

Advice in lockdown

A brief report on advice demand among people using Lambeth foodbanks, April to June 2020

The figures used in this report are in relation to one project only, delivered jointly by Brixton Advice Centre and Centre 70

July 2020



Introduction

A project funded by City Bridge Trust

[Brixton Advice Centre](#) (BAC) and [Centre 70](#) (C70) are funded by the City of London Corporation's charitable funder, City Bridge Trust, to provide advice sessions at outlets of the Trussell Trust affiliated [Norwood and Brixton Foodbank](#). This is a three-year long project that commenced in October 2018. Pre-lockdown, it involved advisers regularly attending each foodbank session around the borough, including at weekends (Brixton) and evenings (Streatham). The thrust of the project is to provide a range of impactful social welfare law advice to people in situations so difficult they are unable to feed themselves and their families. The aim is to address underlying advice needs and assist people in gaining some social and economic equilibrium.

“Thank you for listening. It’s such a relief. Everything is such a mess right now. I don’t know what I’d have done”

Feedback from person with benefit issues, insufficient money and worries about a family member who was shielding and unable access any support (May 2020)

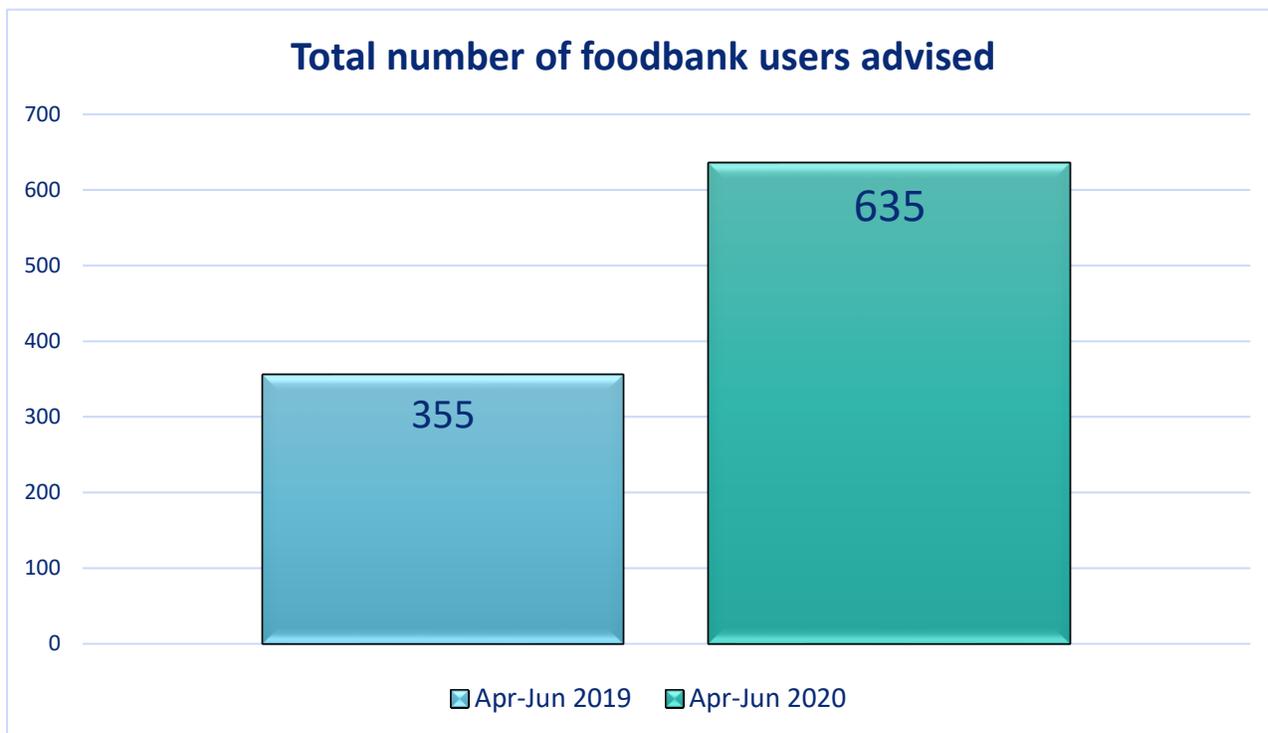
Following the [government announcement](#) on 23 March 2020, BAC and C70 finalised the switching of all advice services to telephone, email and digital. This involved the setting up and coordination of remote working for all staff so as to enable them to provide ongoing advice services, under multiple funder heads, but from their respective homes.

