

Norwich City Council
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Item No 6

REPORT for meeting to be held on 23 February 2017

Causes of food poverty in Norwich

Summary: This report defines food poverty and outlines the causes of food poverty on both a national and local level.

Also included is data from Norwich foodbank to identify trends showing who uses them and why.

Conclusions: The report provides members with information on food poverty in the city and causes.

Recommendation: That the scrutiny committee considers the evidence provided and identifies the three main drivers of food poverty in Norwich with a view to identify possible solutions at the March meeting.

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Background

'Food poverty is...

...worse diet, worse access, worse health, higher percentage of income on food and less choice from a restricted range of foods. Above all food poverty is about less or almost no consumption of fruit & vegetables'

Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy at City University

1. The scrutiny committee opted to dedicate two meetings to the topic of food poverty in Norwich. The meeting on 23 February will address the causes of food poverty in Norwich and the meeting on 23 March will identify any solutions.
2. Members will hear from three speakers who will provide evidence on food poverty and will answer questions to help inform any recommendations the committee may make.
 - Presentation by Jo Mack (Author of Breadline Britain)
Joanna Mack works at the Open University and created the research resource www.poverty.ac.uk. They are both former award-winning television producers, and have collaborated on research and television programmes about poverty over the last thirty years. She lives in St Albans. <https://oneworld-publications.com/joanna-mack.html>
 - Presentation by Councillor Vaughan Thomas (cabinet member for fairness and equality)
 - Hannah Worsley (project manager of Foodbank) Norwich foodbank supports local individuals and families who find themselves on the edge of disaster through the provision of emergency food supplies. These supplies take the form of nutritionally balanced emergency foodboxes to cover an individual or family's basic needs for 72 hours: the critical time gap before the Social Services safety net "kicks in."
<http://www.networknorwich.co.uk/Group/Group.aspx?ID=109369>

Causes and consequences

3. Root causes of food poverty

- Delay in benefits
- Benefits sanction
- Changes to benefits
- Unemployment
- Debt
- Domestic abuse
- Sickness
- Low income
- Homelessness
- Absence of free school meals during school holidays
- No recourse to public funds (asylum seekers)
- Rising food prices (up by 12% from 2009-2013)

4. Consequences of food poverty

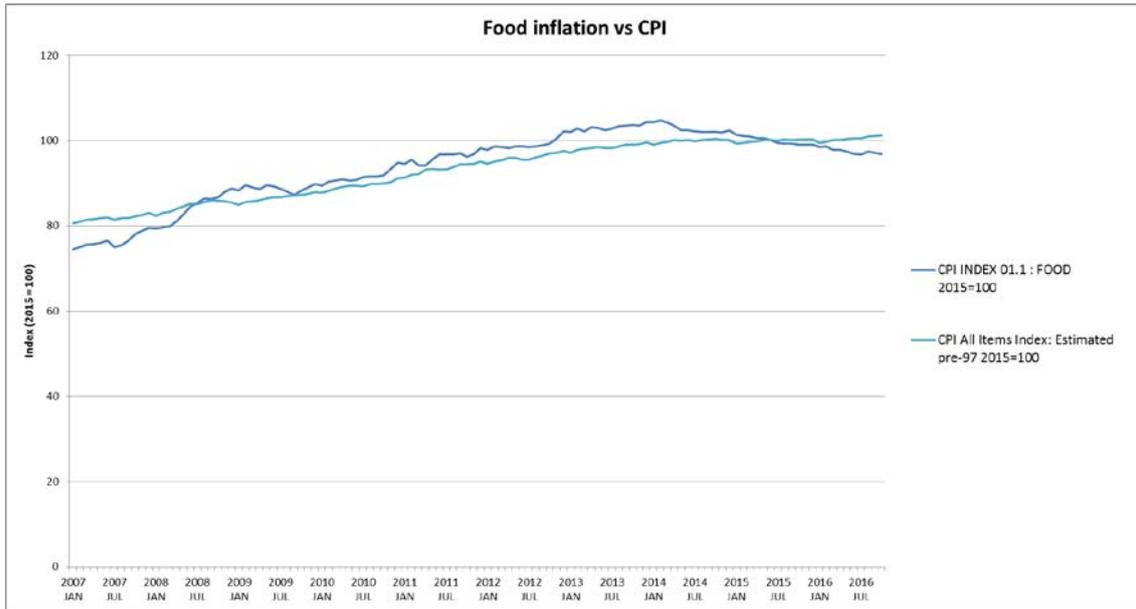
- Poor nutrition
- Poor health outcomes – over or underweight
- Increase in health inequalities
- Over indebtedness
- Social isolation

