

Communities Scrutiny Panel

DATE	04/09/2025
REPORT OF	Director of Adult Social Care/Director of Public Health
SUBJECT	Food Poverty Assessment
STATUS	Open

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

The Council has two strategic priorities – Stronger Economy and Stronger Communities. Access for all people to healthy and nutritious food at reasonable cost is essential for the second of these priorities and important for the first. Therefore it is important to understand the extent and nature of food poverty in the Borough and to develop an action plan to address food poverty where it exists. This also aligns with the principle of developing North East Lincolnshire as a Marmot Place which was supported by Cabinet in July 2025.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2023, a Notice of Motion on Food Poverty was passed by Full Council, which included commitment to the delivery of a Food Poverty Action Plan by North East Lincolnshire Council. In order to ensure that there is a good understanding of the extent and nature of food poverty in North East Lincolnshire this needs assessment was commissioned to be delivered by the public health service.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

For members to consider the results and recommendations of the food poverty assessment, prior to the development of a food poverty action plan.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

Between February and May 2025, a Food Poverty Assessment was completed by the Public Health Team, with a view to informing a strategic response to food poverty in North East Lincolnshire.

The assessment aimed to:

- Understand the scale of food poverty in North East Lincolnshire, as well as trends over time.
- Understand risk factors for food poverty, including areas of the Borough where barriers in accessing sufficient, good quality, affordable food are likely to be most pronounced, and any groups of the population who are likely to be at heightened risk.
- Understand how people experiencing food poverty in North East Lincolnshire are currently being supported, including what works to increase people's food security in the long-term.
- Understand where there may be unmet need in the Borough in relation to food poverty.

- Formulate recommendations for strategies to ensure that everyone in the Borough is able to access sufficient, good quality, healthy food throughout their lives.
- The Food Poverty Assessment makes a series of recommendations, outlining where further work is needed to safeguard NEL residents' ability to access sufficient, good quality food. These recommendations will be used as the starting point to formulate a Food Poverty Action Plan for North East Lincolnshire, which will be shared with the Communities Scrutiny Panel for review.
- Officer support from within the Public Health Team will be given to developing a Food Poverty Action Plan over the autumn of 2025. The action plan will look to implement interventions which can be sufficiently resourced within available resources and will link to the ambitions of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy which is currently being finalised by the Health and Wellbeing Board. North East Lincolnshire's Food Forum (chaired by Public Health) will also be engaged in the development of this action plan, to ensure that a coordinated approach to reducing food poverty is taken across North East Lincolnshire. It is anticipated that the Food Poverty Action Plan will be ready for review by the Communities Scrutiny Panel early in 2026. This will enable sufficient time for the meaningful engagement of wider partners in the development of the action plan.
- The full report is included as Appendix 1.

2. RISKS, OPPORTUNITIES AND EQUALITY ISSUES

An Increase in the high levels of health inequality when comparing NEL to the region and nation is a highly rated risk on the council's strategic risk register and we know that one of the greatest impacts on health inequality is healthy weight and the food environment. Food poverty is substantially greater in poorer parts of our country and borough so addressing this effectively will ultimately reduce health inequality and reduce the risk overall.

3. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

The delivery of a food poverty action plan will support the council's relationships with individuals, communities and partner organisations and demonstrate our commitment to work together to meet our shared aims of a healthy and sustainable future.

The food poverty assessment provides baseline evidence for the extent and nature of food poverty in North East Lincolnshire and will assist in the delivery of the food poverty action plan.

4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

At this point there are no direct financial implications other than the officer time associated with developing a food poverty action plan. The recommendations from the assessment will be used to form the basis of an action plan which may bring some additional costs.

5. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

Food poverty is enormously damaging to children and young people resulting both in an increased risk of malnutrition and a substantially increased risk overweight/obesity due to the fact that food poverty leads to an over-dependence on cheap ultra processed food which is known to be obesogenic. The development of a food poverty action plan should mitigate some of these detrimental impacts on public health in children.

6. CLIMATE CHANGE, NATURE RECOVERY AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct implications but the gradual shift to a population eating healthier food will be beneficial for climate change and the environment.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no significant financial implications arising from the assessment. Any financial implications arising from the action plan will need to be assessed with the context of the Council's overall resources.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct legal implications arising from the report. However, it is worth noting that it is prudent to conduct an assessment to understand the extent and nature of food poverty before developing an action plan to inform the plan's priorities and ensure it effectively addresses, and delivers, the specific needs of the community.

9. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct HR implications contained within this report.

10. WARD IMPLICATIONS

The food poverty assessment is relevant to all wards in the Borough.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Director of Public Health Annual Report 2023.
NEL JSNA State of the Borough 2024.
Marmot Town Proposal Cabinet Paper, July 2025.

12. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

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APPENDIX 1:**Food Poverty in North East Lincolnshire****Introduction**

Food poverty in the UK has been rising for several years, with rising fuel, food and housing costs putting pressure on people's budgets. A household can be defined as experiencing food poverty if they cannot (or are uncertain about whether they can) acquire an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways.

Food poverty can be triggered by a change in finances or personal circumstances, such as a job loss or an unexpected expense. However, it can also be a long-term experience due to not having access to or not having the income or facilities needed to prepare healthy food.

North East Lincolnshire's Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives Strategic Framework sets out a vision that all Northern Lincolnshire residents are able to make healthy food choices throughout their lives. The Council has a key role to play in reaching this ambition, and is working with a range of partners, including the Northern Lincolnshire Food Partnership and local food banks, to achieve this.

However, to inform a strategic response to food poverty in North East Lincolnshire, it is necessary to understand the scale and nature of food poverty in the Borough, including who is most affected, risk factors, and how we might identify people at risk early and implement effective interventions to improve people's long-term food security.

Definitions

Food poverty has historically been defined as the inability to afford, or to have access to, foods which make up a healthy diet.¹

By contrast, food insecurity is often used as a broader term than food poverty, reflecting that financial concerns do not wholly explain why people's food access may be inadequate and that access to food is impacted by a complex interplay of factors, including environmental, social and economic factors.

Nevertheless, many modern definitions of food poverty and food insecurity overlap. For the purpose of this assessment, a household can be defined as experiencing food poverty if they cannot (or are uncertain about whether they can) acquire an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways.

Although this food poverty assessment does not look in depth at the broad range of factors influencing food access for North East Lincolnshire residents (for example,

¹ This definition of food poverty was set out in 2005 by the Department of Health.

the way in which the local food system operates), significant attention has been given to understanding the reasons why some local residents are struggling to access a sufficient quantity of food. As the assessment identifies, these barriers are broader than financial concerns.

Aims of the Food Poverty Assessment

In order to enable the Council to reach its ambition to ensure that all residents are able to make healthy food choices throughout their lives, the food poverty assessment aimed to:

- Understand the scale of food poverty in North East Lincolnshire, as well as trends over time.
- Understand risk factors for food poverty, including areas of the Borough where barriers in accessing sufficient, good quality, affordable food are likely to be most pronounced, and any groups of the population who are likely to be at heightened risk.
- Understand how people experiencing food poverty in North East Lincolnshire are currently being supported, including what works to increase people's food security in the long-term.
- Understand where there may be unmet need in the Borough in relation to food poverty.
- Formulate recommendations for strategies to ensure that everyone in the Borough is able to access sufficient, good quality, healthy food throughout their lives.

Objectives of the Food Poverty Assessment

The objectives of the food poverty assessment were to:

- Identify in which population groups/geographical areas we would anticipate the most demand for food support based on the prevalence of risk factors. Compare this to current demand for food support to identify any potential unmet need (i.e. population groups/areas of the Borough who may be experiencing food poverty but not receiving support).
- Collate data from food providers and wider support agencies on the demand for food support in North East Lincolnshire, including how this demand has changed over time, and population groups/geographical areas where demand is highest.
- Summarise current support available for people experiencing food poverty, including what community food provision is available and what support with wider determinant factors (such as debt, benefits, housing, fuel support) can be accessed by those receiving food support.
- Identify what has worked elsewhere in the country to combat food poverty, based on a literature review.

- Identify where pathways of support could be strengthened, and/or where opportunities exist to enhance support for people experiencing food poverty, including opportunities for early intervention.

What does national evidence say about who is at risk of food poverty?

The United Kingdom Food Security Report 2024 (DEFRA, 2024) highlighted that while a large majority of households in the UK continue to be food secure, there has been a notable decrease in food secure households between 2019/20 and 2022/23 (a food secure household in this context is defined as access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life). The decrease in household food insecurity over this time period has coincided with increased financial pressures to household budgets from both high general inflation and high food price inflation (DEFRA, 2024). This has led to households having to make difficult trade-offs, including choosing how much to spend on heating and food (DEFRA, 2024).

The Food Foundation's 2023 report 'The Broken Plate' found that in 2021-22 the most deprived fifth of the population would need to spend 50% of their disposable income on food to meet the cost of the Government recommended healthy diet (the Eatwell Guide), compared to just 11% for the least deprived fifth (Food Foundation, 2023).

Various national surveys of food security conducted since the Covid-19 pandemic (the Department for Work and Pension's Family Resources Survey, the Food Standards Agency's Food and You 2 Survey and the Food Foundation's Food Insecurity Tracker) have also highlighted that rates of food insecurity vary greatly by demographics (DEFRA, 2024). Low-income households (including those on income related benefits), households with disabled adults, households with children, ethnic minority households and households with a younger head of the household (particularly where the head of the household is aged 16 to 24) have been shown in these surveys to have the highest levels of household food insecurity (DEFRA, 2024).

For those households with children, the risk of food insecurity also appears to increase in households with greater numbers of children and in households which are headed by a single adult compared to multiple adults. The Food Foundation found that in June 2024 17% of households in the UK with one child were food insecure compared to 26% of households with 4 or more children and that in households which were headed by a single adult with children, 31.4% were food insecure, compared to 15.9% of multi-adult households with children (DEFRA, 2024).

Data from Food Foundation surveys also suggests that households with younger children are more at risk of food insecurity: 24% of households with a child under the age of four experienced food insecurity in January 2024, significantly higher levels than that seen in households without children and in households with only school-aged children (13% and 19% respectively).

Other risk factors include:

- Living in social rented accommodation – DWP data from 2022/23 highlights that social rented sector tenants (people who rent from councils or housing associations) were much more likely to be in food insecure households (27%). This compares with 14% of private renters in food insecure households. The

proportion of those in food insecure households was lowest among those who owned their home outright (without a mortgage), at 2%.

- Being in a household where everyone is out of work - Families in which everyone is out of work are much more likely to have a low household income and more likely to experience food insecurity. DWP data also shows that 17% of people in families where nobody worked were in food insecure households in 2022/23, compared with 9% of people in families where at least one adult worked.

