

FOODBANK IMPACT REPORT



2024

Introduction

Epsom & Ewell Foodbank (now part of Good Company) was set up 12 years ago by local churches and community groups to tackle hunger in our local area. We run five distribution centres in Epsom, Ewell, Banstead, Leatherhead and Tadworth, providing emergency food and support to individuals and families who are experiencing severe financial hardship. The number of people using the Foodbank has nearly doubled in the last few years, due to the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis. In 2023/24, we distributed enough food to feed nearly 10,000 people for at least 3 days.

Foodbank clients must be referred by another local agency or by one of our support workers. As well as receiving food and toiletries, clients are offered practical, financial and emotional support to help address their underlying needs and help them not to need the foodbank. Our long-term vision is to help lead our community to a poverty-free future, by:

Compassion

Building communities that listen, care and empower

Justice

Influencing local policies through participation and culture change

Hope

Increasing people's financial resilience and developing pathways out of poverty

This report presents the findings from a survey of Foodbank clients carried out in March 2024. Everyone attending one of our Foodbank centres during a four-week period was invited to complete a short paper survey about their experience of coming to the Foodbank, provided they hadn't already done so on a previous visit. We received 119 responses in total – or 58% of clients visiting the Foodbank over this period.



Reasons for visiting the Foodbank

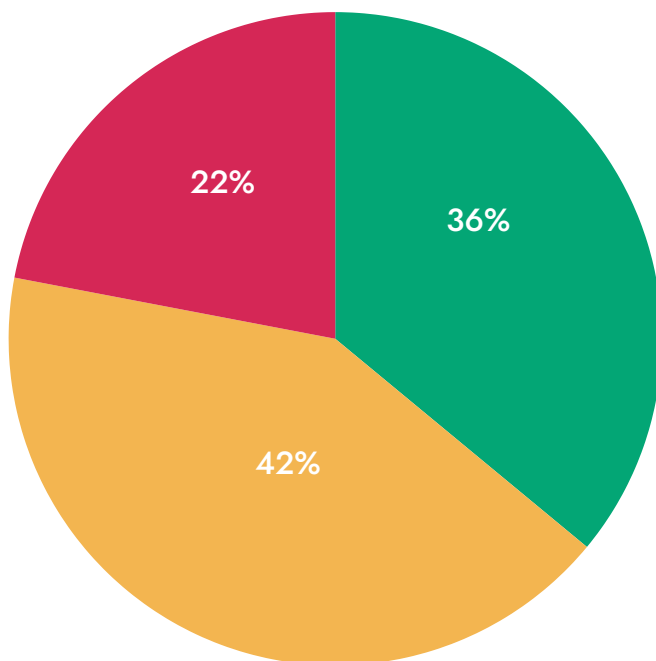
We asked clients how they would describe their relationship with the Foodbank, with three possible responses:




- The most common response – chosen by 42% of respondents – is that they use the Foodbank “occasionally” and when needed to help them manage financially.
- A further 22% of clients said they visit us “regularly”, because their income is not sufficient to get by without it.
- The remainder – just over a third of respondents (36%) – said they were visiting the Foodbank to help them through a temporary crisis.



Analysis of our Foodbank database produces broadly comparable results. Over the course of any given month, 35-40% of clients appear to be in a short-term or more prolonged, but concentrated, crisis. The other two-thirds are using the Foodbank occasionally or regularly over an extended period of time.

Which of the following best describes your relationship to the Foodbank?

