rapidly tipped those ‘just managing’ into insecurity”.

The FSA note that in the UK⁵:

- Food insecurity has more than doubled under COVID-19 and lockdown
- Food insecurity levels in May 2020 were 250% higher than pre-COVID
- Approximately 16% of people have skipped meals/cut meal sizes for financial reasons
- As of June 2020, 1 in 4 young people under 25 were experiencing food insecurity

Drivers of risk and vulnerability include⁵:

- The inability to build and draw on financial safety nets
- Working without full time, reliable salaries
- Working in sectors that could not ‘move remote’ when COVID-19 hit
- Caring responsibilities which limited income potential and raised outgoings
- Health and mental health challenges
- Domestic violence and abuse

In addition to this, rising basic costs under COVID-19 and lock-down added to challenges. For example, increased utility bills, caring for children at home, lack of social food sharing, paying for delivery charges on top of shopping and reduced access to budget shops to name a few.

The complexity of the physical, emotional, social and financial challenges experienced by individuals are highlighted below⁵:

- Caloric intake, nutritional quality and variety had reduced – Many people were subsisting mostly on tinned food, frozen food, or simple carbohydrates (bread, pasta and rice).
- Many were skipping meals and going hungry regularly.
- Some showed potential signs of malnutrition - for example, regularly feeling fatigued, sluggish or poorly.
- Many were putting on weight, even as they ate much less, raising concerns about links between obesity and COVID-19’s more severe symptoms.
- Stress, anxiety, overwhelm and depression were serious issues for many; wellbeing suffered, and existing mental health issues worsened.
- Many with food intolerances were unable to afford foods used to manage their health (e.g., gluten free), with negative physical and emotional impact.
- Some were compromising on food safety - e.g. ‘stretching’ labelling advice around use-by dates, raising risks of food poisoning.
- People lost the small comforts that provided a sense of stability under COVID-19; eating only for basic sustenance.
- Some spoke of reduced family contact time over meals: there was little sense of social ‘sharing’ when serving toast for a second ‘meal’ of the day.
- Celebratory meals, like birthdays or Sunday dinners, were cancelled - eliminating ‘small pleasures’ that would otherwise provide useful distraction.

- Food insecure parents were particularly affected, juggling many financial and emotional challenges daily. Managing food insecurity, COVID-19, income loss and other stresses for themselves plus their children was a heavy burden”.
- The Health Foundation note that in April 2020, 2 million children nationally experienced food insecurity, and that in addition school closures meant missed learning as well as the loss of important sources of emotional support⁶.

Additional information about contextual factors influencing food insecurity

Universal Credit

Universal Credit (UC) is a benefit for working-age people, to help them with the cost of living. People in receipt of UC may be in or out of work. In April 2020, the UC payment was temporarily increased by £20 a week – to help those struggling during COVID-19 with a little extra in their UC payment. Whilst this was initially due to end in March 2021, an extension of this payment uplift was extended to September 2021⁷. At the time of writing, the government has removed the UC uplift, and UC remains at pre covid levels.

Whilst the increase was welcomed, many called for this increase to be made permanent, to avoid people being worse off again when the uplift ended^{8,9}. The Trussell Trust also note that if the uplift had been applied across all main income replacement benefits (UC/Job Seekers Allowance (JSA)/ Employment Support Allowance (ESA)/ Income Support (IS)) it would have reduced the number of food parcels distributed by foodbanks in the Trussell Trust network in 2020/21 by around 30% (or 1,375 food parcels in a typical local authority)¹.

In work poverty

In May 2021 the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) published a report¹⁰ looking at the rise of in work poverty. The report found that rising house costs for those on low incomes has become a key driver of working poverty in recent years. They note that housing costs for private tenants have risen by almost half (48%) in real terms over 25 years, contributing to widening inequality by ‘locking out’ working families. For those needing social support, (housing support in particular) is failing to keep up with runaway rents in the private sector for those on low incomes, particularly for families with children.

The IPPR assert that whilst a key notion that the main route out of poverty is through jobs and employment, in reality this is not enough to lift people out of poverty and ‘level up’. Their research found that even in homes with two people working full time, the chances of being pulled into poverty have doubled, rising from 1.4% to 3.9%¹⁰.

The report also notes the increasing need to have two parents in regular work to avoid poverty for those on modest incomes. This coupled with a lack of flexible and affordable childcare, as well as accessible and flexible or part-time work, is also a growing and neglected cause of in work poverty¹⁰.

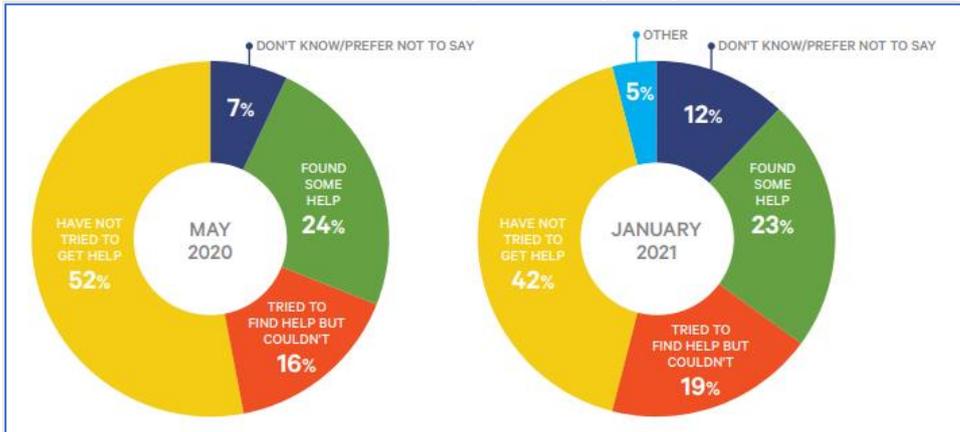
Support

The Food Foundation survey collected data from seven rounds of nationally representative UK-wide surveys to monitor levels of food insecurity impacted by COVID-19. Feedback gathered from the Food Foundation surveys summarises⁹:

- Despite vital emergency measures in place, more people are food insecure now than before the pandemic
- Households with children have been hit hard, with many children still falling through the cracks in support.
- Existing support schemes (furlough/ UC top up) have made a difference, but gaps have meant many people still struggle to eat adequately.
- COVID-19 has dramatically widened inequalities in food security and nutrition.

Another key finding within the Food Foundation survey is that a large proportion of people have not tried to get help and have continued to struggle on their own (52% in May 2020, 42% in January 2021), with stigma being widely reported as a reason why people don’t reach out for help. Also, an important figure is the percentage of respondents that tried to find help but couldn’t, increasing from 16% to 19% over the same time. This indicates there unmet need in those experiencing food insecurity.

How food insecure households have experienced getting help ("Other" not an option asked in May 2020):

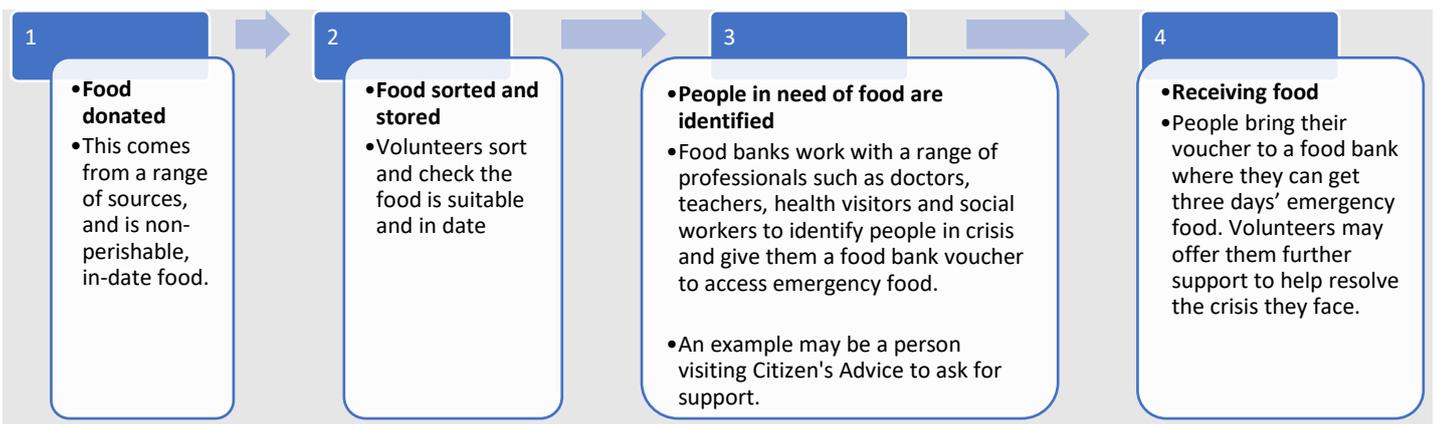


Source and image credit: ⁹

Foodbanks and food insecurity

Foodbanks help people who are struggling to afford the essentials to live, and those experiencing food insecurity and food poverty. They are reliant on food being donated and are dependent on volunteers to operate the foodbank.