Community Food Provision in North East Lincolnshire

There is a variety of community food provision in North East Lincolnshire. This includes:

Foodbanks – providing free food to the public:

- Rock Foundation
- We Are One (also provide hot food through a community kitchen)
- West Marsh Community Centre Food Larder (in partnership with We Are One)
- Feed the Community (in partnership with We Are One)
- Clee and St Francis Food Larder
- St Peter's Food Pantry, Cleethorpes
- CARE Food Larder Immingham
- Oasis Hub South Grimsby
- ECHO (also provide hot food)
- Side Door Youth and Community Church
- Food bank running out of the Molson Centre, Kent Street, Grimsby

Food Pantry – free membership for the public in that area, people pay a set fee per visit and choose a certain number of items:

- Generations Church Food Pantry, Willows (£4 per visit)
- We Are One Food Pantry (£4 per visit)

Hot food kitchens – provide hot food to the public:

- Grimsby Food Kitchen
- We are One (also provide a food bank)
- ECHO (also operate as a food bank)

Social supermarkets offering surplus food at discount prices for members who need that provision and qualify for their conditions:

- The Community Shop, Nunsthorpe (for registered resident members who fulfil benefit criteria)
- The Company Shop, Estate Road No. 8, Grimsby (Employees and pension recipients of the following sectors: – NHS, Care & Emergency Services – Prison Services – British Armed Forces – Charity – FMCG supply chain. People in receipt of means-tested benefits are also eligible).

Meals on wheels or similar paid-for community food offerings:

- Age UK
- Nurtrio (formerly Care4All)
- Meals Fore You (formerly Fresh Start Meals)

At least 4 organisations who provide either food parcels or hot food for their clients in the groups that they serve.

- Harbour Place
- Doorstep
- Women's Aid
- Staying Close project (supporting care leavers)

Scale of Food Poverty

The DWP published statistics on food bank use for the first time in March 2023. In 2022/23, 2.3 million people in the UK lived in a household which had used a food bank in the previous 12 months, a rate of 3% (Department of Health, 2024). This includes 6% of children, 3% of working-age adults, and around 1% of pensioners (Department of Health, 2024). National evidence also suggests that more people are using food banks. The Trussell Trust, a food bank charity which is estimated to run around 60% of food banks in the UK, have reported a significant increase in the number of emergency food parcels being delivered by the Trussell Trust network: in 2023/24, the Trussell Trust supplied 3.12 million emergency food parcels, the highest number of parcels distributed by the network in a year and an increase of 94% over the past five years (Trussell Trust, 2024).

In North East Lincolnshire, it is difficult to track trends over time in the use of food banks/emergency food provision. This is partly because data is not joined up between the majority of community food providers, meaning it is not possible to report on the number of unique households who have used food banks in the Borough in any given time frame (households may be double counted if using more than one foodbank). Likewise, whilst data was historically collected on the number of emergency food parcels and hot meals distributed each week by community food providers in the Borough, this data is not complete, as not all community food providers submitted data regularly. There was also a large gap in data collection following the redundancy of NEL's Community Food Coordinator.

Who is experiencing food poverty in NEL?

To understand who is experiencing food poverty in North East Lincolnshire and what is driving food poverty locally, a One Day Census exercise was conducted in a local food bank and food pantry. This was facilitated by a Public Health Principal attending We Are One Foodbank on both Thursday 17 and Tuesday 22 April 2025 (both weekdays that the food bank is open) and a foodbank volunteer running the survey at We Are One Food Pantry on Saturday 19 April 2025. As noted, these are different types of provision for people who are struggling to afford food: the foodbank provides food for free to those with evidence of financial hardship, whereas those attending the food pantry pay a small fee per visit. We Are One also operates a laundry service during food bank opening hours, allowing people experiencing homelessness to do their washing.

The One Day Census was anonymous (respondents were not asked for their name,

address or any other identifying information), however, it sought to understand the composition and demographics of households accessing food provision, as well as the reasons why people were needing to access a food parcel.

It should be noted that not everyone attending the food bank completed the survey. In some cases this was due to language (on Tuesday 22 April 5 individuals did not complete the survey due to not speaking English). However, some individuals did not want to complete the survey (9 individuals on 22 April).² Nevertheless, the majority of food bank and food pantry attendees were happy to complete the survey. In total, 68 unique responses were received from We Are One Food Bank attendees, and 44 unique responses were received from We Are One Food Pantry attendees. On the odd occasion when someone was attending We Are One Food Bank again on 22 April, having attended the previous week, they did not re-complete the survey.

Composition of households accessing food provision

The Trussell Trust, which is estimated to run around 60% of food banks in the UK, report on the number of food parcels distributed to the following age bands: 0 to 4, 5 to 11, 12 to 16, 17 to 24, 25 to 64 and 65+. It was decided to align the One Day Census with the Trussell Trust data reporting and record the number of people in each household within these same age bands, to enable comparison between demographics accessing food provision in North East Lincolnshire, and elsewhere in the country. This does however mean that children are defined in the following tables as those aged 0-16, and working age adults those aged 17-64, whereas a typical definition of a working age adult would be 18-64.

The One Day Census highlighted several differences between the composition of households attending We Are One Food Pantry (where people pay a £4 fee for a basket of shopping) and We Are One Food Bank (where food is provided for free).

44.8% of households who took part in the One Day Census at We Are One Food Bank were working age adults (17-64) living alone: this group made up the biggest cohort of who was accessing We Are One Foodbank on 17 and 22 April 2025. By contrast, only 13.6% of households who took part in the Census at the Food Pantry on 19 April were working age adults living alone.

The biggest cohort using the Food Pantry were households with multiple adults (17+) but no children (27.3% of households who took part in the Census). The Food Pantry was also accessed by a much higher proportion of households which were older adults (65+) living alone (22.7%) compared to the Food Bank (10.4%). There was a lower proportion of single parent households accessing both the food bank (11.9% of households who took part in the Census) and the food pantry (11.4% of households who took part in the Census) than might have been expected given national evidence. This could suggest unmet need amongst families. However, as has been highlighted, it is important to note that not everyone who attended the Food Bank or Food Pantry filled in the survey. Likewise, it is possible that other food banks in North East Lincolnshire are seeing a higher proportion of single parent households, such as those food banks which also provide a baby bank. The One Day Census was also only a snapshot of attendance at We Are One Foodbank, and it is possible that

² No tally of non-response was kept on the first day of the survey (17 April 2025), however, the number of non-responses on the 17 April were minimal.

conducting the survey on a different date would have seen different proportions of different types of households in attendance.

Table 1: Composition of households attending We Are One Food Pantry on 19 April 2025

Type of household	Count of households	% of households using food pantry
Household with multiple adults (17+) but no children	12	27.3%
Single adult household (17+) with at least one child (0-16)	5	11.4%
Household containing multiple adults (17+) and at least one child (0-16)	11	25.0%
Older person (65+) living alone	10	22.7%
Adult (17-64) living alone	6	13.6%
Total households	44	100.0%

*All 44 households completing the survey provided information on ages within their household

Table 2: Composition of households attending We Are One Food Bank on either 17 or 22 April 2025

Type of household	Count of household	% of households using food pantry
Household with multiple adults (17+) but no children	11	16.4%
Single adult household (17+) with at least one child (0-16)	8	11.9%
Household containing multiple adults (17+) and at least one child (0-16)	11	16.4%
Older person (65+) living alone	7	10.4%
Adult (17-64) living alone	30	44.8%
Total number of households who provided information on ages within the household	67	100.0%

*68 households attending We Are One food bank completed the survey, however information on ages within the household is only available for 67 households.

Reasons for attendance at We Are One Food Bank & Food Pantry

The final question of the One Day Census captured a household's reasons for needing a food parcel on that particular day. The options listed for this question were aligned to Trussell Trust data recording, with the idea that this would enable comparisons to be drawn with national trends. However, if the One Day Census was run again, these categories should be reviewed given the high number of 'other' responses (see table 3).

The most common response amongst those households accessing We Are One Foodbank on 17 or 22 April 2025 for why they were needing a food parcel on that particular day was 'other'. A range of other responses were given, but the most common was people stating a lack of income (18 respondents): for example, people reported either having only one income coming into the household or receiving limited benefits. It was notable that a small number of respondents (3) reported issues with addiction having an impact on their need to access support with food, and a small number also reported using the food bank whilst being on sick leave from work (3).

The complexity of people's circumstances was apparent as often attendees at the Food Bank had multiple reasons why they were needing support with food.

Reasons for attendance at the Food Pantry were a lot more consistent. Nearly all respondents highlighted a rising cost of essentials (rent, transport, food, fuel, etc) as the reason for needing to use the food pantry.

Table 3: Reasons for attending We Are One Food Bank on 17 or 22 April 2025

Reason for needing a food parcel	Count	Percentage of respondents
Other	35	51.5%
Rising cost of essentials (rent, transport, food, fuel, etc)	13	19.1%
Unemployment	12	17.6%
Insecure housing (living in temporary accommodation, under threat of eviction, etc)	10	14.7%
Ongoing impact of existing mental or physical health condition	7	10.3%
Benefit reduction (for example due to a sanction or change in eligibility)	4	5.9%
Benefit delay	3	4.4%
Awaiting first benefit payment	3	4.4%
Debt	3	4.4%
New or change to existing physical or mental health condition	2	2.9%
Change in relationship status	1	1.5%
Change in dependents (for example, having a new baby or caring for a relative)	1	1.5%
No access to financial support due to immigration status	1	1.5%
Change in work hours	0	0.0%
Other unexpected expense	0	0.0%
Loss of support from family or friends	0	0.0%
Domestic abuse	0	0.0%
Prefer not to say	0	0.0%
Total number of respondents	68	100.0%

*Respondents often had multiple reasons for needing a food parcel and so the total number of responses is greater than 68.

Table 4: Reasons for attendance at We Are One Food Pantry on 19 April 2025

Reason for attending Food Pantry	Count	Percentage
Rising cost of essentials (rent, transport, food, fuel, etc)	41	93.2%
Unemployment	5	11.4%
Ongoing impact of existing mental or physical health condition	2	4.5%
Debt	1	2.3%
Total number of respondents	44	100.0%

*Respondents sometimes had multiple reasons for needing a food parcel and so the total number of responses is greater than 44

Accommodation type of households using We Are One Foodbank and Food Pantry

The majority of attendees at We Are One Foodbank on 17 and 22 April either rented from the Council/a Housing Association (33.8%) or rented privately from a private landlord or letting agency (32.4%). 7 attendees (10.3%) were recorded as having no fixed address and 5 attendees (7.4%) were recorded as living in temporary accommodation. With regards to those attendees recorded as having no fixed address, some stated that they were sofa surfing, whereas others simply stated that they were homeless.