5. The Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has responsibility for household food security and department of health has responsibility for obesity and nutrition. The health and well-being boards and public health departments in local authorities are responsible at a local level. However there is no national policy on food.

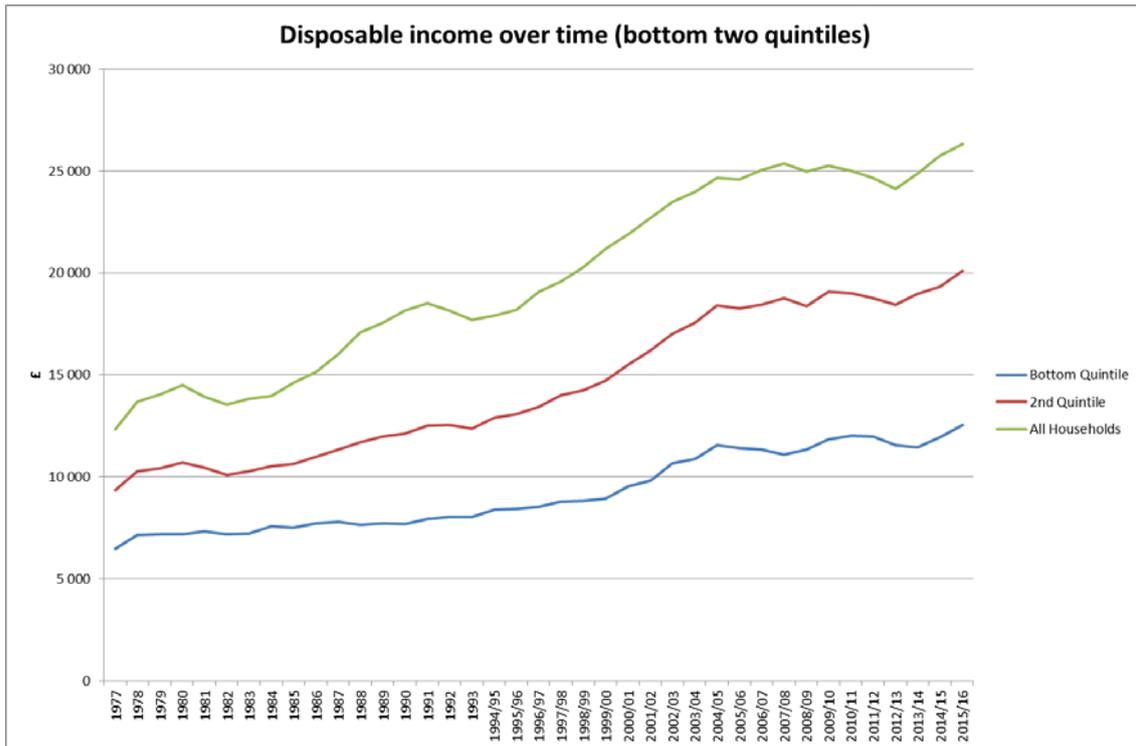
The following sections show key data on two issues – income and benefits.

