

Emergency Use Only!

Understanding and reducing the need for food banks in the UK

CASE Social Exclusion Seminar, 4th March 2015

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OF ENGLAND



OXFAM



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(Durham)

Trained food bank volunteers

Advisory Group

Background

- Rapid growth in food aid, especially Trussell Trust food banks
- Economic context
- DEFRA review (published Feb '14)
- Sterile political debate - demand or supply-led?

“Food from a food bank is a free good and by definition there is an infinite demand for a free good.”

Lord Freud (July 2013)

“There is no reliable evidence that welfare reforms are linked to increased use of food banks.”

Mark Hoban MP (Sep 2013)

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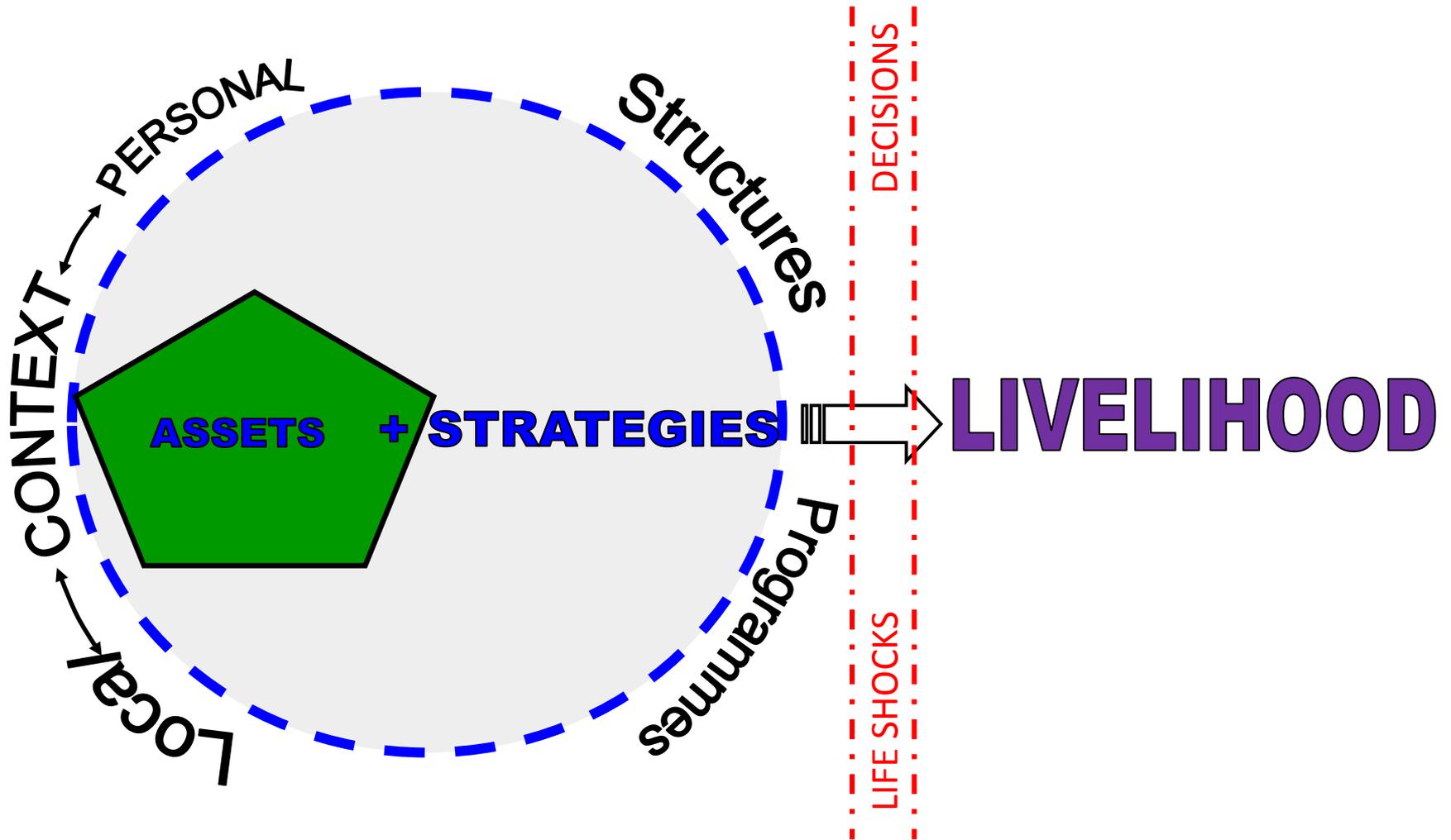
Research Questions

1. Why do people use food banks?
2. How do food banks fit with wider coping strategies?
3. What would help reduce the need for food banks in the future?