Table 5: Accommodation type of households using We Are One Foodbank on either 17 or 22 April 2025

Accommodation type	Count	Percentage
Rents from Council or Housing Association	23	33.8%
Rents privately: Private landlord or letting agency	22	32.4%
No fixed address	7	10.3%
Other*	6	8.8%
Living in temporary accommodation	5	7.4%
Owens with a mortgage	3	4.4%
Owens without a mortgage	1	1.5%
Living rent free (including rent-free in a relative or friend's property)	1	1.5%
Lives part rent and part mortgage	0	0.0%
Rents privately: Employer of a household member	0	0.0%
Rents privately: Relative or friend of household member	0	0.0%
Prefer not to say	0	0.0%
Total	68	100.0%

*Other responses included supported accommodation (3), Home Office/asylum accommodation (2), accommodation for people recently released from prison (1)

45.5% of attendees at We Are One Food Pantry on 19 April 2025 were renting

privately from a private landlord or letting agency, with a smaller percentage renting from the Council/a Housing Association (18.2%). It was notable that 27.3% of attendees at We Are One Food Pantry owned their house without a mortgage. National evidence suggests that people who rent from councils or housing associations are the most likely to be in food insecure households and that the proportion of those in food insecure households is lowest among those who own their home outright (without a mortgage).

However, further analysis of the One Day Census data showed that 11 of the 12 households attending the Food Pantry who owned their house without a mortgage contained an older adult (65+) and 5 of these 12 households were older adults who lived alone. All of these 12 households cited the rising cost of living as the reason why they were attending the food pantry. This reflects conversations had whilst conducting the Census, which highlighted the impact of the rising cost of living on older adults, some of whom specifically noted that they were reliant on their State Pension only.

Table 6: Accommodation type of households using We Are One Food Pantry on 19 April 2025

Accommodation type	Count	Percentage
Rents privately: Private landlord or letting agency	20	45.5%
Owens without a mortgage	12	27.3%
Rents from Council or Housing Association	8	18.2%
Owens with a mortgage	2	4.5%
Other	2	4.5%
Lives part rent and part mortgage	0	0.0%
Rents privately: Employer of a household member	0	0.0%
Rents privately: Relative or friend of household member	0	0.0%
Living in temporary accommodation	0	0.0%
Living rent free (including rent-free in a relative or friend's property)	0	0.0%
No fixed address	0	0.0%
Prefer not to say	0	0.0%
Total	44	100.0%

*Other responses included supported accommodation (1) and care rental (1)

Ethnicity of people using We Are One Food Bank and Food Pantry

97.7% of attendees at We Are One Food Pantry on 19 April 2025 described their ethnicity as White, compared to 86.4% of attendees at We Are One Foodbank on 17 and 22 April 2025. The results show there was more diversity in food bank attendance. However, it must be noted that results from analysis of the ethnicity question in the One Day Census will underrepresent ethnic groups other than White British. This is because several attendees at We Are One Foodbank were unable to take part in the survey due to English not being their first language. Therefore, the prevalence of food bank use by ethnic groups other than White was actually higher than was recorded. There was also evidence that food poverty is being experienced

by asylum seekers in North East Lincolnshire given the 'other' responses to the accommodation question where two respondents noted that they were living in Home Office/asylum accommodation.

Table 7: Ethnicity of people using We Are One Foodbank on either 17 or 22 April 2025

Ethnicity	Count	Percentage
White	57	86.4%
Asian or Asian British	2	3.0%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	2	3.0%
Other ethnic group	2	3.0%
Prefer not to say	2	3.0%
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	1	1.5%
Total	66	100.0%

Table 8: Ethnicity of people using We Are One Food Pantry on 19 April 2025

Ethnicity	Count	Percentage
White	43	97.7%
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	1	2.3%
Asian or Asian British	0	0.0%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	0	0.0%
Other ethnic group	0	0.0%
Prefer not to say	0	0.0%
Total	44	100.0%

Disability

As part of the One Day Census, respondents were asked 'Do you or anyone in your household have any physical or mental health conditions that have a substantial, long-term (lasting or expecting to last 12 months or more) effect on your ability to do day-to-day tasks?' This aligns with the UK Census definition of a disability.

Almost two thirds of attendees at both the food bank (66.2%) and the food pantry (65.9%) reported that they or someone in their household has a physical or mental health condition which has a substantial, long-term effect on their ability to do day-to-day tasks. This is in line with the national picture, which suggests that people living with a disability are more likely to be food insecure (Francis-Devine, 2024).

This also triangulates with what we know about work and health in North East Lincolnshire. In 2022/23 25.9% of adults in North East Lincolnshire were economically inactive. The main reason for being economically inactive was due to long term illness: North East Lincolnshire had a higher proportion on long term illness (33.7%) than the UK average of 26.5%. Indeed, 9 respondents (13.2%) mentioned either the ongoing impact of an existing mental or physical health condition or a new or change to their physical or mental health as a factor in why they were using the We Are One Foodbank. A small number of respondents also mentioned being on sick leave from

work.

Table 9: Proportion of respondents using We Are One Foodbank on either 17 or 22 April 2025 who reported having a physical or mental health condition which had a substantial, long-term effect on their ability to do day-to-day tasks

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	45	66.2%
No	20	29.4%
Prefer not to say	1	1.5%
Did not answer question	2	2.9%
Total	68	100.0%

Table 10: Proportion of respondents using We Are One Food Pantry on 19 April 2025 who reported having a physical or mental health condition which had a substantial, long-term effect on their ability to do day-to-day tasks

Answer	Count	Percentage
Yes	29	65.9%
No	15	34.1%
Prefer not to say	0	0.0%
Total	44	100.0%

Household Nutrition Survey findings

Between December 2023 and February 2024 a household nutrition survey was conducted in North East Lincolnshire, to understand more about how the adoption of a nutritious diet varies across the Borough. There were limitations in the representativeness of this survey in that only 198 responses were received, and the majority of these responses came from the most affluent wards of the Borough (wards such as East Marsh were particularly underrepresented). Likewise the majority of responses came from people aged over 35 and there were very few responses from people who didn't identify as White British. Nevertheless, this survey asked a series of validated questions³ to measure food insecurity amongst survey participants and found that the following factors were associated with increased food insecurity in North East Lincolnshire:

- Being in a younger age group
- Having a long-term mental health condition (expected to last 12 months or more)
- Having a physical disability or a long-term physical health condition (expected to last 12 months or more)

³ Food Insecurity was measured using questions from the UN FAO Food Insecurity Experience Scale (Pool, 2021). This is an experience-based measure of household or individual food insecurity, developed by FAO Statistics (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations). The FIES Survey Module (FIES-SM) consists of eight questions regarding people's access to adequate food and can be easily integrated into various types of population surveys. These questions can then be used to calculate a measure of food insecurity. More information on this scale can be found here: <https://www.fao.org/inaction/voices-of-the-hungry/fies/en/>

Frequency of use of emergency food provision in North East Lincolnshire

Data on how often households are using community food provision is limited. As previously highlighted, there are a range of community food providers in North East Lincolnshire, run by a range of organisations which are predominantly independent of one another (other than Feed the Community and West Marsh Food Bank, who work in partnership with We Are One). Likewise, in North East Lincolnshire, most foodbanks do not operate a mandatory referral system, meaning the onus is on the food provider (and not statutory agencies) to capture and record data. Most community food provision is also run predominantly by volunteers, with data collection methods varying from paper-based sign-in sheets where individuals accessing the foodbank/food pantry provide their name, postcode and how many people are in their household, to electronic systems where people are registered formally with a membership number. This means that for some food providers, it can be challenging to report on repeat attendance as the data would have to be manually linked from week to week. Most food providers also do not share data with each other (other than those partnered with We Are One, who have a shared data system), meaning that it is not possible to say whether households are using multiple food banks/food pantries in a week.

Data from Generations Church Food Pantry in Grimsby highlights that 33.5% of their members were active users of the food pantry.⁴ This suggests that for a large proportion of households who had at some point used this particular food pantry, they may not have been experiencing food poverty long-term. However, this could also indicate that these individuals who were not regular users of Generations Church Food Pantry were also using alternative food provision in North East Lincolnshire.⁵ Feedback from a focus group with North East Lincolnshire's Food Forum in March 2025 suggests that the experience of food poverty in North East Lincolnshire varies greatly between households temporarily needing support following emergencies and much longer-term reliance. Nevertheless, to truly understand the frequency of attendance at food banks and how long households are reliant on emergency food provision, additional work will be needed with community food providers.

Food poverty amongst children and young people in North East Lincolnshire

The Adolescent Lifestyle Survey (ALS) is a survey for young people who live in North East Lincolnshire or attend a secondary school in North East Lincolnshire which has been carried out every 3 or 4 years since 2004. The most recent survey was carried out in October 2024 with approximately 6,000 responses.

The results from the 2024 survey highlight that in 2024, 24% of young people in North East Lincolnshire (years 7 to 11) reported that they never eat breakfast. Of these young people who never eat breakfast, 3% (46 young people) stated that this was

⁴ This was calculated as the proportion of people who had ever visited Generations Church Food Pantry who had visited in the preceding 2 months (the period between 01 Jan 2025 and 27 Feb 2025).

⁵ Research conducted by Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire in 2024 highlighted that some people were using multiple foodbanks, although this was based on a limited sample size (28 conversations with people using food banks and food pantries in North East Lincolnshire).

because there is no food at home.

In 2024, 10% of young people in North East Lincolnshire (years 7 to 11) reported that they don't usually eat lunch. Of those young people who don't usually eat lunch, 17% reported that this was because school food is too expensive.

The 2024 ALS also included the Your Voice, Your Vote annual consultation, which allows young people in North East Lincolnshire to vote for the issue they believe is most important to make change. These votes each year influence local priorities and actions which are then sent to the British Youth Council/UK Youth Parliament. Although food was not one of the options which young people could vote for in the 2024 Your Voice, Your Vote, young people were asked if they had any other topics or ideas for next year and around 30 young people mentioned a food related topic, including calls for cheaper school meals and free school meals for everyone.

National evidence suggests children are more likely than adults to be in food insecure households: in 2022/23, 17% of children, 11% of working-age adults and 3% of pensioners in the UK were in food insecure households (Francis-Devine B., 2024). However, not everyone in a food insecure household experiences it directly and children are often shielded from this. The Child Poverty Action Group reports that children in these households do not always have insufficient food, as parents often skip meals to make sure their children are fed (Francis-Devine B., 2024). Therefore, although low numbers of young people reported there being no food at home in the ALS, it cannot be assumed that all other young people surveyed were in food secure households. The cost of food appeared to be an issue which affected a notable cohort of young people in the survey, as highlighted by the percentage of young people not usually eating lunch due to the cost of school food and the Your Voice, Your Vote responses.