Income

6. The following graphs show national statistics that show some of the pressures on household budgets. The first graph shows how trends in food prices over recent years compare with wider changes in the costs of goods and services as reflected by CPI:



The next graph shows variation in disposable incomes for households over recent decades, with the trends for those in the bottom two quintiles shown:



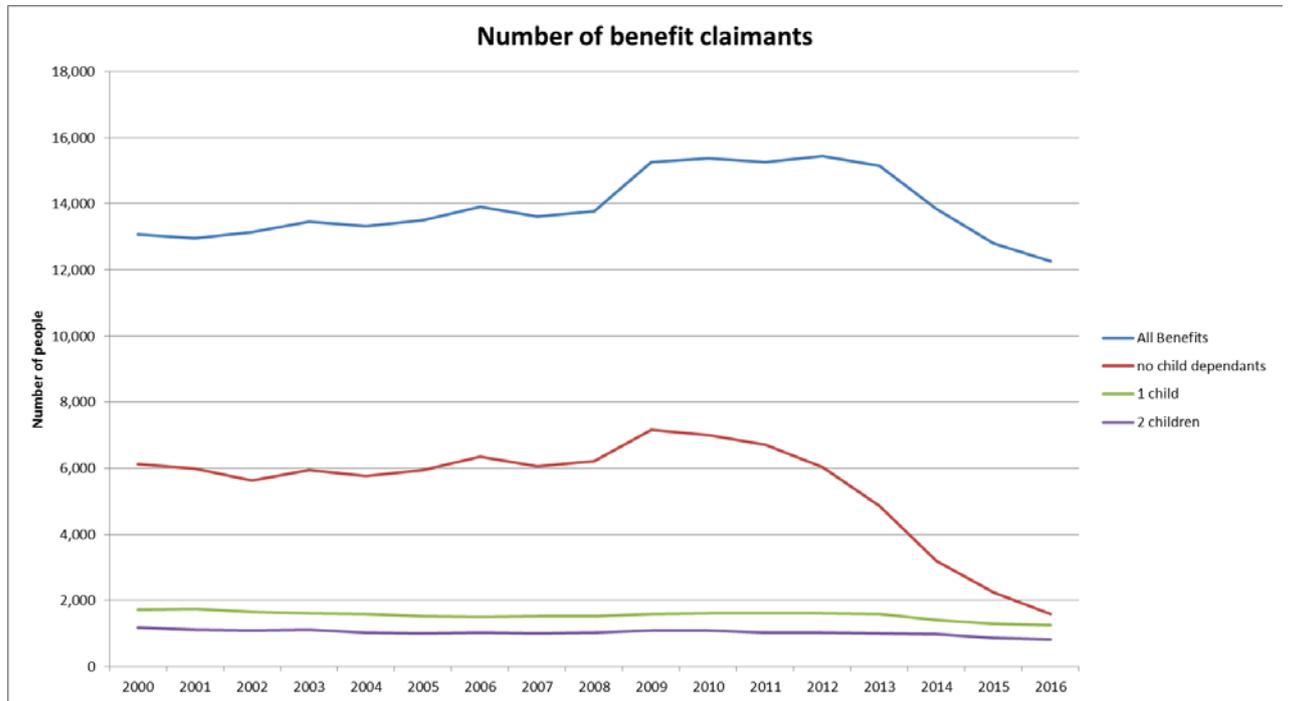
7. The level of income varies for different types of households, for example by housing tenure, as does the source, as can be seen from the next two tables:

Tenure		Average disposable annual income
Rented	Social rented	£20,585
	Private rented unfurnished	£30,618
	Private rented furnished	£30,346
	Rent free	£32,805
Owner-occupied	With mortgage	£46,709
	Rental purchase	£27,253
	Owned outright	£30,711