How foodbanks work in principle¹¹:



Whilst the list above shows how the process should work in its 'formal' sense, there is recognition that this may not be the case on the ground. Local evidence indicates many people turn up to foodbank or foodbank style venues without a voucher, and that a there are a lot of Suffolk foodbanks do not operate by a voucher system.

Foodbanks are not new, but have gained increased publicity over recent years, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, as larger numbers of individuals and families struggled with employment and income. The first UK Trussell Trust foodbank was established in 2000 in Salisbury¹², but charitable organisations dispensing food and food parcels pre-date this by many years. Even prior to the pandemic, concerns were being raised around the 'institutionalisation' of foodbanks, and about them becoming embedded as part of the welfare system¹³.

Reasons for referral

Economic need drives foodbank use- not having enough money to buy food once essential bills have been paid¹. Almost all people referred to foodbanks meet the definition of being destitute, but they are also deprived on other dimensions, such as being in considerable debt or experiencing homelessness¹.

Nationally, The Trussell Trust note that the primary referral causes in 2019-20 to their foodbanks were:

1. Low income (39%)
2. Benefit delays (17%)
3. Benefit Changes (15%)

The Trussell Trust note that “**it takes more than food to end hunger**”¹¹, and that their foodbanks are encouraged to also provide people with practical and compassionate support, to tackle root causes locking people into poverty.

In the 2021 report, the Trussell Trust highlight that akin to 2019, not having sufficient income from the social security safety net is the first and most significant factor driving extreme economic need. However, they also noted two other ‘background’ factors that were associated with foodbank use and compounded the impact of low income and benefit problems¹:

- ill-health or adverse life experiences (such as household separation or eviction)
- lack of informal and/or formal support

Interlinked with these findings, one of the key findings from the 2021 State of Hunger report was that there was a sharp increase in the share of people owing money to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). From 26% in late 2018 to 38% in early 2020 and 47% in mid-2020. **The DWP had become the main creditor to people referred to foodbanks.**

In Suffolk, some of the reasons noted for using foodbanks include *(no percentage breakdowns available)*¹⁴:

- Waiting for benefits to start
- Unemployed
- Furloughed/ reduced hours
- Asylum/Immigration –no recourse to public funds
- Family/Short-term crisis
- Debt
- Sickness
- Do not meet criteria for crisis support
- Benefits stopped or changed
- Increased utility bills –home schooling/shielding
- Domestic abuse (financial control, change of circumstances)

National foodbank use pre and post COVID-19

Research published in 2019 found that people who have been referred to a foodbank²:

- have an average weekly income after housing costs of just £50
- cannot afford to buy the absolute essentials that we all need to eat, stay warm and dry, and keep clean – with 94% facing **real** destitution
- have a household income that was about the same as their housing costs
- have problems with the benefit system, with over two-thirds reporting issues with the system in the last year
- are very likely to have health issues – with nearly 75% reporting at least one health issue
- are very likely to be facing long-term crisis

Whilst there will be an existing cohort of foodbank users pre-pandemic, reporting also highlights the emergence of new users to foodbanks, that pre COVID-19 were in good jobs and enjoying comfortable incomes⁸. The Guardian notes that the emergence of this ‘newly hungry’ cohort in the wake of COVID-19 highlights the presence of [gaps in the safety net](#) for self-employed people who have not qualified for government welfare support, and those who found subsistence-level universal credit payments [were not enough](#) to meet essential living expenses.

Data from the 2021 State of Hunger report indicates¹:

- 40% of foodbank visits in mid-2020 were mainly due to the pandemic, indicating people who had newly found themselves in crisis. However, half of visits were made by people who had also used a foodbank before the pandemic, underlining the significance of persistent or recurrent severe poverty.
- Food banks in the Trussell Trust network distributed 18% more food parcels in the financial year 2019/20 compared to the number in 2018/19.

- During the COVID-19 lockdown in spring 2020, foodbanks in the Trussell Trust network experienced an unprecedented growth in the need for food parcels. The number of food parcels distributed in the Trussell Trust network in April 2020 was 84% higher than in February 2020.
- 95% of people referred to foodbanks are destitute.
- The socio-demographic profiles of people who report food insecurity and people who were referred to foodbanks in the Trussell Trust network were very similar. The most striking disparity in the two sets of profiles are people aged 16-24 who report high levels of food insecurity but low levels of referrals to foodbanks.
- The proportion of couples with children referred to a foodbank increased from 19% in early 2020 to 24% during the COVID-19 pandemic in mid-2020.
- **Importantly, the report notes that modelling indicates the vast majority of the increase in provision of food parcels is a result of increased underlying need rather than the growth in the number of foodbanks.**

Local data and intelligence

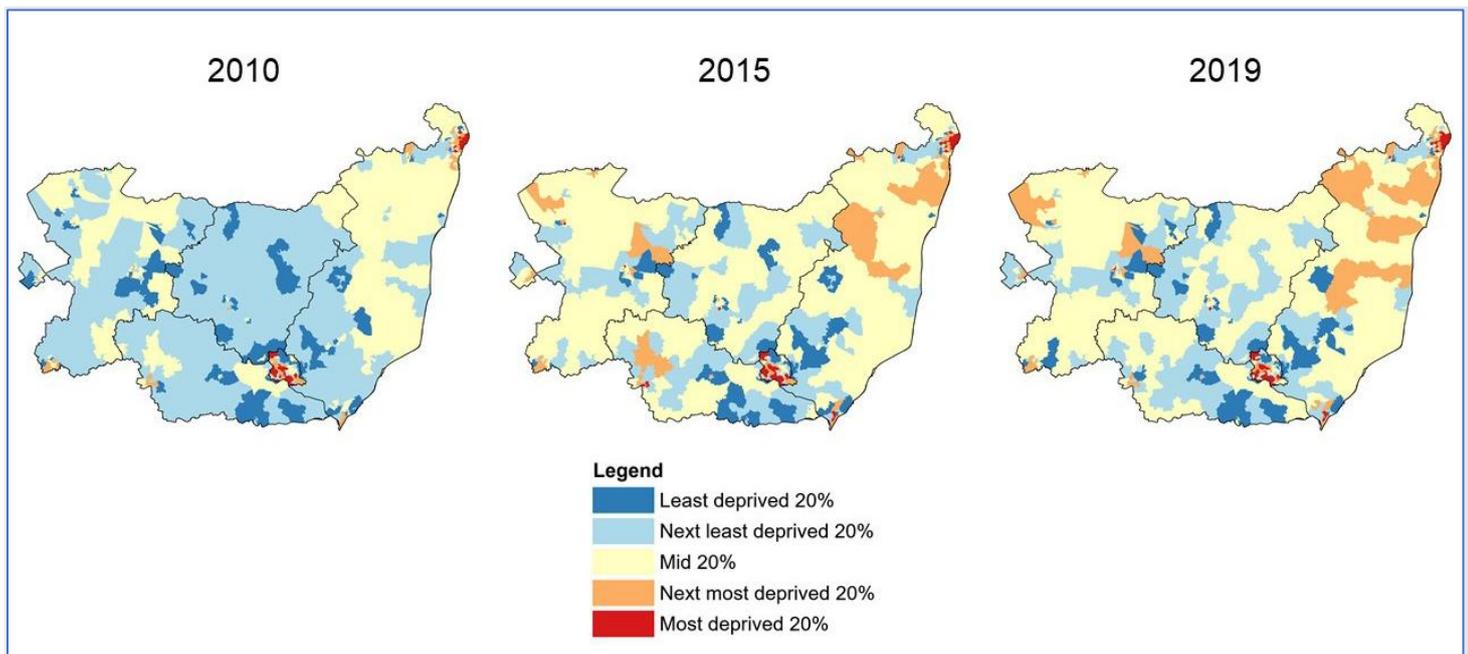
Deprivation in Suffolk

For many people living in Suffolk, the area is a safe, secure and welcoming place to live. For some Suffolk residents life is more challenging, and households may struggle with limited income, insecure housing, declining health and may even feel unsafe in their homes. This section explores some of the key drivers of food insecurity.