Geographical variation in referrals for food support

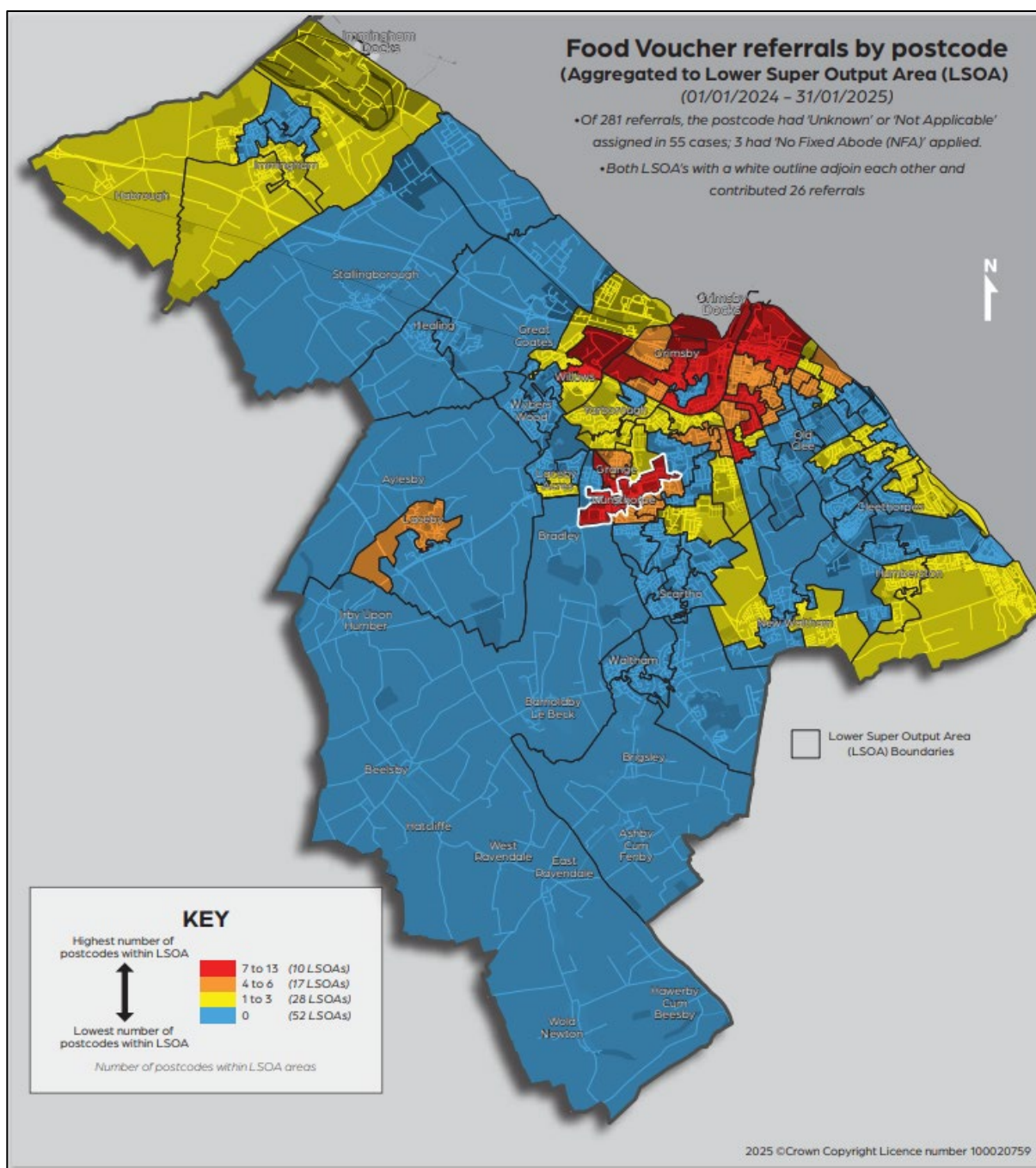
In North East Lincolnshire, a community signposting service operates called Connect NEL. This service comprises a phoneline which operates Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm and a database of services and activities in the local community. Connect NEL can also provide food vouchers and will refer people to food banks where they are experiencing hardship. It must be noted that the referrals to foodbanks/provision of food vouchers by Connect NEL will only represent a small fraction of where individuals are struggling to access sufficient food/experiencing hardship. This is because, as aforementioned, most community food providers in North East Lincolnshire do not operate a referral system, and so people can access food provision without engaging with external agencies. Nevertheless, the data provided by Connect NEL is useful as it highlights the geographical variation in both referrals to foodbanks and provision of food vouchers.

Data from the beginning of January 2024 to the end of January 2025 on food voucher referrals made through Connect NEL highlights that:

- 94.7% of 281 referrals had a *query*, or a reason of 'Food Hardship' assigned. 'Domestic Violence,' 'Financial Support,' 'Fuel Hardship,' 'General Hardship,' and 'Information & Advice' were also recorded, but numbers were relatively negligible.
- 100% of referrals were supported with food vouchers.

- 95.4% of people received help on the same day; 6 people waited one day and 7 people waited longer than that. The maximum wait was 14 days (1 person).
- Connect NEL usually can only provide a food voucher once in a six month period. Therefore, sometimes the service will also refer individuals to another agency who can issue a food voucher, where they are unable to issue a voucher themselves. Connect NEL data highlights that the provider of the food vouchers was broadly split between two organisations: CARE were the providers in 23.8% of cases, while Connect NEL provided them in 68% of cases. Community Shop contributed most after that, helping in 8 cases.
- Regarding the ward of residence for food voucher referrals, South had the highest rate with 4.4 per 1,000 residents (based on the ONS' 2022 Mid-Year Population Estimates). Just behind that figure was East Marsh with 4.2 referrals per 1,000 residents. There is then a slight drop to the rate recorded by West Marsh (3.4). These three wards contributed 119 referrals, while Waltham and Scartho contributed 0. It should be noted, however, that individuals can be referred for food vouchers several times per year, with different organisations applying different limits. So, these rates should be taken as indicative of a trend and *not* as a numerical distinction between wards.
- Of the 281 referrals for food vouchers, 223 had valid postcodes and 138 of these were unique. So, 85 referrals were for postcodes that had already seen a referral. Four postcodes saw 7 or more referrals. Although, multiple households in a single postcode can be referred for food vouchers, so this does not necessarily indicate repeat demand from the same households.

Figure 1 – Food voucher referrals in the period 01/01/24 – 31/01/25 in North East Lincolnshire. Breakdown by LSOA.



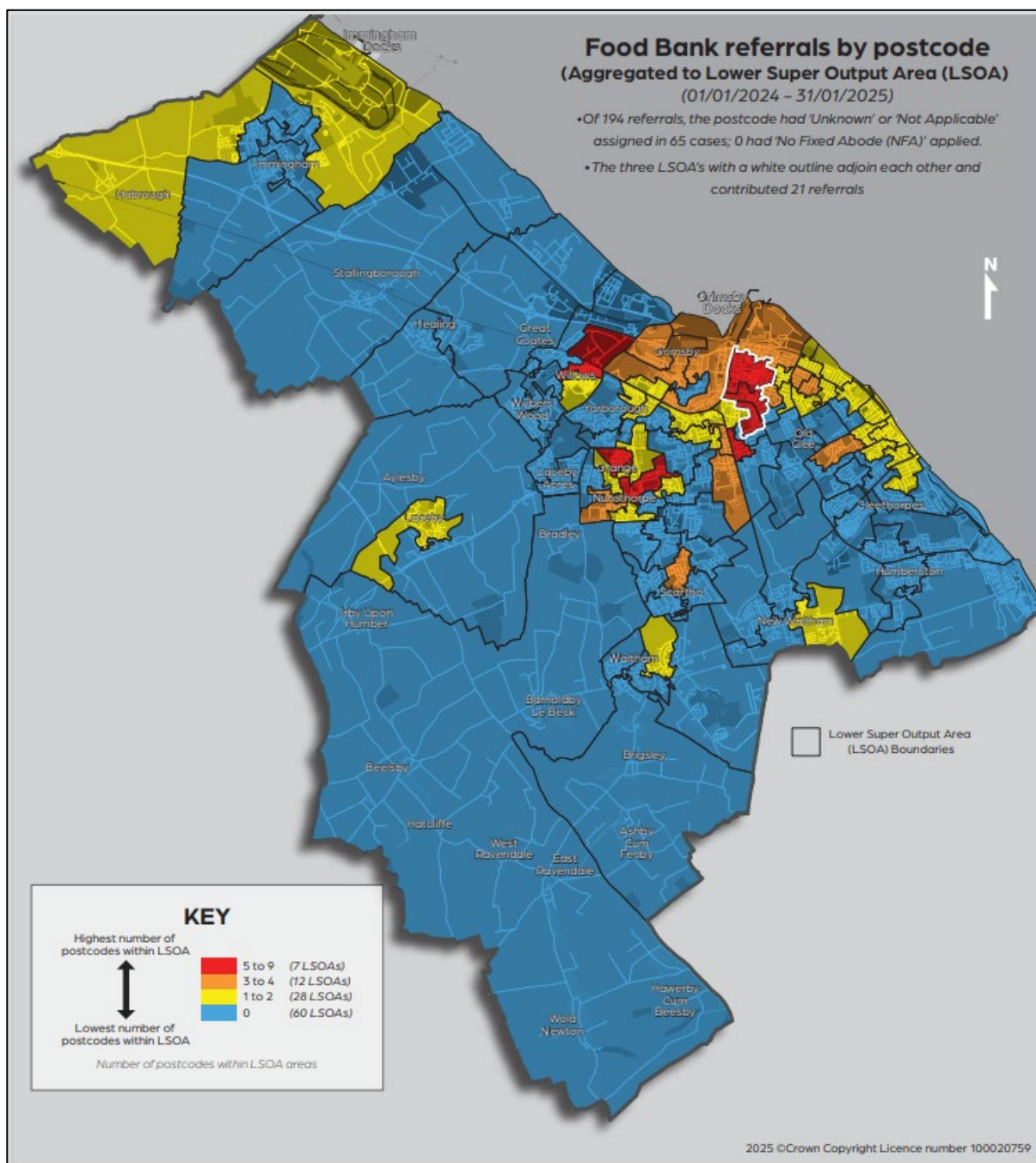
Source – Connect NEL

Data from the beginning of January 2024 to the end of January 2025 on food bank referrals made by Connect NEL highlights that:

- 92.8% of 194 referrals had a *query*, or a reason of 'Food Hardship' assigned. 'Financial Support,' 'Fuel Hardship,' 'General Hardship,' 'Information & Advice,' 'Medical Services/Information,' and 'Mental Health' were also recorded, but numbers were relatively negligible.
- 88.1% of referrals were supported with 'signposting'. The remainder received 'Information *only*.'

- All but two people received help on the same day; one individual waited two days and the other waited ten days.
- Unlike with food vouchers, there was a somewhat mixed picture in terms of the provider of the help given here. The Rock Foundation provided help in 43.3% of cases, We Are One were the providers for 20.6% of the total, and Connect NEL helped 9.3%, while 12.3% were given the details of *all* the area's food banks and advised to check Connect NEL's information; the remaining 14.4% were helped by other food banks, of which Echo contributed the most, helping 5 people.
- Like referrals for food vouchers, the ward distribution of people receiving food bank referrals reflect existing trends in health and deprivation. Although, in this case, East Marsh contributed the most, with 2.8 referrals for every 1,000 residents (based on the ONS' 2022 Mid-Year Population Estimates). South and West Marsh recorded figures of 1.7 and 1.4, respectively. All wards had at least one referral, but collectively, Haverstoe, Humberston and New Waltham, Waltham, and Wolds recorded only 6, equalling a rate of 0.16 referrals per 1,000 residents. It should be noted, however, that individuals can be referred to food banks several times per year, with different organisations applying different limits. So, these rates should be taken as indicative of a trend and *not* as a numerical distinction between wards.
- Of the 194 referrals to food banks, 129 had valid postcodes and 89 of these were unique. So, 40 referrals were for postcodes that had already seen a referral. Six postcodes saw 4 or more referrals. Although, multiple households in a single postcode can be referred for food vouchers, so this does not necessarily indicate repeat demand from the same households.