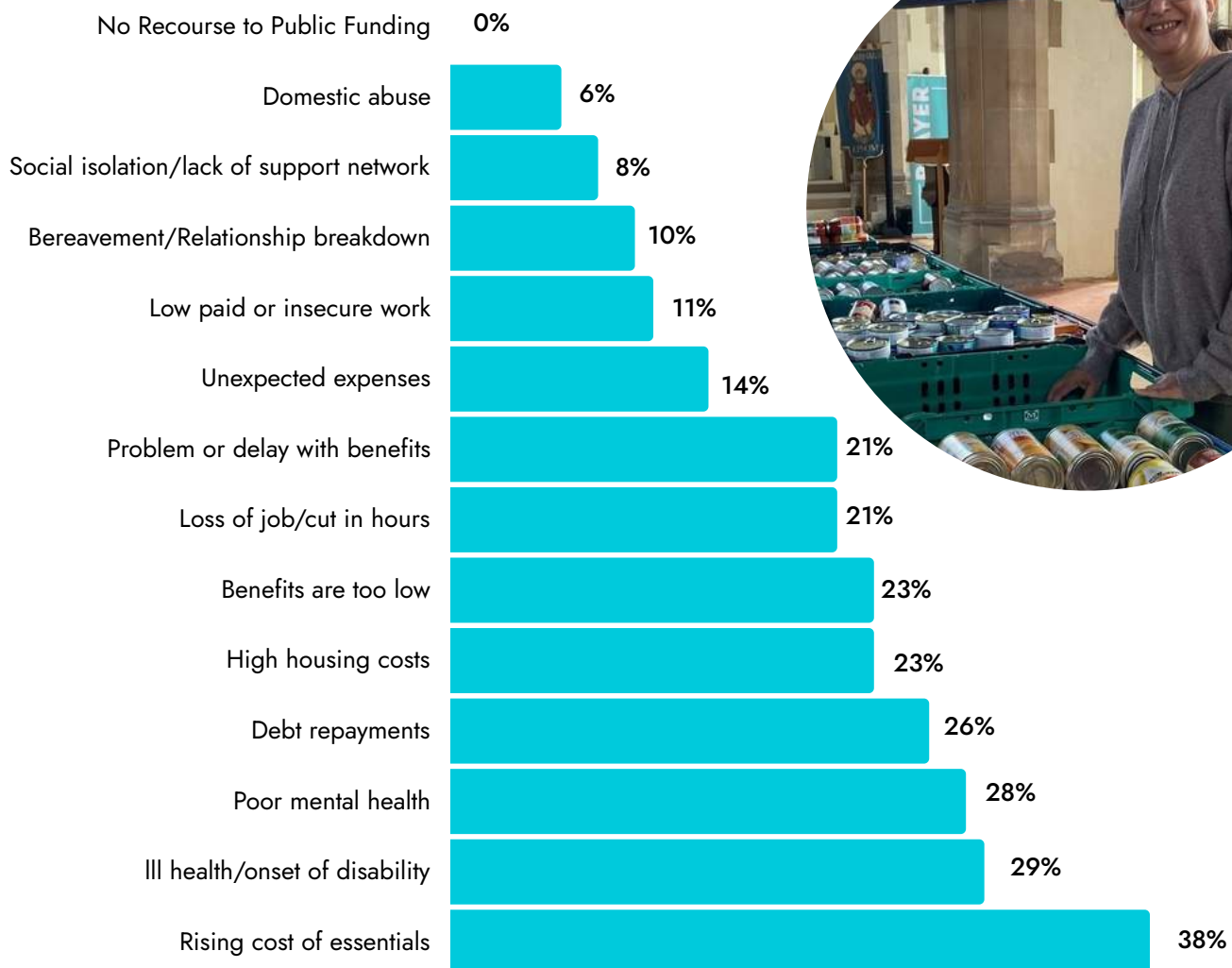


-  I am using the food bank to help me through a crisis
-  I use the food bank occasionally to help me cope financially
-  I use the food bank regularly as my income is not enough to get by

When asked which factors contributed to them needing the Foodbank, people cited a wide range of reasons, including cost of living increases, poor physical and mental health, debt problems, high housing costs, reductions in pay and benefit delays, as well as domestic abuse and other relationship issues.

Only 7% of respondents did not select any of the factors listed below and only one of the listed reasons (“no recourse to public funding”) was not selected by anyone. The majority of clients reported multiple issues, with 59% identifying more than one reason for needing the Foodbank, and 41% citing three or more reasons. This demonstrates the importance of offering holistic support to help people address the underlying needs that drive food bank use.

Which factors contributed to you needing the Foodbank?



We also asked clients an open-ended question about their current situation. Their responses reflect the diversity of the reasons for needing the Foodbank:

“My wife needs the heating on as she is disabled, and the cost is very high.”

“Once all the bills and food shopping and clothing is paid for, there is not enough money.”

“I’m on the council housing list for the over 55s, because my health and domestic situation is not good. We sold our flat, but my husband has not signed the divorce papers and is being awkward over paying up and moving!”

“I have had to battle with Universal Credit to get extra money for disability payments; this is ongoing and I cannot work due to this.”