Income deprivation is a key driver of food insecurity, and foodbank use. National data indicates the average household income of people referred to foodbanks was around 13% of the national average¹⁵. In early 2020, the average monthly household income after housing costs for people who needed to use a foodbank was £248 on average, or £8 a day for a couple without children¹⁵.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation, commonly known as the IMD, is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in England. In 2019 (the latest available data), the dramatic decline in relative deprivation seen in Suffolk between 2010 and 2015 was not repeated, but neither has there been much of a recovery in Suffolk’s relative position. In 2019, Ipswich was the most deprived local authority in Suffolk. However, the revision of lower tier local authorities (merging Suffolk Coastal and Waveney local authorities into East Suffolk in particular), has masked higher levels of deprivation in Lowestoft (depicted in red in the maps below).

Deprivation by small areas in Suffolk in 2010, 2015 and 2019:



Source: ¹⁶

There are other measures that can be explored when looking at deprivation and poverty in Suffolk. These pre-date the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated many pre-existing inequalities. However, they do provide an overall indicator of potential need in Suffolk:

- **2019 data indicates 14.5% of households were experiencing fuel poverty.** Meaning they have high fuel costs to heat their home – these costs are so high that paying these would put their residual income below the poverty line¹⁷. The highest percentage of households in fuel poverty is in Ipswich (17.3%) but the highest number of households is in East Suffolk (16,181).
- **2018/19 data indicates 13.1% of children under 16 live in absolute low income families in Suffolk, and 16.7% live in relative low income families¹⁸.** The immediate impact of living in a low-income family may be restriction of food, and essentials to live and thrive at school and home. However, there is evidence that childhood poverty leads to premature mortality and poor health outcomes for adults, and that they have been exposed to a range of risks that can have a serious impact on their mental health.
- **2019/20 data indicates a 9.8 percentage point gap in the employment rate for those with a long-term condition¹⁸.** The evidence tells us that work is generally good for both physical and mental health and wellbeing. Individuals that are unable to work due to their health are at risk of low income as well as poorer physical and mental health.
- **2017-2019 data indicates that inequalities persist in the resident population.** An example of this is using the slope index of inequality. This data indicates a gap in life expectancy of 7 years for males living in the most deprived areas of Suffolk compared to the least deprived areas¹⁸. For females, the gap is 5 years.

There are several key drivers that can act to reduce poverty including¹⁴:

- Increasing employment can reduce poverty, as more people have additional income from work
- A decrease in housing costs for poorer households (e.g. through access to more affordable housing, or a rise in income that outpaces the rise in rental cost/ mortgage cost) can reduce poverty
- Benefits increasing faster than earnings can reduce poverty
- High earnings growth can reduce poverty if those with low incomes see their earnings grow at least as fast as median earners

However, both national and local data indicates that all these factors have been **negatively impacted by COVID-19**.

The impact of COVID-19

The impact of COVID-19 upon all areas of life has been felt internationally, and there have been noticeable impacts at a local level as well. The information below provides a very brief synopsis of the current known impacts of COVID-19 in Suffolk in relation to health, wellbeing and the wider economy. The following information has been extracted from analysis undertaken by the Suffolk Office for Data and Analytics (SODA)¹⁴.

Health and wellbeing impact

- The health burden of COVID-19 on our Suffolk communities has been very significant overall, with over 1,500 deaths being registered (as of July 2021). However, COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on certain groups, with those over aged over 65, women, those classed as overweight / obese, and those in lower socio-economic groups, being more affected by COVID. In addition, several mental health and wellbeing factors have declined across the past year.
- A positive impact has been individuals and communities coming together to support each other, with numbers of informal and formal volunteering rising across the past year. Community Action Suffolk note that over 1,000 community groups, businesses and organisations offered help at the height of the pandemic. 620 if these were mutual aid type groups with a conservative average of 20 volunteers per group (equating to roughly 10,000 volunteers across Suffolk). Although, some feedback received informally as part of compiling this report highlighted that some areas reported a loss in the 'sense of community'. They reported that the 'element of community dropped after the first lockdown and hasn't recovered'.

Free school meals

The National Food Strategy³ notes that whilst in Key Stage 1 (Reception to Year 2) all children receive free school meals (FSM), after this point the eligibility threshold is set at an annual household income of less than £7,400 before benefits. The report notes: **“In other words, you have to be extremely poor to qualify. This means there are some children from low-income households going hungry”**³.

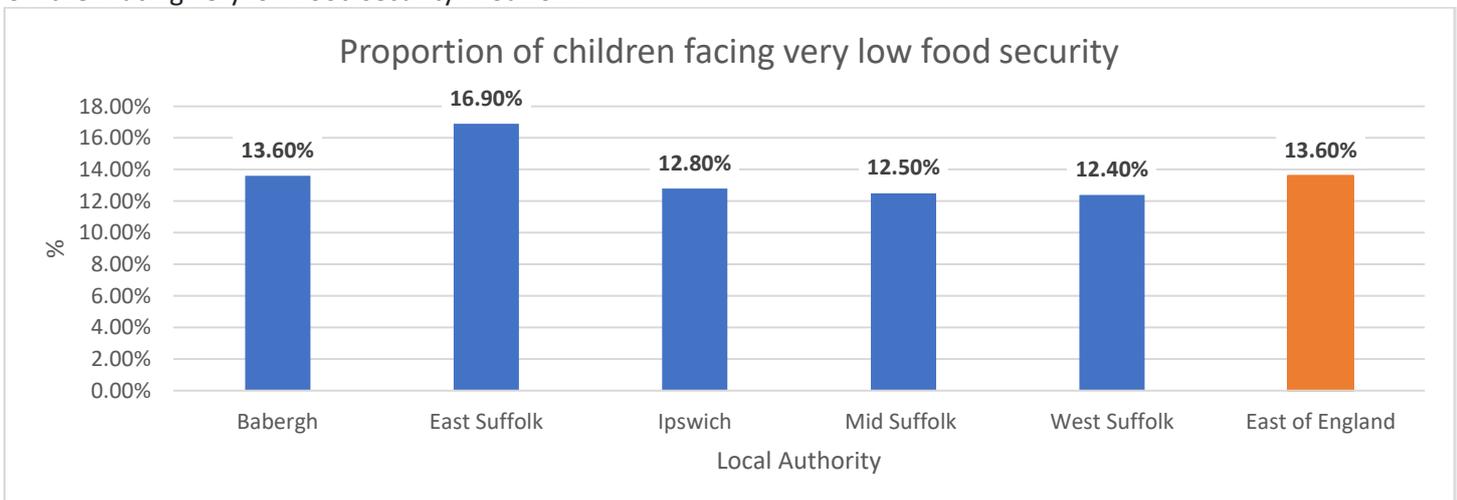
- The Health Foundation note there was great concern during the pandemic around food provision for children and young people who would usually receive free school meals. Widespread media reports challenged the adequacy and nutritional value of the food parcels provided in their place⁶.
 - The numbers of children eligible for FSM has increased at a rate faster than prior to the pandemic. Between 2019 and 2020 there was a 14% increase, but between 2020 and 2021 there was a 21% increase in numbers. Some of the increase pre-pandemic (between 2019-2020) can be attributed to work the Suffolk County Council Free School Meals team have undertaken to ensure people eligible for FSM are taking up the offer. This included:
 - reception year eligibility checks
 - liaising with the Early Years team to get data to check those moving into Reception,
 - Whole School Checks,
 - a quick and easy application process,
 - posters in the most spoken languages in Suffolk (Bangladeshi, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian) These have been very useful in encouraging and helping those who may not speak English as a first language to apply.
 - A large increase has been observed in the reception checks in particular; previously a lot of parents would not have applied because they assumed their child would get it automatically (Universal Infant Free School Meals). By getting parents and carers to apply when filling in all the other paperwork needed for school has really helped Suffolk schools and increased their pupil premium.