Figure 2 – Referrals to Food banks in the period 01/01/24 – 31/01/25 in North East Lincolnshire. Breakdown by LSOA.



Source – Connect NEL

Risk factors for food poverty in North East Lincolnshire

Evidence submitted to an All-party inquiry into the extent and causes of hunger and food insecurity in the UK suggested that individuals and families are most at risk of experiencing hunger and food poverty when they lack either the practical or financial resources, or both, to deal with a crisis when it strikes (Forsey, 2014). The key underlying causes of hunger and food poverty in the UK were found to be in the long-term erosion of poorer households' financial buffer, coupled, for some, with a

diminished ability to cope on a low income (Forsey, 2014).

Challenges in relation to the financial resilience of households in North East Lincolnshire are highlighted by data from Citizens Advice.

Citizens Advice North East Lincolnshire are rarely in contact with clients where a need for emergency food provision is their only presenting issue. Where this is the case, the contact would be recorded under 'Charitable Support and Food Banks' and usually only as a simple query (signposting). In the 2024-25 financial year, only 31 people and 57 issues were recorded under this issue. However, a high number of benefits, debt and other cases seen by Citizens Advice will have been given the details of food provision as part of their advice provision, as the underlying issue would be addressed, and signposting for immediate support provided.

Between April 2024 and March 2025, 2,211 clients in North East Lincolnshire were supported by Citizens Advice with 8,555 issues. The top issue for which support was provided in this time frame was debt (2,806 debt issues supported), followed by benefits and tax credits (1,813 benefits and tax credits issues supported).

Table 11: Top issues seen by Citizens Advice North East Lincolnshire between April 2024 and March 2025

Issue	Count
Debt	2,806
Benefits & tax credits	1,813
Immigration & asylum	790
Housing	685
Benefits Universal Credit	468

During this same time period (April 2024 to March 2025), the top debt issue supported was debt assessment (554 issues seen in relation to this), followed by Council tax arrears (332 issues seen in relation to this).

Table 12: Top Five Debt issues seen by Citizens Advice North East Lincolnshire between April 2024 and March 2025

Issue	Count
Debt Assessment	554
Council tax arrears	332
Other Debt	327
Debt Relief Order	301
Fuel debts	199

The top benefit issue seen in North East Lincolnshire by Citizens Advice in this time period was issues in relation to Personal Independent Payment (826 issues seen). Indeed, the number of Personal Independent Payment (PIP) issues seen by Citizens Advice in North East Lincolnshire has increased by 20% in the 2024-25 financial year: 688 PIP issues were supported in 2023-24 compared to 826 PIP issues in 2024-25.

Table 13: Top Five benefit issues seen by Citizens Advice North East Lincolnshire between April 2024 and March 2025

Issue	Count
Personal independence payment	826
Not recorded/not applicable	211
Attendance Allowance	202
Limited capability for work elements	136
Other benefits issues	130

Between April 2024 and March 2025, 81% of clients supported by Citizens Advice North East Lincolnshire were recorded as having a White ethnicity, and 19% of clients were recorded as being from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups. Given that during this time period, 790 issues were seen by Citizens Advice in relation to immigration and asylum, this data suggests that a large number of refugees and asylum seekers are likely accessing support from Citizens Advice in North East Lincolnshire.

The majority (53%) of those supported by Citizens Advice between April 2024 and March 2025 were either disabled or had a long-term health condition. The highest proportion of clients supported were in the 65+ age group (21%), closely followed by the 35-44 age group (20%).

Table 14: Clients seen by Citizens Advice North East Lincolnshire between April 2024 and March 2025, broken down by age group

Age group	Percentage of clients seen
<25	5%
25-34	17%
35-44	20%
45-54	17%
55-64	19%
65+	21%

When people are struggling to pay their fuel, council tax and rent (the priority debts) and need extra income, it is likely that they may need to access food banks to bridge the gap. Between April 2023 and March 2025, data from Citizens Advice for North East Lincolnshire shows that:

- 2,404 clients were supported with 9,828 issues in relation to benefits and tax credits, debts and housing.
- 1,115 clients were supported with 3,421 issues in relation to benefits and tax credits.
- 1,104 clients were supported with issues in relation to debt. In total 5,163 issues in relation to debt were dealt with in this time period.
- 454 clients were supported with issues in relation to housing. In total, 1,244 issues in relation to housing were dealt with in this time period.
- The largest percentage of issues dealt with were in relation to debt (53% of issues), followed by benefits and tax credits (35% of issues) and housing (13% of issues).

This data highlights the complexity of people's circumstances, as individuals receiving

support from Citizens Advice often had more than one presenting issue.

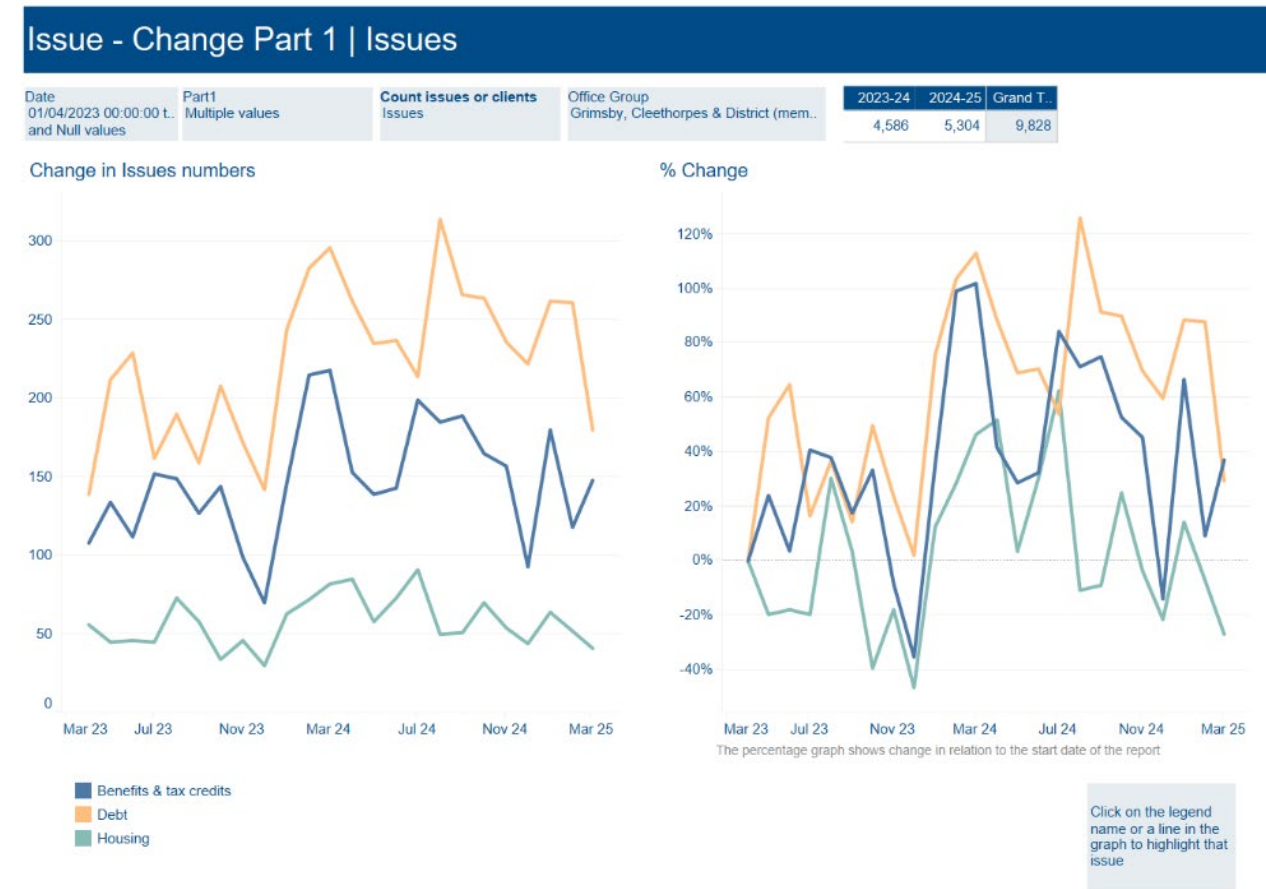
Table 15: Overview of benefits, debt and housing support provided by Citizens Advice North East Lincolnshire between April 2023 and March 2025

	Clients	% Clients	Issues all	% Issues
Benefits and tax credits	1,115	46%	3,421	35%
Debt	1,104	46%	5,163	53%
Housing	454	19%	1,244	13%
Grand Total	2,404	100%	9,828	100%

Figure 3 below demonstrates the change over time in the number of debt, benefit and housing issues dealt with by Citizens Advice North East Lincolnshire. Between April 2023 and March 2025, debt was consistently the most common issue for which support was provided, followed by benefits and tax credits and then housing. It is also apparent from this chart that Citizens Advice have seen a significant increase in demand between April 2023 and March 2025, with a particular spike in demand in the fourth quarter of 2023-24 and the second quarter of 2024-25. This suggests that the financial pressure faced by households in North East Lincolnshire in relation to debt and benefits (and to a lesser extent housing) may be increasing.

Whilst there was a dip in December each year in how many issues were dealt with, it must be noted that Citizens Advice close for part of the month in December.