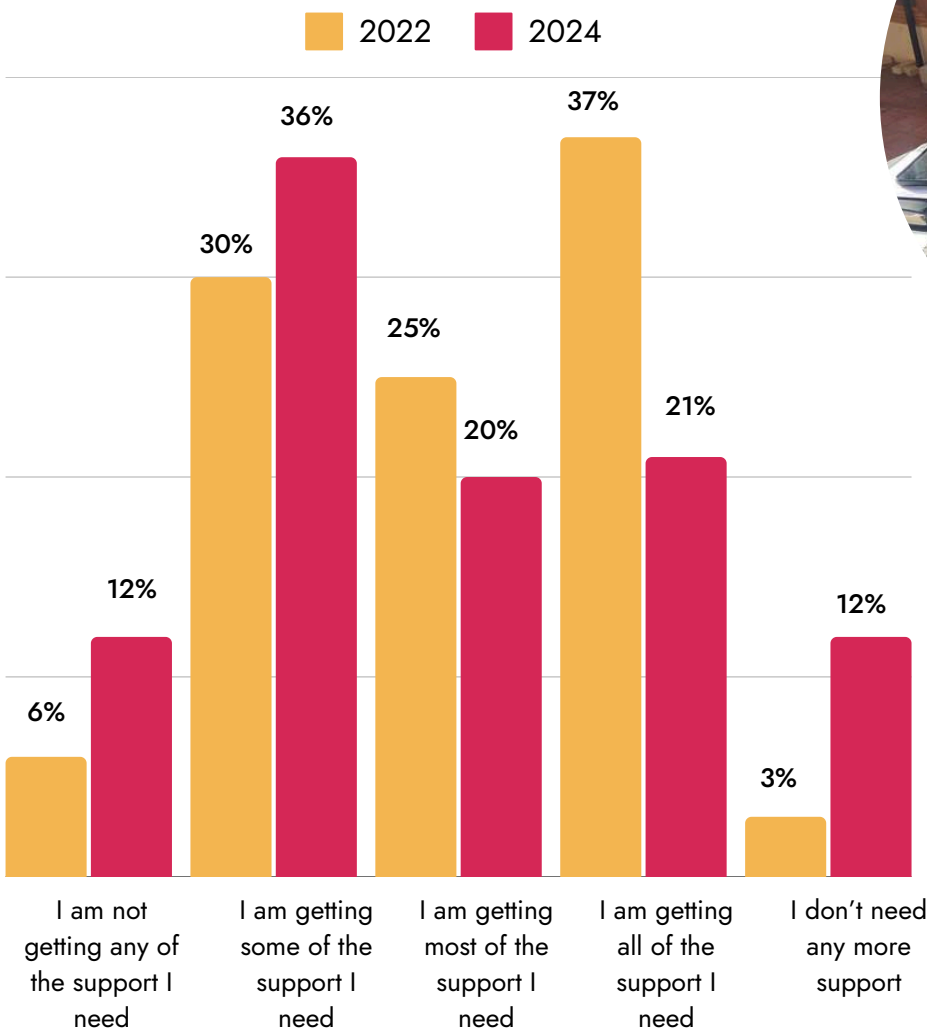
“I am struggling having lent my stepson £144, as he has been unable to meet the agreed repayment. Also, I am self-employed and income has been inconsistent and insufficient to meet my expenses.”



When asked what, if any, advice and support they had received with these issues, only just over half of respondents said they were getting all or most of the support they needed. Worryingly, 12% of respondents said they were not getting any support (up from 6% in 2022) and 36% said they were only getting “some of the support they needed” (up from 30%).

Good Company is working with other agencies to fill this gap by establishing a network of drop-in Advice Cafés across this part of Surrey, where people can access face-to-face advice and support with many of these issues in a safe, friendly community setting.