Number of children eligible for free school meals in Suffolk 2019-2021:



In December 2020, the Social Market Foundation note that whilst there is no single method for measuring food insecurity, modelled estimates of children facing very low food security can be calculated¹⁹. Based on this modelled data, East Suffolk has the highest percentage of children with very low food security (16.9%) with the average for the East of England being 13.6%

Children facing very low food security in Suffolk:



Source: ¹⁹

Their reporting also notes:

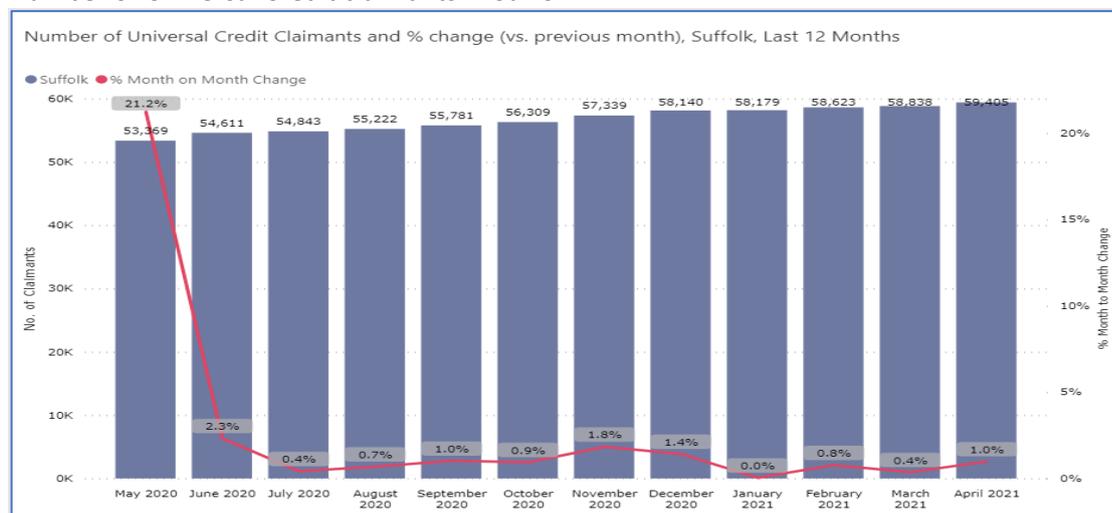
- One in four children have faced some form of food insecurity in the six months following lockdown.
 - 16% of parents said that their children made do with smaller portions, had to skip meals or went a day without eating between March and September.
 - 24% said they had had to rely on only a few kinds of low-cost food.
 - 18% said that they couldn't afford balanced meals and that their child was not eating enough.
 - 7% said their child went hungry.
- Very low food security is more common and rose significantly for children with parents working in hospitality and leisure, retail and construction – all sectors badly hit by economic shutdowns.
- Of the children entering very low food security in 2020, 61% had parents whose wages had fallen (compared to 25% for those that did not enter very low food security), 44% had parents whose working hours had been cut and 24% had parents that lost a job.
- Younger parents were more likely to report very low food security, with just under a quarter of those aged under 35 doing so.

Whilst free school meals may benefit during term time, school holidays can be particularly hard time for households experiencing food insecurity³. The added meals needed may provide additional challenges in provision of food for households during this time.

Economic impact

- COVID-19 and the measures brought in place to deal with the pandemic, had a significant negative impact on Suffolk's and the nation's workforce, businesses and the economy.
- Employment, earnings and benefits are three of the four drivers commonly causing changes in poverty and these have been impacted negatively by the pandemic across Suffolk since March 2020.
- The number of residents relying on benefits have increased by 88% (compared to 100% nationally).
- Those classed as 'unemployed' by DWP have increased by 101% (compared to 102% nationally).
- To understand the impact of COVID on employment numbers, there are other statistics that count the number of people claiming benefit due to unemployment, which we can use as a proxy for unemployment now. Based on this DWP statistic (currently under evaluation by the UK Statistics authority) unemployment increased in Suffolk by 141% between Mar 2020 and Feb 2021²⁰.
- In April 2021 there were 59,405 Universal Credit (UC) claimants across Suffolk. This means that since lockdown measures were implemented in March 2020, Suffolk UC claimant numbers have increased by 81%. Within Suffolk, the highest increases of UC claimants have been in Mid Suffolk (105%) and Ipswich (101%). In absolute terms, East Suffolk and Ipswich continue to have the largest numbers of UC claimants.
- In-work Universal Credit claimants have increased by 95% (compared to 114% nationally).

Number of Universal Credit claimants in Suffolk:



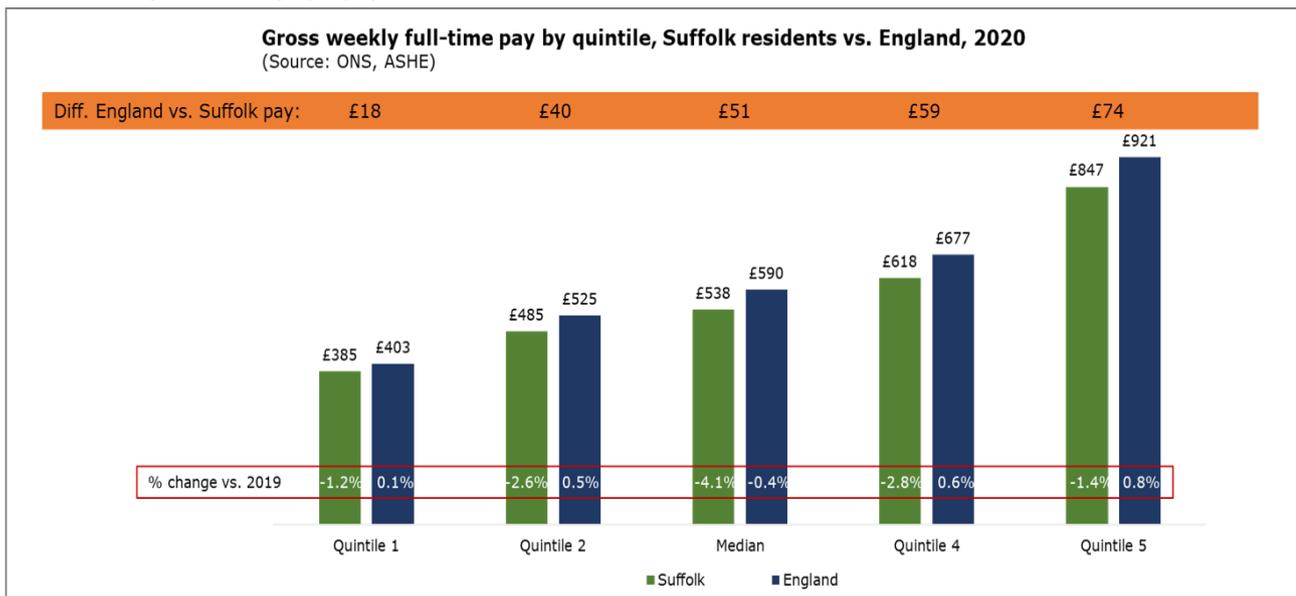
Source: 21,²⁰

National research also indicates the UC system itself can adversely impact individuals. For example¹:

- having to wait five weeks for the first UC payment
- the very low rate of UC standard allowance and other income replacement benefits –providing only a third of the income necessary for a minimum socially acceptable standard of living, as measured by the ‘Minimum Income Standard’
- deductions from UC to repay advances and other debts
- low [Local Housing Allowance \(LHA\)](#) rates and LHA caps
- the impact of the ‘bedroom tax’
- the structure of the PIP assessment and the way it is carried out

In addition, pay across Suffolk has consistently been below national averages – in 2020, the median weekly full-time pay gap increased further from £30 in 2019 to £51 between England and Suffolk²⁰.