Figure 3: Change in the benefits, debt and housing support provided by Citizens Advice North East Lincolnshire between April 2023 and March 2025



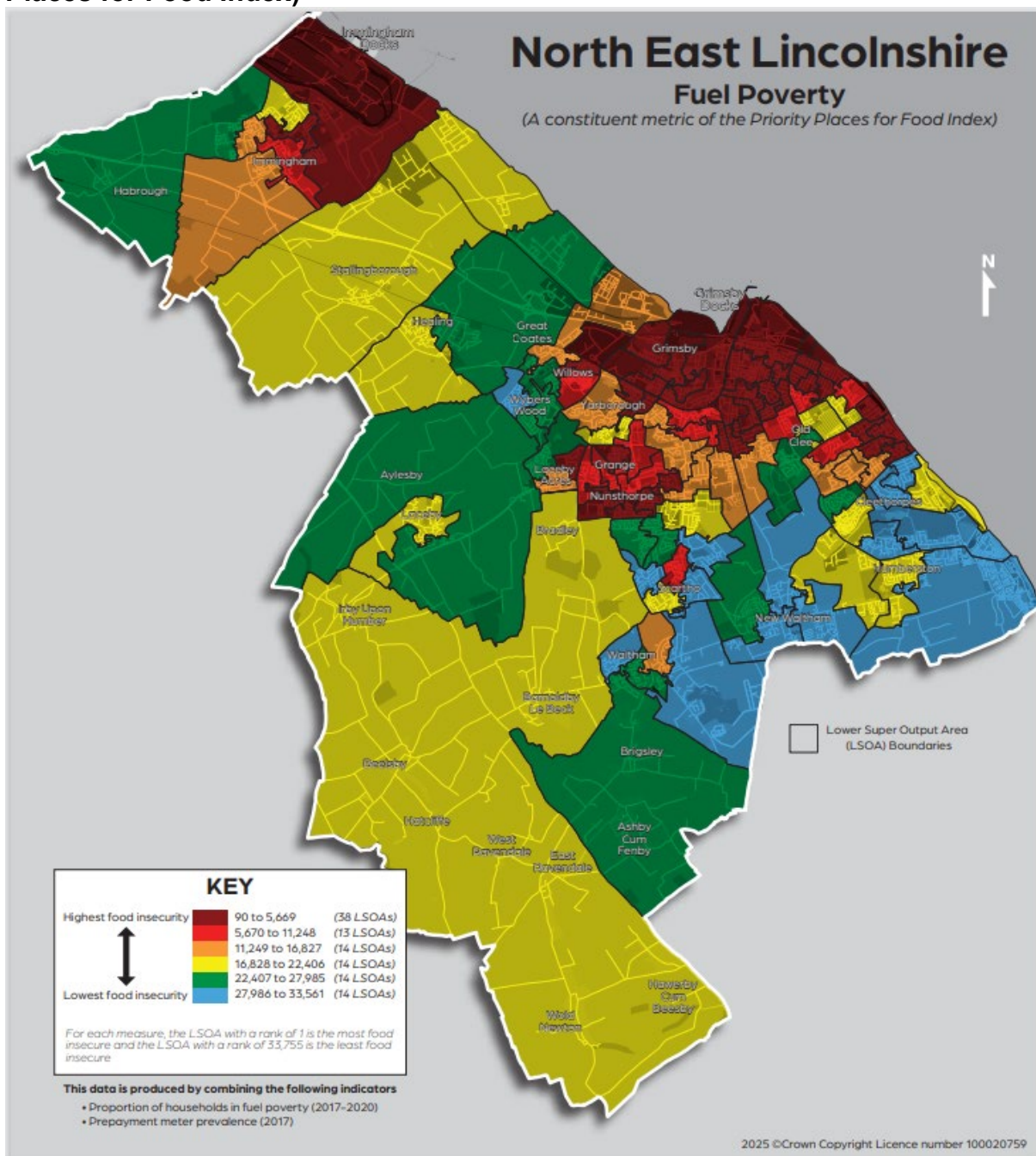
Priority Places for Food Index

The Priority Places for Food Index is a composite index formed of data compiled across seven different dimensions relating to food insecurity risk in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Its goal is to identify neighbourhoods that are most vulnerable to increases in the cost of living and which have a lack of accessibility to cheap, healthy, and sustainable sources of food.

This Index includes a metric on fuel poverty (Figure 4), which indicates that the more deprived urban areas of the Borough experience the highest rates of fuel poverty (particularly the East Marsh, West Marsh, Sidney Sussex, Croft Baker and South wards and parts of Immingham) however, fuel poverty does also exist at lower levels in the rural areas of the Borough.

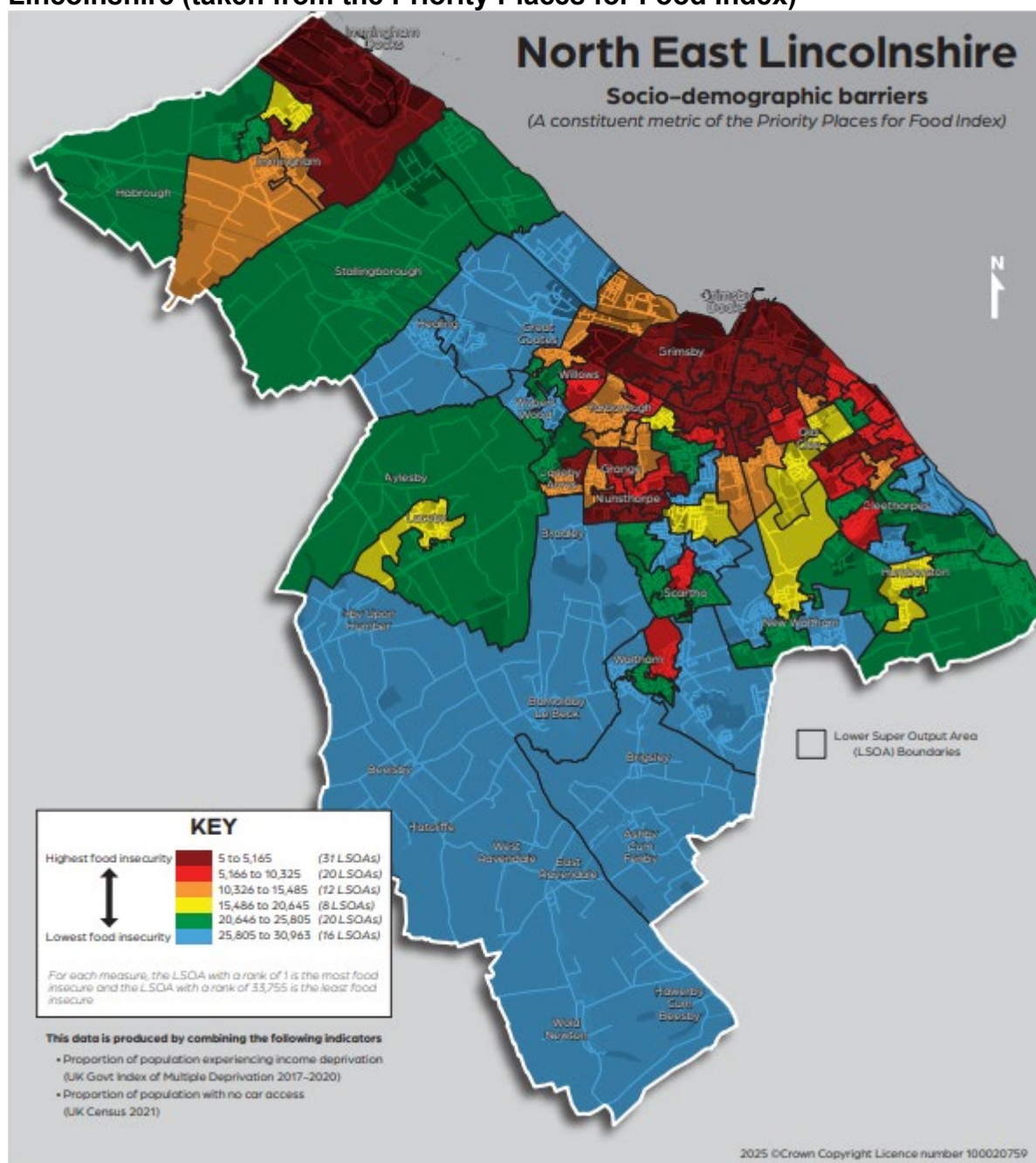
Data from April 2022 until February 2025 shows that when it comes to support around utility debts, fuel debts were by far the biggest issue for which support was provided by Citizens Advice North East Lincolnshire during this time frame. There was also a large spike in support for fuel in early 2024.

Figure 4 Fuel Poverty in North East Lincolnshire (taken from the Priority Places for Food Index)



The metric of the Priority Places for Food Index which looks at socio-demographic barriers (the proportion of the population experiencing income deprivation and the proportion of the population with no car access) highlights that the most deprived areas of the Borough are likely to experience the greatest socio-demographic barriers to food access.

Figure 5 Socio-demographic barriers to food access in North East Lincolnshire (taken from the Priority Places for Food Index)



Perspective of community food providers and wider support agencies

In North East Lincolnshire, a Food Forum has been running since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. This forum brings together community food providers (food banks, food pantries, community kitchens, social supermarkets), and wider support agencies such as Centre4, Citizens Advice North East Lincolnshire, HEY Credit Union and Navigo, who meet bi-monthly to discuss challenges and opportunities in relation to food provision.

In March 2025, a focus group was held with attendees of North East Lincolnshire's Food Forum to inform this food poverty assessment. This focus group sought to

understand the perspective of community food providers and wider support agencies in relation to the scale of food poverty in North East Lincolnshire, who is most affected, where support is working well, and where there are opportunities to enhance the support available for individuals struggling to access and afford sufficient food. The following themes emerged from this focus group:

Risk factors for food poverty

- Insufficient income, including the lack of a financial buffer for emergencies puts people at risk of food poverty. Emergencies, such as a broken washing machine or a failed MOT, can push individuals into food poverty, even if they are employed. These situations often lead to a sudden need for food assistance, which can be temporary or develop into a long-term issue.
- Changes in the benefits system have caused confusion. It was mentioned that it is crucial to signpost individuals correctly to ensure they receive the appropriate amount of benefits.
- Providers highlighted that demand increases slightly during the cold winter months. This was attributed to people experiencing homelessness finding accommodation and the higher need for food kitchens.
- The impact of addiction on food security was highlighted. It was noted that a significant amount of money is spent on alcohol in North East Lincolnshire (as one local organisation's review of bank statements has highlighted) and that online gambling is also easily accessible and may be linked to loneliness.

Groups particularly vulnerable to food poverty

Providers highlighted that food poverty can affect anyone. However:

- There has been an increase in individuals just over the earnings threshold who are not receiving support elsewhere accessing food provision. There are also higher numbers of people using food pantries for more affordable food options.
- Rising bills have led to more families seeking assistance.
- There has been an increase in older individuals (pensionable age) needing support. For example, there has been an increase in memberships from older people in the Community Shop.
- Whilst initially, community kitchens primarily served people experiencing homelessness (including people who were sofa surfing), they now also see families and individuals released from prison by the Probation Service.
- It was noted that young individuals who were previously homeless often lack the income to furnish their homes and feed themselves. These young people may under-report their food spending to secure housing, meaning they then do not have enough money for food.

Wider support needs of people experiencing food poverty

Providers fed back that individuals experiencing food poverty often need:

- Assistance with navigating the benefits system. Support with applications and preventing individuals from staying stuck in cycles was seen as essential.
- Help with budgeting/managing finances.
- Support with mental health issues.
- Support for physical health concerns.

- Individuals released from prison often need support with accommodation.
- People experiencing homelessness often need additional clothing.

Where support is working well

- The increase in food larders (pantries) was noted as a positive development as we are moving away from traditional food banks.
- Existing wraparound support was discussed very positively. For example:
 - The establishment of satellite sites, such as the one in Cleethorpes, is beneficial. These sites assist with substance use problems and can appoint agency representatives to help with mental health issues, housing, and employment.
 - Lincolnshire Housing Partnership tenants can access a well-staffed money support team, which partners with the council to offer Household Support Grants. However, as noted below, at the time of the focus group, the uptake of this service was relatively low.