At the same time, the Norwood and Brixton foodbank found itself at the centre of an ambitious borough-wide logistics and food distribution network, working with [Lambeth Council](#) and others such as [Lambeth Larder](#) to make sure people who needed food and who were unable to afford it were fed during lockdown.

Along with our other advice services and projects, advice to persons using foodbanks continued, but with no foodbank open-door sessions this was facilitated by the foodbanks directly referring people in advice need they were coming across to the two advice agencies, who would then contact the clients and respond appropriately.

Demand

Lockdown, April – June 2020 inclusive, compared to the same period in the previous year, 2019



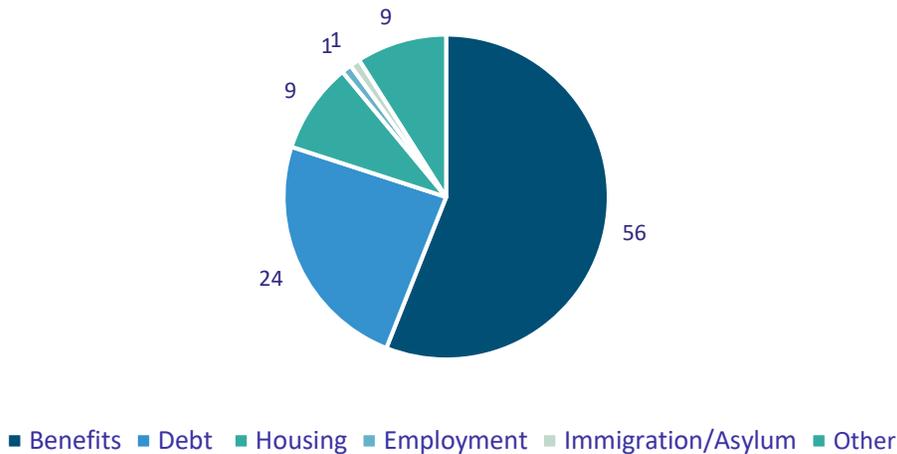
Despite being in lockdown and not providing any services face-to-face, there was a 79% increase in persons accessing the two advice services via the foodbanks when compared to the same period in 2019, when all face-to-face foodbank venues were open and running normally.

This increase is significantly greater than the original performance expectation for this project, which in 2019 was already operating over target. Both advice centres contributed significantly more organisational resources to cope with the increased demand during lockdown than would have been necessary in any other period, mostly in the form of additional staff time at both adviser and management level.

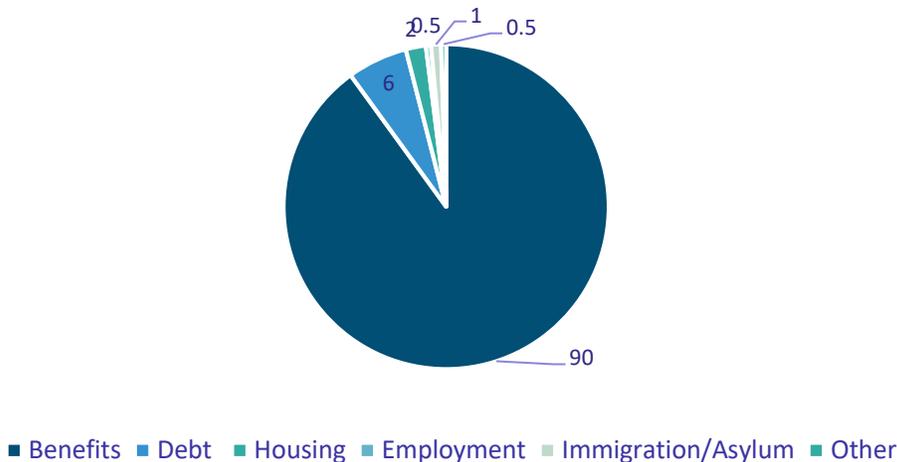
All 635 contacts were provided with advice. Of these, all but 14 were also provided with a foodbank voucher.