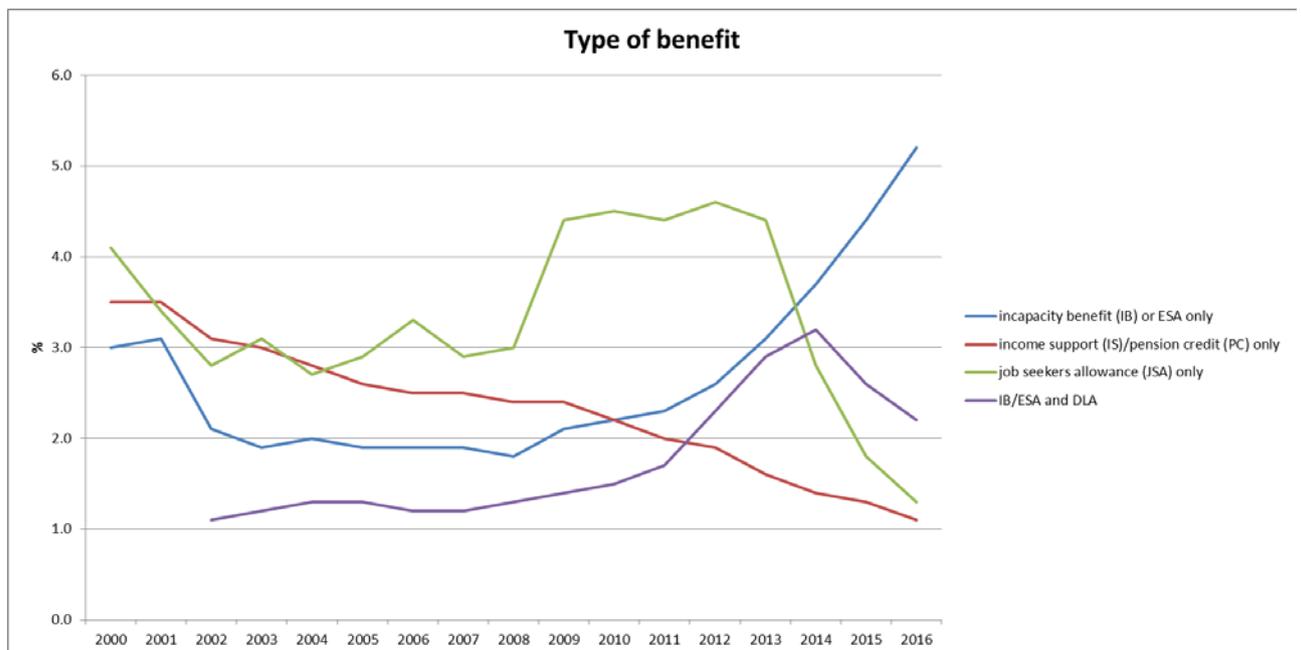
Tenure		Source of income as % of gross household income					
		Wages and salaries	Self-employment income	Private pensions, annuities	Investment income	Other income	Total cash benefits
Rented	Social rented	42	5	4	0	1	48
	Private rented unfurnished	68	9	2	2	1	17
	Private rented furnished	72	10	1	1	3	12
	Rent free	33	2	7	5	30	14
Owner-occupied	With mortgage	81	9	2	2	1	4
	Rental purchase	85	3	1	0	0	10
	Owned outright	40	7	26	5	0	21

Benefits

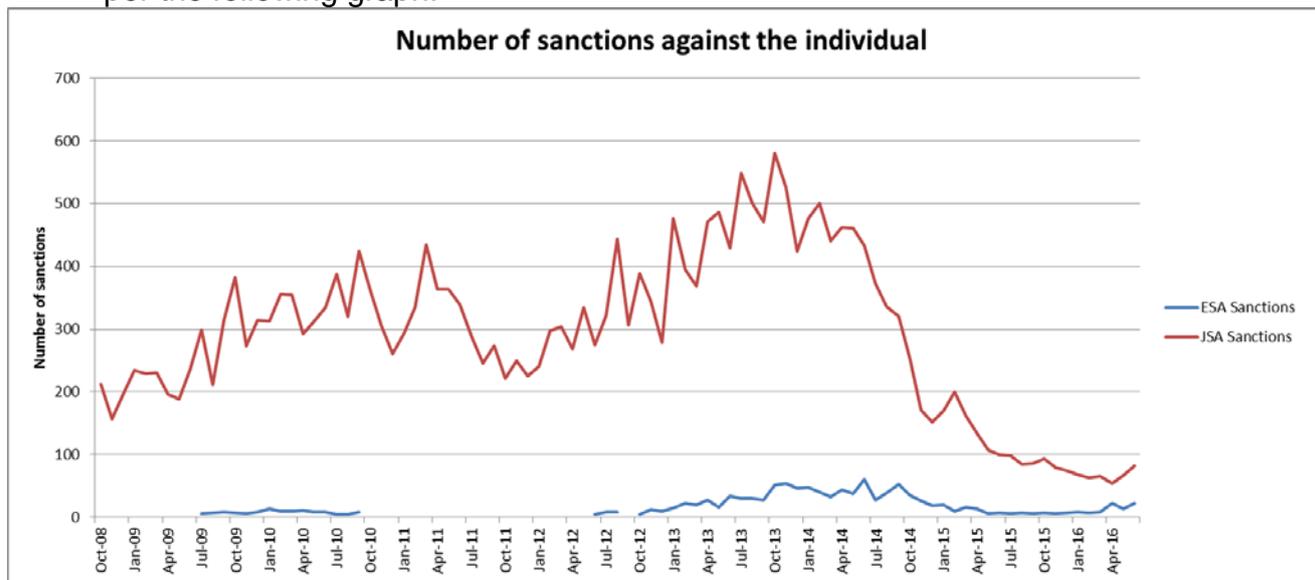
8. The next graph shows numbers of benefits claimants in Norwich over recent years