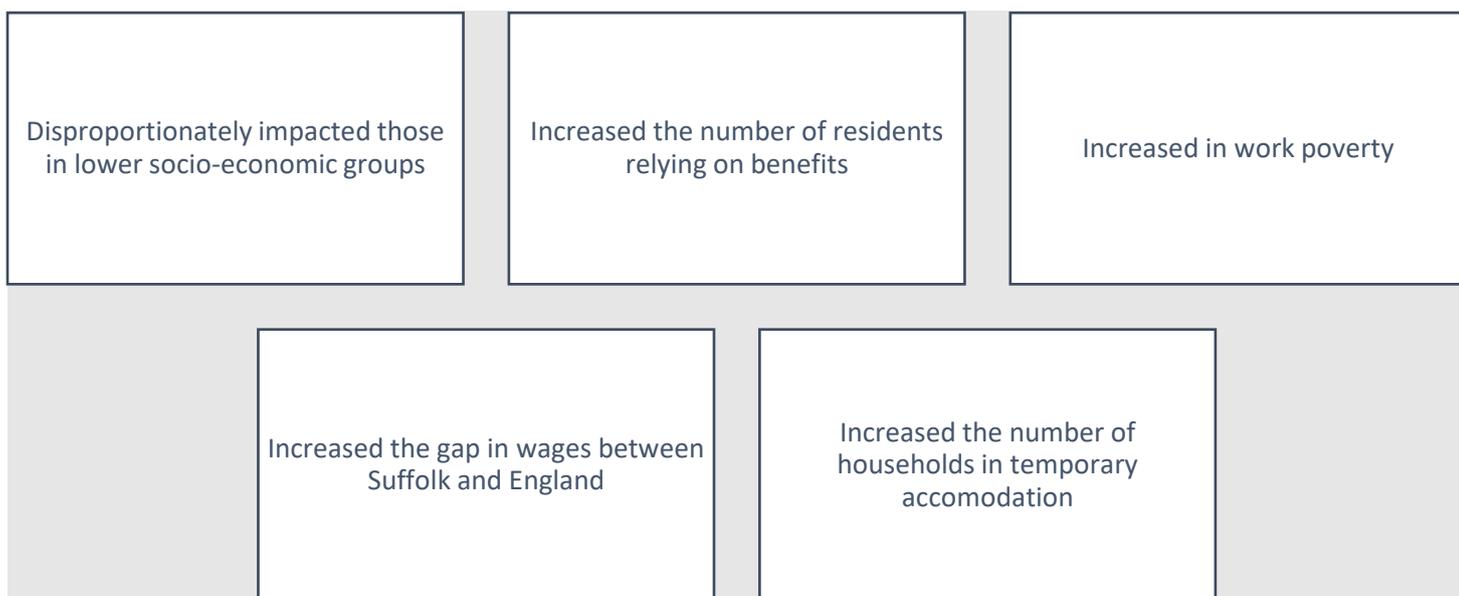
Gross weekly full-time pay by quintile for Suffolk residents 2020:



Source: ²², ²⁰

- Median earnings have fallen by -4.1% (compared to -0.4% nationally), meaning the median pay gap between England and Suffolk has increased to £51 per week.
- Gross domestic product (GDP) measures the value of goods and services produced. In broad terms, a high or rising GDP is an indicator of a strong economy. Declining GDP is an indication that the economy is shrinking, which is not good for workplaces or workers. Applying national GDP forecasts to the county would see a decline of Suffolk’s GDP from £21,851m in 2019 to £19,513m in 2020, with a slight recovery to £20,391m in 2021.
- 120,000 employments in Suffolk had been furloughed at some point since the scheme was launched in March 2020. This represents 37% of a total of 327,700 eligible employments and is in line with regional (36%) and national (38%) averages.
- The number of furloughed employments in Suffolk declined after the end of the first lockdown however, at the end of January 2021 (*latest available data*), 49,600 employments were still furloughed.
- The number of households in temporary accommodation have increased across 2020, most notably in Babergh and West Suffolk.

In summary COVID-19 has:



Any one of these factors may increase the likelihood of food insecurity. Whilst some individuals may only need support such as a foodbank as a one-off or as a very short-term solution, others will have a more enduring need. It is likely that some residents of Suffolk will experience multiple challenges in terms of suitable and affordable housing, a stable income that enables a real 'living wage' and good health status.

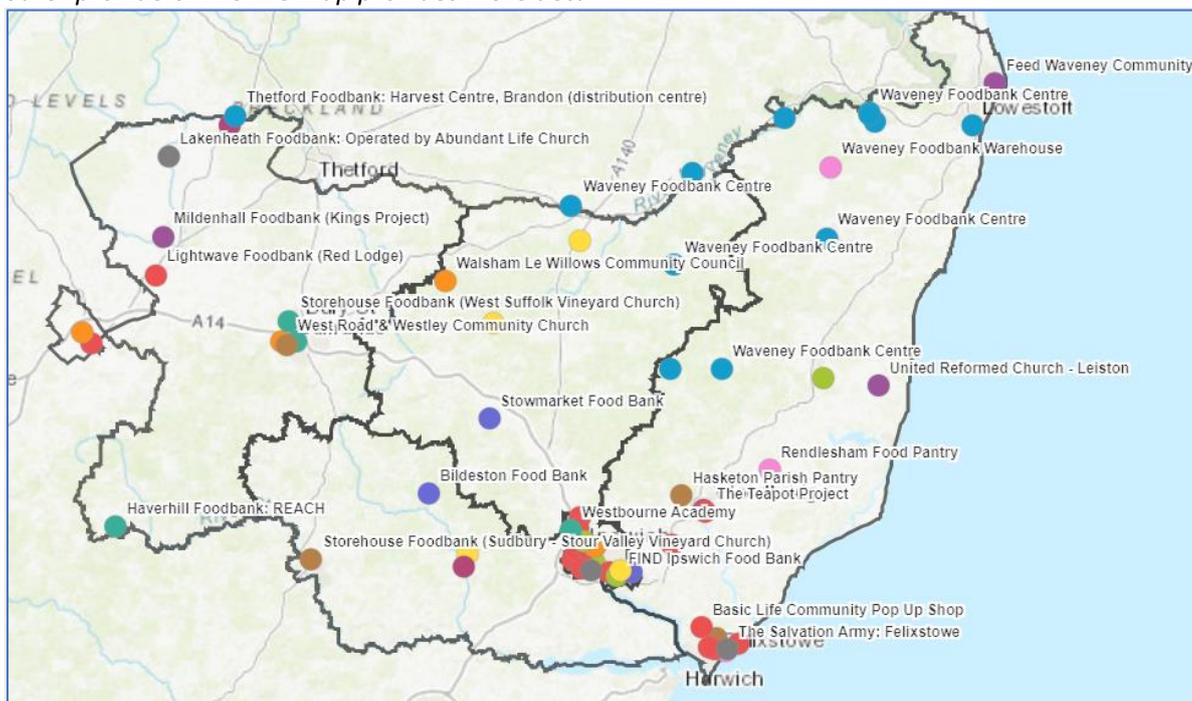
Foodbanks and use in Suffolk

At the time of writing (September 2021), Suffolk had:

- 46 Emergency food providers operating over 68 venues. 14 are pop up community shops, 7 operate as community pantry/larder/shop, 4 are in-house operations.

View the [live map of food providers in Suffolk](#) or look at the screenshot below:

Please note in the screenshot below some providers may not be visible due to the zoom, or because they overlap with other providers. The live map provides more detail.