We believe the various moratoria and suspensions/closures affected the drivers for advice demand, with the suspension of evictions, court processes and debt recovery (including bailiffs) in particular leading to less people seeking advice in these areas. Whilst benefit sanctions were also suspended, there were still significant issues for people in terms of benefit claims and payments, including from the newly unemployed and employees having their hours at work or their pay reduced.

Presenting advice area by percentage (2019)



Presenting advice area by percentage (2020)



In addition to delivering normal advice provision, including internal referral to specialist staff and teams, we noticed a change in the types of assistance being requested and the needs of the persons we were advising. It became common to spend time providing greater levels of general support, a listening and encouraging ear, highlighting other support that might be available and linking clients into other services dedicated to supporting people through lockdown.

This entailed advisers developing a broad telephone support role above and beyond standard social welfare law advice giving, familiarising themselves with the range of services available to help our community, including rapidly developing government support initiatives as well as those stemming from the Council and a wide range of local groups and community-based services.

We have listed some of the more common topics and themes we encountered below:

- Access to the internet and using web services
- Access to council services – waste collection / cleaning / disability badges
- General household needs – from changing lightbulbs to home adaptations
- Shopping support
- Anti-social behaviour reports and concerns
- Loneliness and anxiety
- Increasing and severe mental health need
- Health issues
- Need for carer
- Support and things to do for children
- Transport and travel support
- Worry or concern about others (close neighbours / family members)
- Translation services

New foodbank clients as a proportion of the total foodbank clients assisted and, comparing total new clients to the previous year