9. Although there has been an overall reduction in total numbers of claimants, as can be seen from the following graph there has been a change in the pattern of benefits claimed:



10. Levels of benefit sanctions have also fluctuated over recent years as per the following graph:

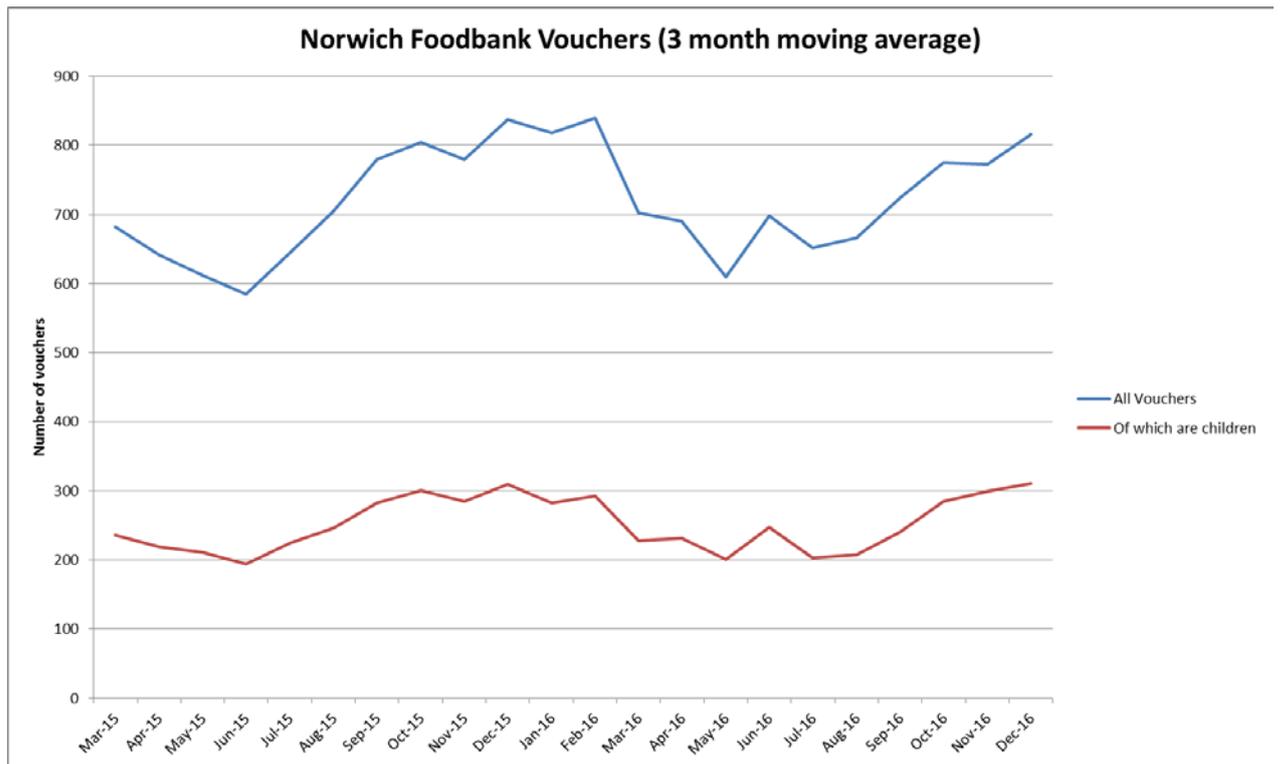


11. Local food poverty context:

- Social exclusion (not being able to participate in food as an aesthetic)
- Insufficient or acceptable quality of food
- Lack of means to obtain food
- Food deserts – areas where cheap, healthy food is unobtainable without use of private transport.