How support for people experiencing food poverty could be improved

The focus group highlighted that:

- There is a need for better communication about available support and what the capacity of existing support services is. It was noted that there are effective support services in place in North East Lincolnshire but some of these services are overstretched, and others have low uptake despite efforts to communicate the support available.
- Where wider support services are overstretched, this can lead to people slipping through the net as services lack availability to provide in-person assistance. It was specifically flagged that Citizens Advice are struggling due to being overstretched and having a locked door policy for security reasons. Providers highlighted that lots of people are getting signposted to them, but they don't always have the capacity to meet this need.
- Many individuals are in unsuitable accommodation, such as B&Bs with limited facilities (e.g., only a microwave and kettle). In particular, it was flagged that there are a high number of families in emergency accommodation locally. Whilst it was noted that work is being done to address this, providers highlighted that monitoring accommodation and moving people into more suitable housing quickly is essential.
- Effective information sharing is crucial to support individuals experiencing food poverty, to understand how often people are visiting food banks and for ensuring a fair distribution of food. It was noted that whilst some food providers work collaboratively and have shared data systems, there has been a reluctance to share information between providers, which has previously hindered the setup of a data-sharing database. Focus group participants noted a need for a greater understanding of when information can be shared, especially when it pertains to safeguarding concerns.
- There are concerns about children standing in queues for food with individuals who have substance use issues. There have been altercations at food banks in the past.
- Housebound individuals who cannot leave their homes face significant barriers.
- Many food larders and foodbanks are struggling as they are run by unpaid volunteers who have other jobs. Food providers also noted that there was a need

for increased funding to meet demand and that there is a need for safety training for volunteers. Resourcing volunteers in a sensible manner is essential (for example, by providing them with appropriate training).

- Longer-term reliance on food banks is an issue. This can be contrary to wider work to empower people. For example, supported housing aims to teach independence, but some individuals in this accommodation rely on foodbanks,

Important principles for food provision

It was highlighted that many individuals feel distraught about needing to use foodbanks. Some individuals may not ask for support due to shame or fear, which could be generational. Some people are also hesitant to use foodbanks due to stigma and reluctance to bring their children. Providers highlighted that:

- Creating a comfortable atmosphere where people can discuss their situations without being cross-examined is crucial.
- Treating everyone with respect and establishing relationships is important.

Lived experience

In July 2024, Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire published a report detailing the findings of 28 individual conversations with people using foodbanks and food pantries across North East Lincolnshire. These conversations explored the reasons why people were using food banks/food pantries, their experiences of using this provision, the challenges they had faced, and what support would help them longer-term to not need to use food banks/food pantries. The most common reason that the people that Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire spoke to were using foodbanks was due to debt: this was either because of long-term health conditions, people being on benefits or not being able to find employment.

Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire also found that those spoken to:

- Felt they needed more wrap around support to enable them to improve the circumstances that they found themselves in.
- Praised the wraparound support that was already offered alongside food provision. (The wraparound support people were currently receiving varied from debt and benefit advice to a listening ear.)
- Could see a time when they stopped using foodbanks but would need support for this to happen.
- Appreciated the foodbanks/food pantries that offered a social space to have a conversation as they knew that extra support was there if they needed it.⁶

The Healthwatch research also highlighted that those providers that gave users a choice of food or had previously had a discussion with the individual to ensure that they could cook the food provided and that the food they were given was familiar to them had better results (both for the individual supported and in terms of food waste).

⁶ There are food banks in North East Lincolnshire that have adopted the 'Warm Space' idea all year round, to enable their users to have a space to socialise and eliminate some of their isolation.

What works to combat food poverty?

Feeding Britain is an independent charity which is working to eliminate hunger in the UK by tackling its underlying causes. Feeding Britain “What Works Centre” has been working alongside their regional partners to create and develop innovative projects that improve people’s access to affordable, nutritious food and strengthen safety nets for those vulnerable to food insecurity. The key projects being implemented across this network are:

1. **Affordable Food Clubs** – this includes establishing and supporting social supermarkets, food pantries, food buses and food larders, where nutritious food is provided at affordable costs/a fraction of its retail value. Such provision is a stepping stone out of crisis provision back to mainstream food whilst still providing a safety net to people experiencing food poverty.
2. **Pathways from poverty** – The Pathways from Poverty model involves placing specialist advice workers into community-led food projects to maximise people’s incomes and tackle the underlying causes of hardship. The Advice Workers provide support around benefits, debt advice, budgeting, housing, energy or employment.
3. **Healthy Holidays** – During school holidays, when there is a loss of term time free school meals, children in the UK are at greater risk of hunger and food insecurity. Feeding Britain’s Healthy Holidays programmes combines nutritious meals and enriching activities to protect children from hunger and the negative physical and mental health impacts it causes. Research undertaken by Long, M. Stretesky et al in 2017 showed that when secure and insecure households are compared, food insecure households benefit the most from holiday clubs, which suggests that holiday clubs may play an important role in mitigating household food insecurity. Feeding Britain played an important role in the introduction and piloting of the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme, which was based on their Healthy Holidays model.

The role of local authorities

In 2023, the Health Foundation produced a list of actions that local government can take to increase food security in their populations. This includes both taking steps to prevent people at risk from experiencing food insecurity and providing targeted support for those who need it. The Health Foundation also noted the support needed by local government, including the need for sufficient and sustainable funding from national government and the need for research funders and academics to work with local authorities to build and disseminate the evidence base about what works to reduce food insecurity (The Health Foundation, 2023).

The Health Foundation’s recommendations for local government were as follows:

- Continue to provide cost-of-living and poverty support, as well as longer term support to incomes through employment support or other interventions and extend monitoring and evaluation of this support to include impacts on food insecurity.

- Support access to existing nationally funded measures among eligible residents, including free school meals and healthy start vouchers.
- Consider implementing evidence-based interventions for reducing food insecurity. This evidence needs to be further developed, but effective interventions include universal – or extended – access to free school meals, school holiday provision and meals on wheels.
- Use the Food Security Risk Index together with wider local intelligence to identify at risk groups or households and target support to these, including emergency support where needed and connection to services supporting access to and advice about welfare and debt.
- Take action to mitigate health and other negative impacts of food insecurity among those experiencing it, taking a systems approach to understand the breadth of impacts and the services that may support with these; for example, providing access to mental health professionals at food banks.
- Consider opportunities for a much wider systems approach to food access and availability that could bring co-benefits to the local economy, the environment and health. Communicating in effective ways about the wider determinants of health and inequalities will be key to building understanding and support for these approaches among potential partners, as well as communities.
- Learn from action and share knowledge, including seeking to influence national government action to improve food security and enable effective local action on this.

Supporting people recovering from addiction to access nutritious food

Given the issues around alcohol and addiction flagged by North East Lincolnshire's Food Forum, and the impact that this has on food poverty risk, effort was taken to review how people recovering from addiction could be supported to access nutritious food. Evidence shows that one of the first “alternative pleasures or interests” that alcohol displaces is food (Alcohol Change, 2019). People who are alcohol-dependent are often underfed, underweight and malnourished. The severity of undereating seen amongst some alcohol-dependent people matches the NICE description of eating disorders (Haber and Kortt, 2021; NICE, 2019).

Evidence shows that the social isolation often associated with alcohol-dependency further reduces social incentives to cook and eat, and disrupted eating is particularly common amongst alcohol dependent drinkers who are otherwise vulnerable and isolated, such as those who are experiencing homelessness (Ijaz et al, 2018). **Error! Bookmark not defined.** Coupled with this is the adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that underlie many unhealthy alcohol use patterns which are also known risk factors for disordered eating (ACE HUB Wales, 2022; Emery et al, 2021).

The Feeding Recovery project was undertaken by Alcohol Change UK in 2019 (Alcohol Change UK, 2025). This study was about more than alcohol as it explored the poor nutrition and social isolation that often go hand-in-hand with alcohol problems; and about how connecting with others around food can promote wellbeing and reduce harm. The project offers a model for services supporting people facing a range of challenges and obstacles in their lives, not just alcohol issues.

The Feeding Recovery project found that several people they interviewed who had

succeeded in reducing their alcohol use or abstaining altogether said that cooking and eating was an important part of their recovery. Below are the findings from Feeding Recovery project in more depth (Alcohol Change UK, 2025):

- **People want connection** - eating with others and someone having sufficient concern for you to make you food can help you improve your relationship with food.
- **People want choices** - Ensuring choices about food affords people safety and dignity by allowing them to avoid foods they are allergic or intolerant to, or which are prohibited by their religion or culture. It also empowers people to make positive choices about what they do want to eat and helps people feel at ease and in control.
- **People want a safe place to be themselves** - Evidence shows that there has been a growing recognition of the need for psychologically informed environments, in which people who may have experienced a range of traumas can feel safe, relaxed, and able to behave naturally. The cooking and eating sessions offered in the Feeding Recovery project were a pressure-free environment, where service-users were free to engage as little or as much as they wanted. This gave them the power to talk if they needed to, learn if they needed to, or just to be warm if they needed this.
- **People want a dignified environment** - Researchers looking at food support programmes have highlighted the importance of creating a “dignified eating environment” that feels “normal” – one that doesn’t feel like charitable provision. It’s about creating the kind of eating environment that anyone would want to be in.
- **Food can fill more than one gap** - The cooking sessions offered in the Feeding Recovery project were providing people with much-needed physical sustenance; but that was not the only gap the food was filling. When people who attended the cooking sessions were asked what they thought they would be doing if they hadn’t attended a session, their answers showed that the sessions were filling up gaps in their day when they might otherwise be bored and unoccupied or using alcohol to pass the time.
- **Eating healthily, or just eating?** - One of the themes that emerged in the project was that interviewees often “opted for [the] most convenient (e.g. fast food) meals in order to fuel their bodies, which was...often an unhealthy choice”
- **Be patient** - Recovery – however it’s defined – is a gradual, complex journey that individuals must take at their own pace. Both long-term alcohol use and poor nutrition will sap energy and motivation to change. Likewise, people may face other challenges in life that keep them from engaging consistently with support. Given this, it is important for staff not to expect rapid results, nor to be disappointed if change doesn’t happen quickly. Even when someone has succeeded in getting to grips with their substance use, their journey back to a healthier relationship with food may be difficult and gradual.

- **Staff need support too** - Workload and time pressures are the most commonly cited workplace stress factors for staff working with individuals with substance use issues; but other identified difficulties include “concerns about whether your work is making a difference and whether you have the necessary skills and are effective in your role”.

Older people and food insecurity

Older people are particularly at risk of becoming malnourished⁷, which in turn can exacerbate frailty through muscle wasting and cognitive impairment, leading to increased risk of falls, and disruptions to completing typical daily tasks such as buying or preparing food (Reid et al, 2020). Some malnutrition amongst older adults can be caused by poverty. However, evidence suggests that the causes of malnutrition in older people are often much broader than financial concerns and that malnutrition is most likely to arise amongst older people following an accumulation of setbacks – bereavement, illness, a loss of community transport services, and a nearby shop closing, for example – which leave them unable easily to access food (Forsey, 2018). Research conducted with community dwelling older adults in Scotland found that financial barriers did not explain older people’s barriers to accessing food (Reid et al, 2020). Access to food, lack of local shops, services and opportunities for social eating were found to be some of the factors fuelling the problems which older people face when accessing and enjoying food. Cooking at home was also found to be a particular issue with many older adults reporting that they were more likely to opt for ready meals, snacks or cold convenience food such as sandwiches. Loneliness, families living further apart and neighbours not knowing each other as well as they used to were also factors. The research found that mitigators of malnutrition risk for older people included empowerment through social care located in the third sector, as well as social aspects of food access, e.g. social eating.