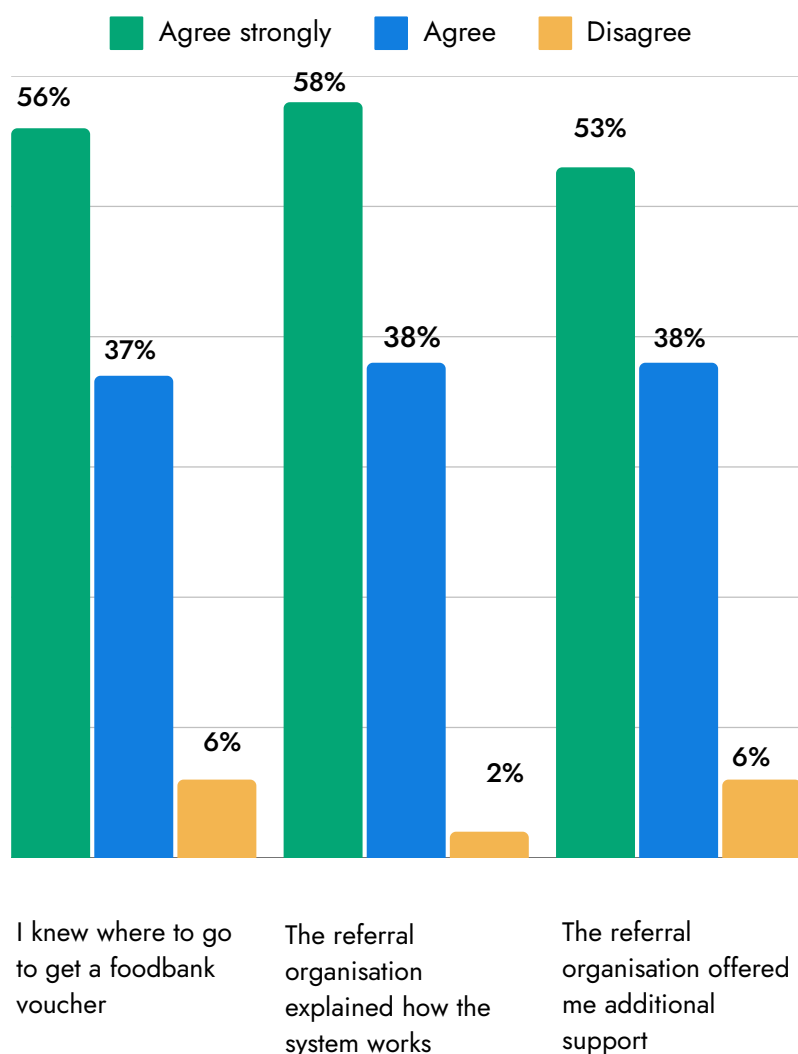
What support have you received with these issues, other than a food bank voucher?



Experience of using the Foodbank

Over the past year we have been working closely with our referral agencies to ensure the referrals process operates efficiently. Feedback from clients suggests this is working well. Most clients (94%) said they knew where to get a food bank voucher and most clients told us that the referral organisation explained how the system works (95%) and offered them additional support (91%) – see chart below.

Do you agree or disagree with these statements about the food bank referral process?



Once at the Foodbank, nearly all clients are either “very satisfied” (89%) or “satisfied” (8%) with the service provided. Asked to describe their experience of visiting the Foodbank, the feedback was extremely positive.

People said that the staff and volunteers are friendly, helpful, considerate, kind, non-judgemental, and supportive:

I was treated kindly and courteously and feel listened to and empowered.

Always polite, helpful, and friendly. The volunteers put me at ease and help where they can.

“ I was shown so much kindness, was able to keep my dignity. I feel I have a chance of making it through these rough times. So grateful. thank you for all your help :) ”

Finally we asked clients if they would be interested in supporting the Foodbank, once they no longer need to use it. Seven in 10 respondents said they would like to help in a range of different ways: by donating food (45%), volunteering at one of our centres (39%), sharing their stories to help raise awareness of poverty (25%), or helping with running of the charity (16%).



This is very encouraging as we continue to look for opportunities to involve our clients in how the charity is run and how to tackle the root causes of poverty. This is part of our broader participation strategy, recognising that effective, long-term solutions to poverty will only be found by working closely with people who have experienced it themselves.



Summary

- Over the course of a month, just over a third of clients are using the Foodbank to help them through a temporary crisis. The other two-thirds visit occasionally or regularly over an extended period, as part of their financial coping strategy or because their income is too low to get by on.
- The majority of clients identify multiple reasons for needing to use the Foodbank, ranging from rising prices, reduced earnings, and problem debt to poor health, benefit issues, and relationship breakdown. This shows the need to offer holistic support to address the underlying needs that drive food bank use.
- Just over half of respondents said they were getting all or most of the support they need; 12% are not getting any support, while 36% are only getting some of the support they need.
- Most clients agree that the referrals process is working well and nearly everyone is very satisfied (89%) or satisfied (8%) with the service provided by the Foodbank. People particularly value the friendly, kind, supportive and non-judgemental staff and volunteers.
- Seven in 10 clients said they would be interested in supporting the Foodbank in a range of different ways, once they no longer need to use it.

Next steps

In the light of these findings, we will...

- Continue to ensure that everyone who comes to the Foodbank is treated with compassion and kindness and signposted for additional support if needed.
- Feed back survey results to food bank clients.
- Continue to work with partners to develop a network of drop-in Advice Cafés so that everyone in our community has access to advice and support before they reach crisis point.
- Develop participation at our Foodbank centres, so that people with lived experience of using the Foodbank are involved in shaping our future direction. This includes the setting up of a 'Choose your own food' model.