In-Depth Interviews

- 40 semi-structured interviews
 - purposive sampling to reflect diversity
- 7 food banks in range of contexts
 - Epsom, Kingston, Tower Hamlets, N Cotswolds, Sheffield, Durham, W Lothian
- Professional researcher and food bank volunteer
 - around 1 hour each
- Transcribed and analysed using NVivo

Sustainable Livelihoods Approach



Additional data collection

- 900+ clients at 3 of the participating food banks
- Supplement Trussell Trust data: specific benefit issues, crisis support, employment, and debt
- Additional form administered by food bank staff and volunteers (with permission of users)
- Gives an indication of the prevalence of issues
- Collated using SurveyMonkey and analysed using Stata

Caseload analysis

- 178 clients seen by welfare rights adviser located at the Tower Hamlets Foodbank
- Referred by food bank if identified any benefits issue(s)
- Enables independent verification and follow through of benefit problems
- Informs specific policy recommendations
- Data collected and analysed using AIMS database system

Why do people use food banks?

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Why...food banks?

Acute income crisis:

- Complete loss of main income
- Dramatic reduction in income

Chronic income crisis:

- Ongoing severe inadequacy of income

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‘We didn’t really want to come [...]

I like to be able to do things on my own and that. But my Mam had brought me a bit of food and I knew I wouldn’t be able to last....especially with baby milk and nappies and everything..... I needed to do something... so we came.’

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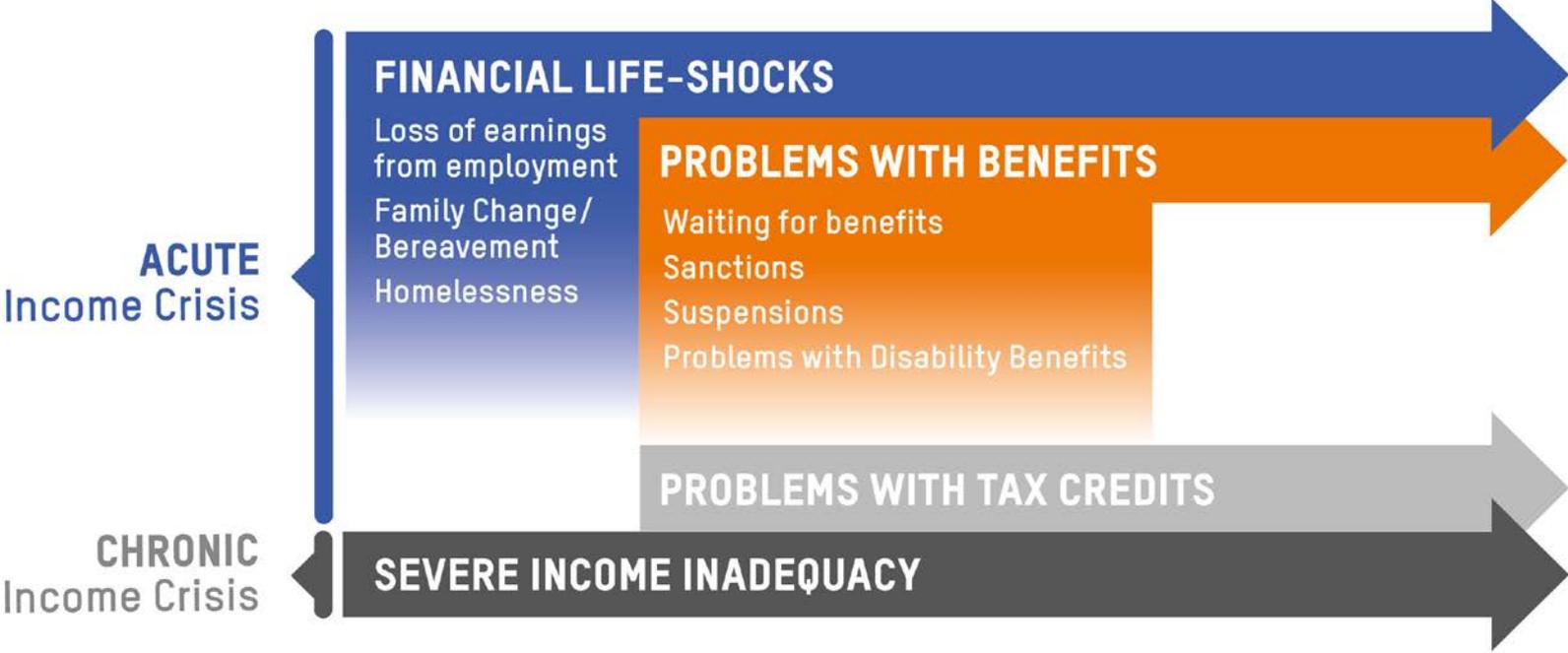
*“I am grateful to you, **it was such a help.** And also **just talking to somebody last week** was just so [useful]. I did get upset but [the food bank volunteer] was fantastic...just being there.*

*And as I say **none of you judged me, and you all treated everybody, no matter what they were, with respect.***

But at the end of the day you don't want to be [at a food bank]. I mean thank God for it because....I would have been....I don't know what I would have done last week.... It was absolutely ridiculous....