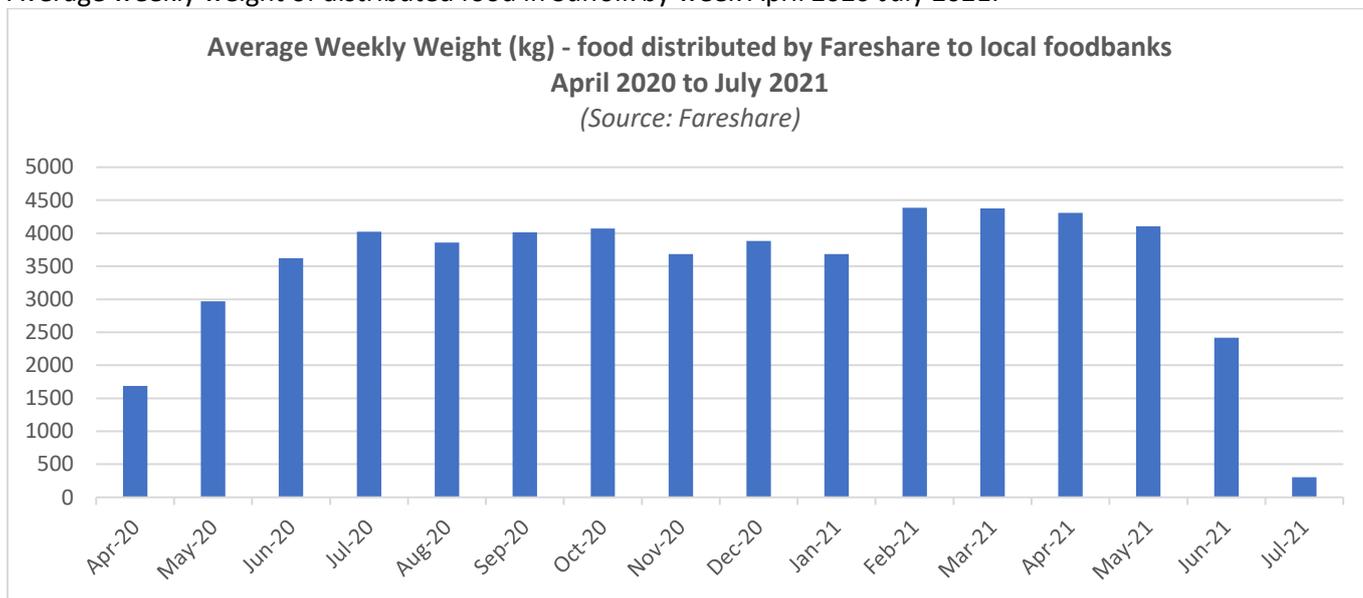
Source: ²³

Intelligence on foodbank usage indicates that the amount of food needed by local foodbanks increased week-on-week from April 2020. More recent reporting indicates some decline over spring and summer 2021.

Since April 2020:

- Nearly 250,000kg of food have been delivered since April 2020
- During the first lockdown an additional 20 foodbank providers were operating.

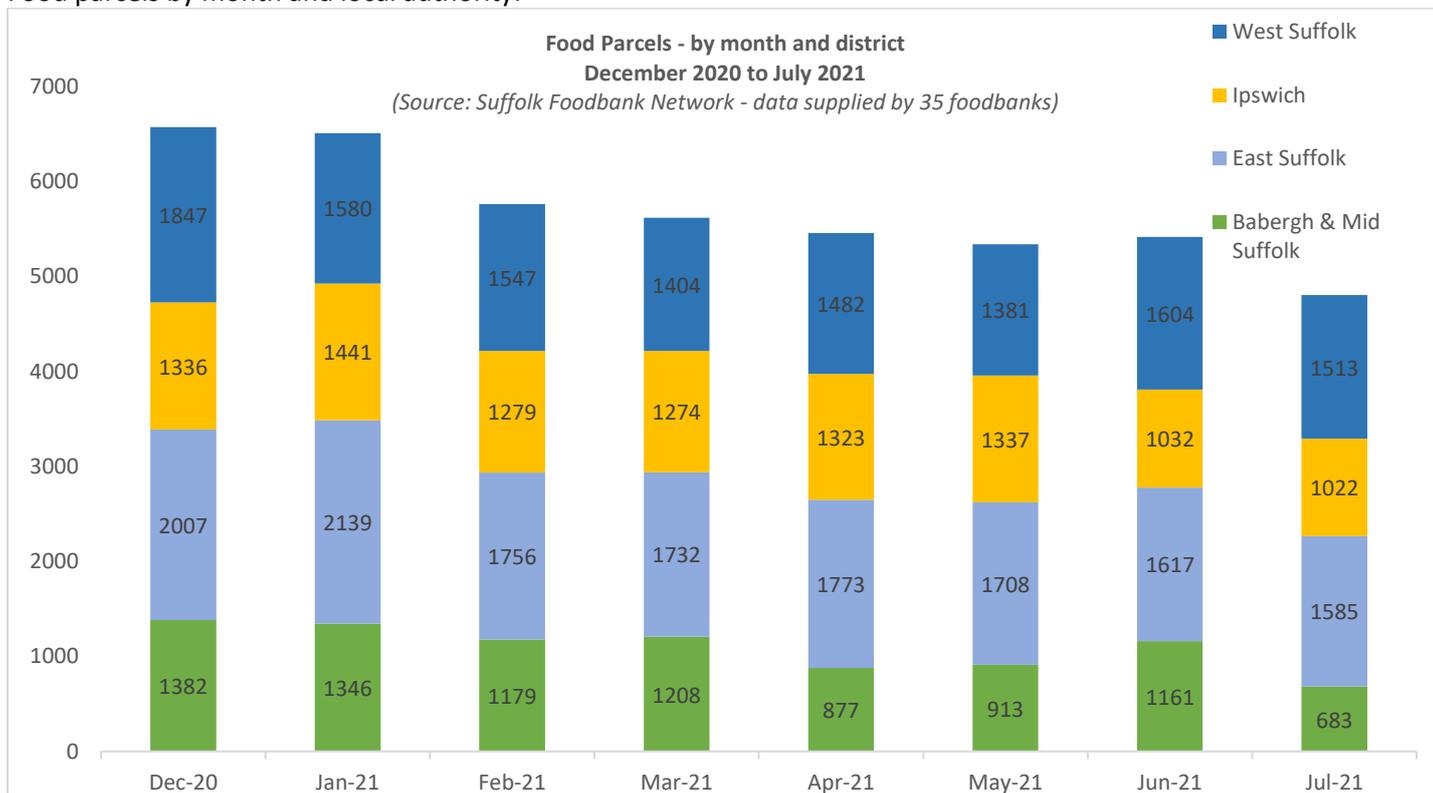
Average weekly weight of distributed food in Suffolk by week April 2020-July 2021:



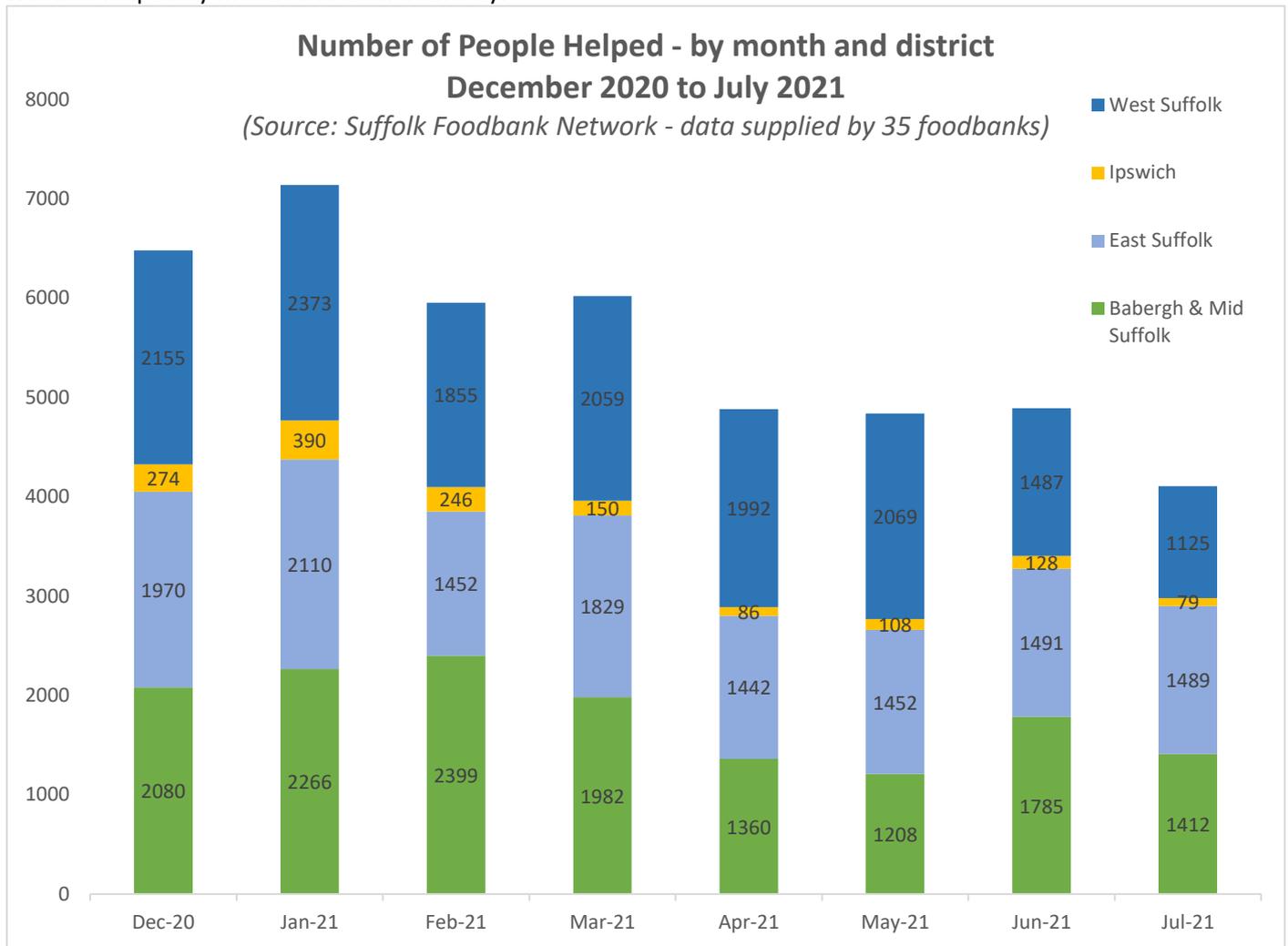
Source: ²⁴

Data from Fareshare indicates that East Suffolk had both the highest number of parcels distributed between December 2020 and July 2021. However, West Suffolk has the highest number of people helped over this same time period (see figures below).

Food parcels by month and local authority:



Number helped by month and local authority:



Source: ²⁴

Informal feedback from the foodbank network

In spring of 2021, informal feedback was gathered from the Suffolk Food Bank Network around several key areas to inform this report:

- Reflections of foodbanks in Suffolk pre and post COVID
- What are some of the key challenges faced?
- Whether there was anything that is going particularly well or is particularly complex

Summary themes from informal feedback are provided in the table below with some brief examples:

Diversity	Rurality	Valuing the person	Wider issues/ ongoing support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More young people that have been placed in homes outside London - Not your stereotypical people needing food – some that would be perceived as affluent – but no cash to buy food - Foodbanks also helping with winter fuel payments, and food vouchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In lots of areas, new builds in rural areas don't include indoor community centres - Access to services, or transport to get to services limited in rural areas – adding to challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We have to see people as individual and treat them as such - We need to make them feel valued and give them dignity - got to be more aware of making people feel loved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Many people have complex issues, giving them a food parcel is not going to solve the problem long term. -Elderly population, may be the only person they see all week – they are isolated -need to invest in intervention and support - some people who used the foodbank previously have come back to volunteer -period poverty is also an issue that may be hidden in some areas -Local Welfare Assistance Scheme helpful -People had nowhere to go -Food for elderly and vulnerable particularly needed during pandemic, but now it seems to be more young people / young families -Single payment families – use of foodbanks doubled during the pandemic -Domestic abuse being observed in people they are supporting

Diversity: The diversity of people supported was reflected by several colleagues. People were using foodbanks for a variety of reasons, and for most it really was a last resort:

- “We saw a carer who got a surprise bonus for working through lockdown, but because of it their universal credit got stopped with no warning. It tipped them over the edge- they said if it wasn't for the foodbank they would have taken their child and dropped off a bridge- it really was the end of the road”.
- “We deliver food to families, and delivered to the houses that you would least expect – big, detached houses with nice cars on the drive, but when they were furloughed and lost their 20% - they couldn't afford food”.
- “There is a real spread of people, we are delivering to what appeared to be well to do families- nice car in the drive, but they are on furlough – lots of people live quite close to the limit- and when they lose 20% of income it really hits hard”.
- “A lot of our support has gone to people during lockdown who have been living in households with domestic abuse present- COVID and lockdown has accelerated this”.
- “I see people who say to me they haven't got school uniform - and the shoes on their feet are 2 sizes too small. How have we got into this situation where children are suffering, and they are suffering in silence. I grew up in the area, and poverty has got worse. Some of the schools seem to refuse to accept that poverty is an issue in their area, so parents can't even go to the school for the help anymore – it perpetuates the stigma”.
- “Our demographic is very rapidly changing – new build social housing plus rehousing from Lowestoft – limited infrastructure to cope and appalling transport links as well as digital poverty increase problems when food poverty is an issue”.

Wider reflections: There were also wider reflections that were captured during feedback.

One food bank noted that whilst use was up around 50% compared to pre-COVID times, use seemed to be declining in the most recent months.

- “All well that we offer food, but we need to invest in intervention – it’s got to be more than being given food parcels”.
- “I long to see the day where it really is EMERGENCY food, instead of reliance”.
- “We run a baby bank (started during COVID-19), and quickly found that people came to us for nappies and milk, and we then found they actually needed food as well. But they didn’t want to get it as they feared their benefits may be cut”

One colleague noted they also stock sanitary products in 3 of the bigger towns. There is a box where people can help themselves. They noted 80% will go to school children walking to and from school, and having the box is helpful as it is anonymous. “They don’t have to check a box on a list at a local library, and wait while a librarian goes into a back room to look for the labelled box!” They also occasionally put deodorant and other toiletries in – these go really fast!

Valuing the person also stood out as a theme:

One area noted they set up a community pop up shop, and noted it worked well for those that didn’t feel comfortable accepting charity. They paid £2 and then they would be able to pack a bag of items. They had around 70-80 people a week visit, and noted that some people were more receptive to this type of system as it felt like there had been a transaction made. In the last few months (up to May 2021), numbers have dropped- hopefully for the right reasons (i.e. people going back to work).

For others, it became a source of companionship, highlighting that food parcels are not just about the food:

- “In relation to older people, some elderly people say that we are the only person they see – so they say please don’t stop our food parcels, as we won’t see anyone”

For some, they were also able to give back when they weren’t struggling:

- “Some of the people we supported at the beginning are now volunteering with the food banks- they say they’ve never felt part of a team before”

One individual noted that free school meals and universal credit top up has made a difference. However, the biggest difference they noted was the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme. They noted that the scheme has been great, but it’s a challenge to spend the allocation in a short period of time:

- “We were able to support a homeless chap. We were able to give him vouchers to spend, he can’t cook himself, but he can buy himself hot food. Another family in isolation got a food box, which was great, but would like some chicken. We can’t supply within that as part of the food parcel, but we could give them a voucher, which gives them some dignity, some choice in the food that they have (i.e. for children)”.

Challenges

There are challenges for both in relation to minimising food insecurity in Suffolk, Suffolk foodbanks themselves, and the wider Suffolk system. These have been summarised below²³. These challenges are all reasons to support the development and implementation of a food justice plan in Suffolk.