Norwich foodbank statistics

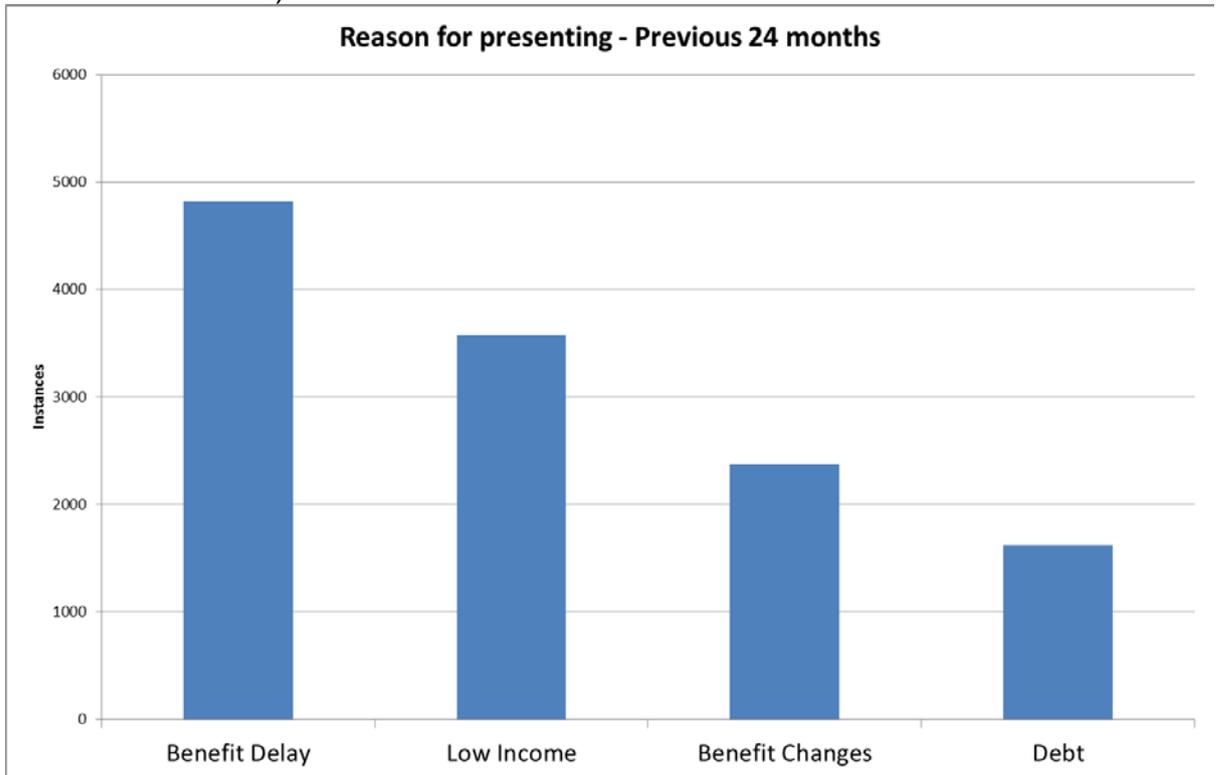
12. The first graph shows the total number of vouchers distributed by Norwich foodbank per month over the last couple of years (including to non-city council area residents):