The report recommended four key actions:

- Community screening for early signs of malnutrition should be mandatory for all statutory agencies with a role in supporting older people.
- Training on malnutrition and unintentional weight loss should be embedded into basic training for all health and social care professionals.
- More secure investment should be made in community initiatives that address social isolation by providing befriending and opportunities for older people to eat, shop or cook with others.
- Policy, practice and research needs to take account of the fact that food poverty and food insecurity are not the same for vulnerable older people.

Local work to combat food poverty

In May 2025, funding for a 12 month pilot in West Marsh Food and Baby Bank was approved by the Population Health Executive. This will connect households experiencing food poverty to wraparound support. Over the course of the 12 month pilot, an advisor, employed by Centre4, will be based in West Marsh Food Bank, and will deliver face-to-face advice around debt, benefits, housing and other wider determinant factors impacting on food security. The advisor will also provide follow

⁷ Malnutrition arises when a person’s body does not gain the nutrients it needs to function properly.

up support where necessary (either face to face or by telephone) outside of food bank opening hours and will refer individuals to Citizens Advice and wider support agencies for more intensive advice and support where needed.

The pilot will aim to reduce diet-related health inequalities in North East Lincolnshire by:

- Improving levels of household food security for vulnerable groups in North East Lincolnshire through targeted work with individuals and families accessing emergency food provision to improve their social and economic circumstances.
- Generating learning which can be shared with other community food providers in North East Lincolnshire on effective interventions to improve people's long-term food security.
- Improving understanding of who is most at risk of food insecurity in North East Lincolnshire, in order to enhance opportunities for early intervention and support.

A variety of data will be collected to enable this, including longer-term follow up of individuals and families who have received support, to understand the longer-term impacts of the pilot.

Market Voucher Scheme

Between July 2022 and March 2023, a Market Voucher Scheme was trialled in North East Lincolnshire for individuals in receipt of or eligible for the Healthy Start Scheme or Pension Credit. This provided eligible individuals with a £5 voucher each week which could be redeemed at either Freeman Street Market or Grimsby Top Town Market for fresh meat, fish, vegetables, fruit or eggs. Feedback from those who engaged with the scheme highlighted that the scheme encouraged them to use fresh produce over frozen meals or takeaways, as well as encouraging greater use of Freeman Street/Grimsby Markets. The scheme also helped some people who were eligible for Pension Credit or Healthy Start but not already receiving these benefits to sign up for them.

This Market Voucher Scheme had similar aims to 'The Queen of Greens' in Liverpool and Knowsley. Launched in November 2022, the Queen of Greens is a social-enterprise mobile greengrocer run in partnership by Alchemic Kitchen CIC, Feeding Liverpool and Feedback Global. The Queen of Greens bus brings affordable fresh fruit, vegetables and eggs into the heart of local communities across Liverpool and Knowsley. Priority is given to locally sourced produce and an emphasis on seasonality to not only lower costs but also promote sustainability. Affordable produce are also offered in loose quantities, enabling customers to purchase exactly what they need and minimising both unnecessary costs and food waste at home. This flexibility means customers can sample smaller quantities of produce without the need to purchase a full packet like they typically would in supermarkets.

The Queen of Greens has encouraged households to try new foods, have savings on weekly grocery bills and have had positive impact on people's wellbeing.

Implications of food poverty for Population Health

Food poverty is not only a major inequalities issue, but an issue with stark implications for population health. It is well-recognised both nationally and locally that the most deprived communities suffer disproportionately from diet-related ill-health, from obesity to type 2 diabetes to cardiovascular disease to dental decay. This is driven by a variety of environmental, economic, commercial and social factors which make it harder for deprived communities and vulnerable groups to access healthy foods and consume a healthy and nutritious diet.

Although a review of the food system in North East Lincolnshire was out of scope of this assessment, a small-scale audit of access to fruit and vegetables in the West Marsh was undertaken as part of the existing Let's Go Grimsby programme⁸. This identified that most convenience stores in the West Marsh sell no or very limited fruit or vegetables, and that where fruit and vegetables were sold, the prices were often much higher than in supermarkets. To buy fruit and vegetables, West Marsh residents would therefore rely predominantly on the larger supermarkets, which are not within a reasonable walking distance for many West Marsh residents.

This suggests that structural and environmental barriers to food access are likely to be impacting on North East Lincolnshire residents' access to food, as well as financial barriers.

Conclusion

The Food Poverty Assessment provides evidence both that older people in North East Lincolnshire are struggling with the rising cost of living, and that there is increased demand for food support from older people in the Borough. Given the national evidence about the complexity of factors influencing an older person's food access, additional focus on access to food amongst older adults in North East Lincolnshire may be needed.

A smaller proportion of households with children, and in particular single-adult households with children were found to be attending food banks/food pantries when the One Day Census was conducted in April 2025 than might have been expected given national evidence. Whilst this may be due to limitations with the One Day Census (not everyone attending the food bank/food pantry completed this survey, and the Census was only carried out with one provider), there is evidence from the Adolescent Lifestyle Survey that some young people in North East Lincolnshire are experiencing food poverty. Given feedback from North East Lincolnshire's Food Forum that some families are hesitant to use foodbanks due to stigma and reluctance to bring their children, there is almost certainly unmet need amongst families with children in North East Lincolnshire. Further work will be needed to understand food

⁸ Let's Go Grimsby is a two year pilot programme in the East and West Marsh of Grimsby which aims to reduce inequalities in childhood obesity. The programme is an afterschool club for children and their families, operating out of primary schools in the East and West Marsh, and focusing on healthy eating and budget cooking. A whole family, holistic approach is taken (all family members are welcome to participate, not just the primary school aged child).

security amongst households with children in North East Lincolnshire.

There is also evidence from this Food Poverty Assessment that households from ethnic minority groups may be particularly vulnerable to food poverty. As noted the responses to the ethnicity question in the One Day Census likely underrepresent the proportion of people from non-White ethnic groups accessing emergency food provision in North East Lincolnshire, as some households were unable to complete the survey due to not speaking English. However, there is evidence that a small number of asylum seekers in North East Lincolnshire are likely to be experiencing food poverty.

The Food Poverty Assessment highlights that ill-health and disability is likely impacting on food poverty in North East Lincolnshire. Almost two thirds of those spoken to at both We Are One Food Bank (66.2%) and We Are One Food Pantry (65.9%) during April 2025 reported that they or someone in their household had a physical or mental health condition which has a substantial, long-term effect on their ability to do day-to-day tasks. Data from Citizens Advice also highlights that over half of those supported in North East Lincolnshire in the 2024-2025 financial year had either a disability or a long-term health condition. Likewise, conversations as part of the One Day Census and Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire's research highlighted that for some of those accessing food bank provision in North East Lincolnshire, they identified the impact of their ongoing or new health condition on why they were needing support with food. Access to food should therefore be a key consideration in local initiatives around work and health.

National evidence highlights that offering wraparound support to people experiencing food poverty can help to address the root causes of why a person or household is experiencing difficulty (Sustain, no date). By addressing wider determinant factors that impact on people's food security (for example, income and the suitability of a person's housing and cooking facilities), it is possible to reduce the barriers that make it harder for more vulnerable groups to access the food needed for an active, healthy life. The Food Poverty Assessment highlighted that wraparound support is also valued by people using emergency food provision.

Issues in relation to benefits, housing and in particular debt have emerged in this assessment as key challenges in the local area, which are impacting on residents' financial resilience and in turn their food security. Community food providers and wider support agencies have also flagged the impact of addiction (alcohol and gambling) on people's circumstances and identified alcohol in particular as a significant challenge locally. A small number of individuals spoken to as part of the One Day Census also opened up about their challenges with addiction and how this has impacted on their need for food support. Given this, it may be prudent to focus on improving wraparound support particularly for debt, housing, benefits and addiction. Consideration needs to be given to the capacity of support services, to ensure that people do not fall through the gaps of support.

Moving towards the Feeding Britain model of food provision, with a focus on affordable food clubs is also likely to have multiple benefits locally. Provision such as food pantries and social supermarkets, where nutritious food is provided at affordable costs/a fraction of its retail value, helps to move people back towards mainstream food provision whilst still providing a safety net to people experiencing food poverty.

This model therefore helps to reduce longer-term reliance on food support. Nevertheless, it also gives people choice and control over the food they eat, promoting dignity. Research by Healthwatch North East Lincolnshire highlighted that there were better results (both for the individual supported and in terms of food waste) where providers gave users a choice of food or had previously had a discussion with the individual to ensure that they could cook the food provided and that the food they were given was familiar to them.

Nevertheless, the Food Poverty Assessment has also highlighted gaps in data. Notably, further work is needed to understand the frequency of attendance at food banks and how long households are reliant on emergency food provision. A need for increased collaboration and data sharing was highlighted by members of North East Lincolnshire's Food Forum.

Recommendations

- Share learning from the West Marsh Food Bank Wraparound Support pilot with other community food providers in North East Lincolnshire, in order to inform funding bids and proposals for similar wraparound support offers elsewhere in the Borough
- Work with community food providers to continue to capture data of who is experiencing food poverty and what their support needs are, to inform preventative strategies to reduce the duration and severity of food poverty. This could include all community food providers committing to running a One Day Census (or similar) each year.
- Work with support services to enhance the wraparound support offer for foodbanks, including a particular focus on support for debt, addiction, benefits and housing.
- Ensure that access to healthy food is a key consideration in local initiatives around work and health, and engage with North East Lincolnshire's Food Forum around this agenda.
- Conduct further work to understand access to food amongst older adults in North East Lincolnshire, with a view to understanding wider social and environmental factors which may be impacting on older people's food access.
- Ensure that nutrition and hydration is factored into the development of an Ageing Well Strategy in North East Lincolnshire.
- Work with community food providers to enhance people's choice and control over their food choices. This should include consideration of culturally appropriate foods, and exploration of alternative models of food provision, in line with Feeding Britain's model of affordable food clubs.
- Work with the local substance use service, the local Recovery Community and community food providers to explore how the nutrition of people experiencing or recovering from addiction can be safeguarded, taking into account learning from the Feeding Recovery project.
- Further work is needed to understand food security amongst households with children in North East Lincolnshire. This should include conversations with local families to understand their experiences.

- Work with North East Lincolnshire's Food Forum to enhance data sharing between providers, with a view to enhancing understanding of the scale of food poverty in North East Lincolnshire, and understanding reliance on food banks.
- Build on the Council's role as a Public Health Council to identify and promote best practices for supporting residents with debt, benefit and housing challenges.

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