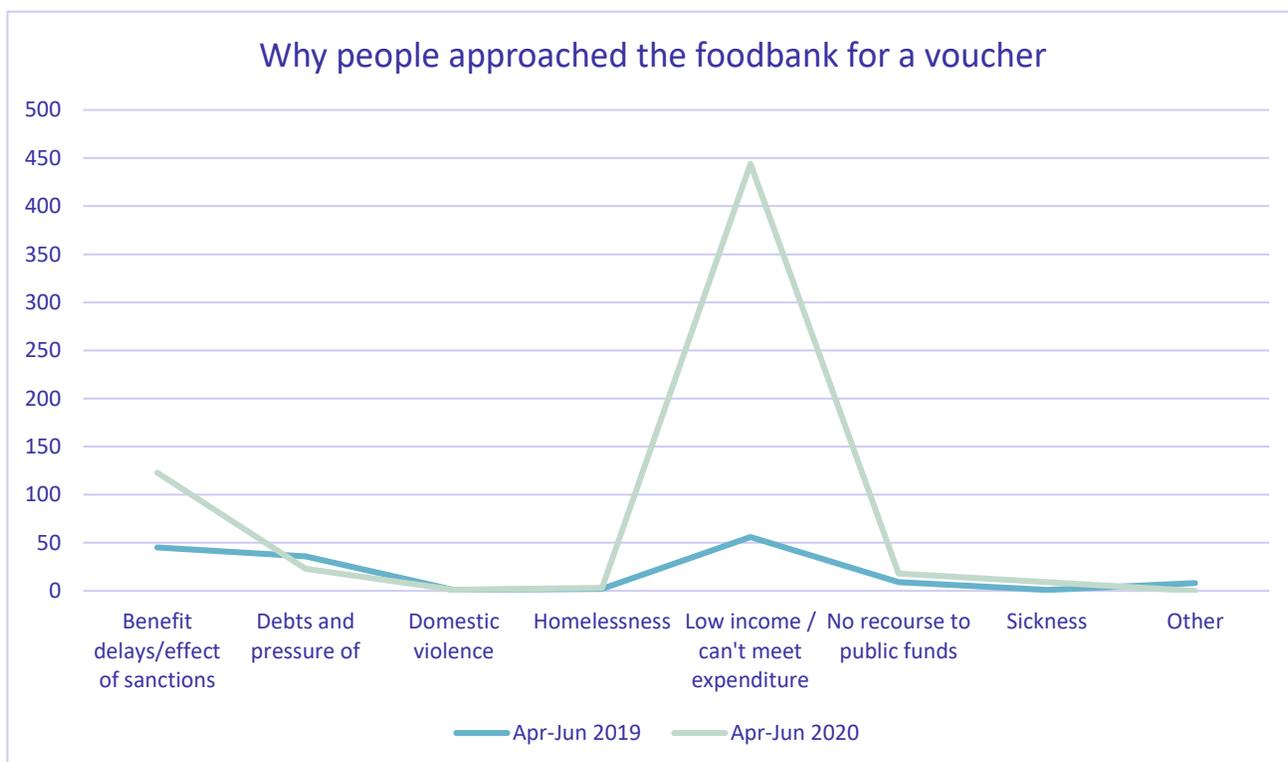


We experienced a 120% increase in the number of new, first-time clients accessing the advice service via the foodbank during these three months of lockdown when compared with the same period last year. 204 **new** foodbank clients were helped in April-June 2019, whereas 448 **new** clients were helped during the same period this year during the height of lockdown.

Additionally, even though the *proportion* of repeat clients during lockdown was smaller than last year when viewed alongside the numbers of new clients, the actual *number* of repeat clients was still higher during lockdown than it had been the previous year (187 in 2020 against 151 in 2019); there had, in effect, been a scaling up of overall advice contacts between 2019 and 2020, but with a much larger proportion of those contacts being people who had never accessed an advice service or a foodbank before lockdown now needing to do so.

Need

We routinely ask people referred to us by the foodbank the reason they needed a foodbank voucher



	Apr-Jun 2019	Apr-Jun 2020
Benefit delays/claim difficulty/effect of sanctions	45	123
Debts and pressure of	36	23
Domestic violence	1	1
Homelessness	2	3
Low income / can't meet expenditure	56	444
No recourse to public funds	9	18
Sickness	1	9
Other	8	0

Monitoring

Monitoring information as a comparison between the two periods

Please note, answer descriptors are only included if at least one response was obtained against that descriptor in either period.

BOROUGH CLIENT LIVES IN	Apr-Jun 2019		Apr-Jun 2020	
Barnet	0		2	
Bromley	0		5	
Croydon	1		29	
Enfield	1		0	
Hackney	0		1	
Haringey	0		1	
Kingston-Upon-Thames	0		1	
Lambeth	351		565	
Lewisham	0		4	
Merton	0		1	
Southwark	2		15	
Sutton	0		1	
Waltham Forest	0		1	
Wandsworth	0		9	
GENDER				
Male	148	42%	212	33%
Female	206	58%	422	66%
Prefer not to say	1		1	
ETHNICITY				
Asian/Asian British	10	3%	18	3%
Black British	89	25%	72	11%
Black/African/Caribbean	84	24%	126	20%
White	100	28%	393	62%
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Group	9	2%	2	
Other Ethnic Group	2	1%	20	3%
Prefer not to say	61	17%	4	
WHETHER DISABLED				
Disability	95	27%	105	17%
No disability	135	38%	527	83%
Prefer not to say	125	35%	3	
AGE GROUP				
16-24	6	2%	23	4%
25-44	163	46%	296	47%
44-64	144	41%	293	46%
65-75	11	3%	17	3%
75 over	1		6	
Prefer not to say	30	8%	0	