It shouldn't have happened”

Why...food banks?



Why...food banks?

Financial life-shocks

- Loss of earnings from employment
 - Delayed or missing wages
 - Redundancy
 - Ill-health or caring responsibilities
- Family change
 - Bereavement
- Problems with housing

Why...food banks?

Problems with benefits

- Waiting for benefits
- Sanctions
- Problems with disability benefits
- Missing tax credit payments

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Why...food banks?

	Durham	Epsom and Ewell	Tower Hamlets
	%	%	%
Income crisis arising from benefits:			
Waiting for benefits	28	32	34
Sanction	28	23	19
ESA stopped - found fit for work	16	9	11
One or more of above	54	50	55
Reduced benefit income:			
'Bedroom tax'	19	9	6
Benefit cap	9	12	3
One or more of all above	63	56	59
<i>No. of respondents (total)</i>	<i>651</i>	<i>122</i>	<i>153</i>

Why...food banks?

Severe income inadequacy

- Low income
 - Low or insecure wages
 - Benefit levels too low
- Under-payment of benefits
 - Under-claiming
 - Under-entitlement
- Reductions to benefits
 - Repayments
 - ‘Bedroom Tax’
 - Benefit Cap
 - Council Tax

Why...food banks?

Wider vulnerabilities

- Local area
 - Access to services
 - Access to jobs
 - Transport
- Health
 - Physical illness or disability
 - Mental health
- Education and skills
 - Formal qualifications
 - Language and literacy
- Housing
 - Suitability and security
- Isolation

What would help to reduce the need for food banks?

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What would reduce need for food banks?

Policy recommendations

- (1) Increase access to STBAs
- (2) Reform sanctions policy and practice
- (3) Improve ESA regime
- (4) Retain and improve LWAS
- (5) Efficient and supportive Jobcentres
- (6) Improve access to advice and support

What would reduce need for food banks?

1. Increase access to STBAs

- Increase awareness
- Simplify claims process
- Improve monitoring
- Make STBA available for missing tax credits

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What would reduce need for food banks?

	Total number of awards
Crisis loan alignment payments:	
2007/08	690,000
2008/09	865,800
2009/10	1,099,600
2010/11	1,162,500
2011/12	971,400
2012/13	834,500
STBA payments:	
2013/14	177,401

Source: responses to written PQs and FOI request to DWP (09/14)

What would reduce need for food banks?

2. Reform sanctions

- Increase access to hardship payments
- Clarify communications
- Mitigate impact during ‘reconsideration’
- Address implications for Housing Benefit

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What would reduce need for food banks?

3. Improve ESA regime

- Mandatory reconsideration
- Missing medical certificates
- Missed appointments

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What would reduce need for food banks?

4. Retain and improve LWAS

- Statutory duty and/or dedicated funding
- Increase awareness
- More central guidance and monitoring

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What would reduce need for food banks?

5. Efficient, supportive Jobcentres

- Reinststate access to telephone lines
- Make email addresses available
- Reduce complexity and clarify procedures
- Improve management and training
- Better treatment of people with mental health problems

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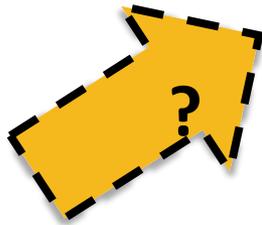

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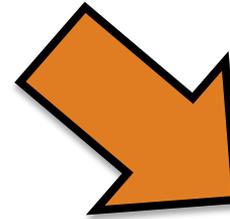
6. Access to advice and support

- Independent advice services and legal aid – better resourced
- Increase links between food banks and advice services
- Better signposting and support

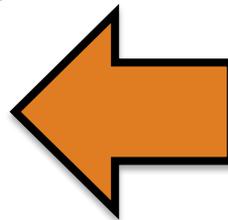
A vicious cycle?



Recession
Spending cuts
Welfare reform
Rising inequality



Growth of 'emergency' food
Local voluntary responses
Informal links to food waste
Increased visibility of hunger



Institutionalisation of food banks
Professionalisation of services
Corporate/state involvement
Normalisation of hunger

Bigger questions

- Is there a role for food banks as part of the safety net, and if so what....?
- ...or are food banks inherently demeaning (despite providers' best efforts)?
- Does emergency food contribute to the problem it is intended to solve...?
- ...or can hunger be a way into highlighting and addressing larger problems of poverty and powerlessness?