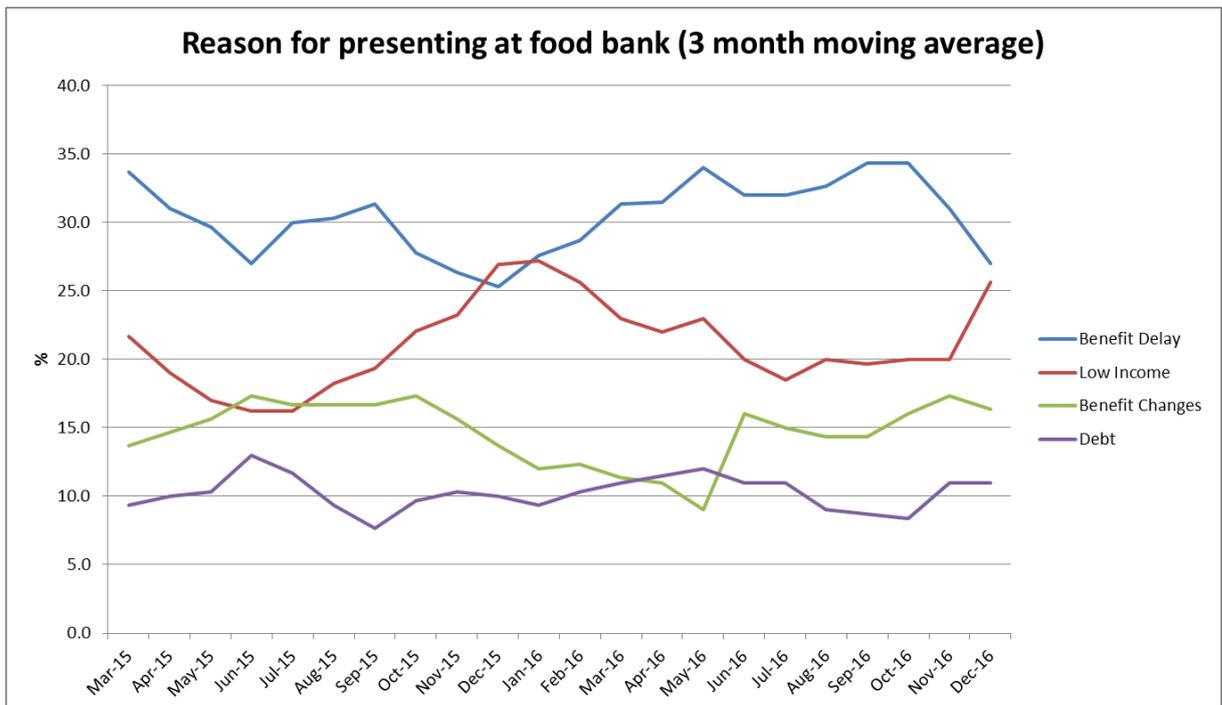
13. Over the same period, between 85% and 92% of foodbank users are unemployed in any given month.

14. In terms of Norwich residents, the map at appendix A shows patterns of foodbank demand coming from specific wards.

15. As can be seen from the following graph, the main reasons given by Norwich foodbank users for presenting are related to benefits (delays or sanctions) and low income:



Though these reasons vary over time:





16. Strategies to manage food poverty

- Use of credit
- Participation in the black economy
- Reliance on family and friends
- Food aid: Food banks/soup runs/meals on wheels etc.
- Frequent shopping for bargains
- Cutting down on meals
- Cutting down on what is perceived as more expensive foods – meat, dairy and fresh fruit and vegetables

17. Evidence suggests that people are well aware of health messages regarding nutrition and diet, but some are not able to exercise much choice as decisions are dictated by diminished or at times non-existent resources.

18. There is no doubt that healthier food choices are more likely to be made if access to good quality, cheap fresh foods are more widely available.

19. Those with limited resources might benefit from support in managing food and their food budgets to maximum effect on health and nutrition, without compromising on quality.

20. Tony Cooke Head of health improvement, Kirklees public health asks the following questions that members may find useful to consider:

- Should we focus on alleviation of hunger, improvements to diet/nutrition or both?
- How to engage with public health teams to address food poverty?
- How can public health engage other partners to address food poverty?
- What are the consequences of food poverty?
- Which areas can public health address? Focus on low / medium input, high impact
- Can local authorities develop systematic strategies to address health inequalities including food poverty and poverty more generally?