Challenges in relation to food insecurity and wider impacts	Challenges for Suffolk foodbanks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A low wage economy in Suffolk may hinder recovery from COVID-19 and perpetuate financial insecurity for some • In work poverty exists in Suffolk – with households in work but struggling to make ends meet • The cost of living is high in Suffolk house prices and rental prices are high, which may mean after housing costs, little money is available for healthy and nutritious food choices • Removal of the Universal Credit ‘COVID’ top up is likely to impact struggling families even more (due to be removed in September 2021) • Children in low income families in Suffolk are likely to have been adversely impacted not only by missing education, but also potentially hunger and food insecurity • Social contact has been reduced due to COVID-19 and qualitative feedback indicates that delivery of food may be the only contact some older Suffolk residents receive • Rurality remains an issue in accessing not only services but also reasonably priced healthy food options • Domestic abuse has in some areas been elevated by COVID-19, with this being observed in households being supported by the foodbank network. • Feelings of a ‘sense of community’ varied in areas based on feedback received. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased demand for food being reported due to reduced household income • Increased demand for additional support e.g. domestic abuse, breakdown of relationships causing homelessness/no income, isolation for those shielding • Fewer volunteers – volunteers who are older or shielding unable to continue to support or those who have to find paid employment • Reduced donations from the public due to less frequent shopping and reduced income • Lack of storage due to premises being too small and unable to cope with demand, also shelving for produce or refrigeration • Supply chain challenges: The precarious nature of the supply chain, for example in relation to food supplies from supermarkets to Fareshare. These can be interrupted causing issues in delivery to foodbanks. Despite having money to commission Fareshare we still can't always guarantee the food delivery 100% of the time. • Culturally and diet appropriate food: Informal feedback indicates that there have been reports of the importance of being able to access culturally appropriate food and also appropriate food in terms of food intolerances (e.g. gluten free). <p>Challenges for the wider Suffolk system in relation to foodbanks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection is often fragmented, inconsistent and piecemeal. Foodbanks are not designed to collect data • Response is often hyper-local - Responding to need at a micro level so may be inconsistent provision (or not enough!) • Various size operations – again can make it difficult to identify need and provide consistent service • Each one is independent – can make communication and coordination difficult • No contracts – No standard offer or provision

Local initiatives and next steps

The release of the National Food Strategy in July 2021 provided a suite of recommendations for further review, with a promise from government to review proposals for future laws within six months post publication⁴. A key recommendation area was the reduction of diet related inequality, including specific recommendations around:

- **Extending eligibility for free school meals.** This would mean fewer children from low-income households going hungry.
- **Funding the [Holiday Activities and Food programme](#) for the next three years.** As well as ensuring that children from the poorest households get at least one freshly cooked meal a day, these programmes provide social contact, exercise and enrichment activities.
- **Expanding the [Healthy Start](#) scheme.** Studies on the effects of Healthy Start have shown that it plays an important role in helping pregnant women and their children access healthier foods.
- **Trial a “Community Eatwell” programme, supporting those on low incomes to improve their diets.** This would give GPs the option to prescribe fruit and vegetables – along with food-related education and social support – to patients suffering the effects of poor diet or food insecurity.

There are many initiatives already in place in Suffolk to support those in immediate and enduring food poverty, as well as supporting healthier and sustainable eating choices including:

- [Suffolk Advice and Support Service \(SASS\)](#)
- [Suffolk Food toolkit](#)
- [Eat Out Eat Well](#)
- [Take Out Eat Well](#)
- [Foodbank providers](#)
- A dedicated foodbank officer
- An established food providers network
- External funding support to help diversify rural businesses
- Allotment associations
- Food skills programmes
- A childhood obesity reduction plan
- [Holiday Activities and Food programme](#)

Suffolk County Council’s Public Health team is currently developing the new Poverty Strategy and Poverty Reduction Action Plan. This will include as part of it, a food justice plan with the following aims:

1. When people are hungry or do not have access to food there is provision in Suffolk for them to have a meal.
2. There is a reduction in the number and frequency of people needing emergency food provision in Suffolk.
3. Systematic change across Suffolk and Nationally prevents people needing emergency food provision in the future.
4. People in Suffolk feel confident and supported in accessing food.

One of the most important elements of the Food Justice Plan will be to reduce dependency on foodbanks and develop more opportunities that enable people to access healthy, affordable food without the need to resort to crisis services and provide support to address the underlying causes of poverty. However, there are steps that need to be taken to ensure this is done in a way that supports local residents, as opposed to heightening need. There also needs to be a clear route for supporting people in an emergency response, as opposed to more enduring support to find routes out of poverty.

Based on local research and consultation work with the foodbank network and on the wider poverty strategy the following priorities and potential activities could help to reduce food poverty in Suffolk:

- 1. Ensuring foodbanks have a regular supply of healthy food**
 - a. Developing the support offer to foodbanks (for example the [Local Welfare Assistance Scheme, Warm Handover](#))
 - b. Considering ways to improve the overall nutritional value of emergency food aid in partnership with foodbanks
 - c. Supporting the foodbank network to share and learn best operational practice
- 2. Supporting the development of places where people can buy healthy food at affordable prices, reducing reliance on foodbanks, reducing stigma and reach more people and provide roots out of poverty**
 - a. Supporting communities and community organisations to develop affordable food networks such as food coops, social supermarkets, food pantries, food clubs etc.
- 3. Advice, Guidance & Signposting**
 - a. Ensure that foodbanks are provided with regular information enabling them to provide advice or signpost to support so their users can address the underlying causes causing the need to access a foodbank
 - b. Encouraging foodbanks to sign up to the Warm Handover scheme and supporting where possible a Foodbank Plus model
 - c. Find ways to be more proactive in targeting people before crisis hits, through approaches like the current East Suffolk trial of [Low Income Family Tracker Dashboard \(LIFT\)](#)
 - d. Consider ways that we can further build on the valuable role that our libraries and children's centres play in local communities
- 4. Ensuring children's access to food 365 days a year**
 - a. Maintain high uptake of Free School Meals and increase uptake of Healthy Start vouchers
 - b. Work with schools to maximise opportunities to reduce child food poverty
 - c. Holiday Activities & Food programme
- 5. Ensuring good access to healthy food for vulnerable groups**
 - a. Reviewing existing food support that is available to vulnerable groups such as the homeless, patients discharged from hospital, older people, people with no recourse to public funds etc.
- 6. Raise the profile of food poverty as an issue in Suffolk**
 - a. Implementing a campaign that seeks to raise awareness of the scale of the issue, address misconceptions around poverty, increase awareness of what support is available and reduce stigma but highlight that poverty is something that can happen to anyone and that it's ok to ask for help.

In addition to the above specific food measures, the wider Suffolk Poverty strategy will address the many other factors relating to poverty.

Summary

The ideal resolution is that no one in Suffolk experiences food insecurity, and that foodbanks close. This is because they are no longer needed, and people have adequate resources and support to prevent them needing food parcels.

In reality, food insecurity will not disappear overnight, and the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated inequalities. Additionally, national evidence indicates a sizeable proportion of food insecure households that are either not accessing support, or are trying but failing to access this support- indicating unmet need.

- For children experiencing food insecurity, ensuring they can access healthy and nutritious meals inside and outside of education settings should also be a key focus- building on the good work already undertaken in Suffolk. Work has been undertaken by the Free School Meals team to ensure people eligible for free school meals are taking up the offer.
- Both nationally and in Suffolk, there is data to support a worrying increase in working poverty, driven by high housing costs, and low wages and childcare costs. Local data indicates that Suffolk still has relatively low rates of pay as well as high housing costs for both those in rented accommodation and those buying

properties. The types of housing being built are not always balanced to meet current or future need. For example, over 10,000 social houses are needed in Suffolk to meet current need, but this does not account for future demand. This is an area that needs to be closely monitored, with action taken to improve skills and wages for the local economy.

- For older residents, some may struggle to access food that is healthy, nutritious and accessible, and use of foodbanks or charitable food deliveries may be the only social contact they receive in a week.
- For those that have struggled during COVID-19 and been reliant on the UC uplift or furlough payments, the removal of this could push people back into food insecurity. Further tracking of foodbank use locally, as well as wider benefits and population data is vital.
- Some households may also be in fuel poverty leading to the challenging decision of whether to 'heat or eat'.

In conclusion, this profile summarises a few of the challenges faced in relation to food insecurity. However, food insecurity does not exist in isolation, and is interwoven with poverty and often other complex factors that influence wider health and wellbeing. There is a need to tackle the root causes of poverty in order to increase financial stability and resilience to households most in need in Suffolk.

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