

Foodbank Pantry Business Plan

Action to reduce short and medium-term
food insecurity needs in the borough

May 21

*Reducing food insecurity and increasing
the health and wellbeing of communities in Epsom & Ewell*

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1. Context

In 2019 Epsom & Ewell Foodbank fed 5,314 people - adults 3,088 & children 2,226.

In 2020 we fed 12,535 people, 7,625 adults and 4,910 children. This was a rise of 236%. The pandemic has had a dramatic effect on everything that we do. Our desire has always been to work towards a community without a need for a foodbank, however the massive increase in demand for our services has undermined that challenge.

In light of this we have continued to develop our 'other' services, working towards a place where demand and reliance on the foodbank can drop, so that maybe one day we can consider closing the foodbank. Prior to Covid we had been looking into a Pantry model as a way forward to support people to not develop dependence on a foodbank and to give clients a greater dignity and choice.

This proposed pilot in partnership with Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is about pursuing the idea of a Pantry-style model, providing another avenue of support to those in food poverty/on a restricted low income in a dignified respectful manner.

'A rise in food prices is more difficult for low income households to cope with because those on low incomes spend a greater proportion of their income on food - a rise in food prices has a disproportionately large impact on money available to spend elsewhere... Food is exerting greater pressure on household budgets since 2007 when food prices started to rise in real terms.'

UK Government. Food statistics pocketbook. London: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; 2015.

Background

Epsom & Ewell Foodbank was created in 2012, as part of the Ewell Christian Fellowship Trust, with two centres one in Ewell and one in Epsom. We are a social franchise from the Trussell Trust, who coordinate over 400 foodbanks across the UK. Since then, we expanded to include centres in Leatherhead, Tadworth and Banstead plus many other wraparound services. Over that time we have fed more than 38,000 people, of which nearly half have come from Epsom & Ewell.

Originally people who found themselves in food poverty were offered three vouchers in a 6-month window, with the expectation that this was all that was required prior to accessing benefits and allaying problems. However, as time has gone on we have realised that the nature of food insecurity has become much more entrenched, and can remain a major problem even when households obtain employment.

After a few years of gradual increases and one year when we even saw a 1% dip, we saw some big jumps in demand for our services. So much so, that after about 5 years we began to actively talk about how we could reverse the trend, as we believe no community should allow people to remain

in food poverty. At this point there were not many initiatives or much conversation around working towards closing foodbanks, just about opening more. We began to talk to our clients about their needs and commissioned research around what could be done to understand more about how people get trapped in poverty. As one commissioner said to us *'You don't wake up one day and think, today I'll live in poverty!*

We began a number of things.

- Offered more than just food ie toiletries, pet food, fresh food donated from supermarkets with short life span and other donations
- Started a furniture project to support people (the biggest request from our survey)
- Employed a support worker (we now have two with plans to recruit a third, subject to funding)
- A counselling service
- Cooking courses called "Eat Well Spend Less"
- Launched a Digital Inclusion project during the Covid-19 pandemic
- Seasonal support (Christmas vouchers, Easter and school holiday support)
- Energy top ups
- Started the Poverty Truth Commission

Local need is increasing

We believe that the numbers of people we have been feeding and supporting over the past few years demonstrate that there is a swathe of the population in our borough who cannot afford the basics. We need to do more to support people to rebuild their lives. We cannot accept dependency on the foodbank, which was only ever meant as a temporary measure.

In May Trussell launched their State Of Hunger part 2 report to an APPG at Parliament (<https://trusselltrust-org.zoom.us/rec/share/hnkGDiewweMUO13fnYle3S-T6mNjsTbPdJA2iLArhV0S7hpWfuCE1iQczwEojOqD.SziVDnoNjKTUcY5J>). One of our commissioners from the Poverty Truth Commission contributed by sharing how poverty had impacted their life in different ways. In the report Trussell communicates the need to work towards 1) That there is no need for a foodbank as people can afford the essentials they need, 2) That there is local support in a community and 3) that people with lived experience of poverty are involved in what happens, it's not just a policy / bureaucratic decision.

We know through our work that there are local issues. We are also aware of the work that many other amazing charities do in our borough from CA to Age Concern to Sunnybank to name a few, to support people.

Attachments 1 and 2 are the report from our *Poverty Truth Commission* (PTC), the first to be held in the South of England.

This was a group of local people who came together to change the 'culture of poverty' in East Surrey. For them, that means changing the way we all think about, talk about and address poverty by putting people back at the heart of things. Half of the group were Community Commissioners, meaning they had experienced poverty. They wanted to share stories to show not just what poverty

looks like – but what it feels like too. The other half were Business and Civic Commissioners, meaning they work locally in private and public sectors. They wanted to share their skills to help shape a more compassionate society. We were all there to listen.

Over 18 months, we used our personal and professional insights to discuss the issues impacting our area. Through these honest and difficult conversations, we found ways to connect and take practical action together.

We formed four sub-groups to focus on the issues most important to us: Poverty, Housing, Mental and Physical Health and Education.

One finding launched the Digital Inclusion programme - *My two sons were put on an online programme to improve their literacy but we don't have a laptop at home. The only solution the school offered was for them to do the extra work on a school computer during lunch break. The boys are sad about this because they're small and just want to play with their friends. I feel awful, like it's my fault, because I can't afford to buy them a laptop.*" Foodbank user

The Digital Inclusion programme referenced above was launched in September 2020. Up until the end of March 2021, the programme was able to collect, wipe, reset, update and test a total of 300 laptops and tablet devices from a wide range of generous donors and amazing supporters across Surrey and also from a number of other parts of the country as well. These devices were donated to children and families at your schools, to support them during lockdown learning, and also for use afterwards as part of their regular education.

Energy Top Ups - Since December 2020 we have been providing top ups on gas and electricity for local people, funded via donations and Government funds to Surrey County Council. We will have spent more than £25,000 in a 7-month window. One key aspect that has impacted us is by how much so many people are in debt with utility companies, which means they cannot switch to a better utilities company as they are not allowed to leave whilst in debt.

The key findings were around, it's not just about changing policy but about changing the culture of an organisation so that all people feel equal. Too often when a client rings, an agency don't deal with the issue, whereas if a representative of the client rings the issue gets dealt with. How can we make changes understanding the impact they will have on people in poverty? Poverty creates isolation. What do we do without thinking that keeps people in poverty? Very simply, cash is king, most small businesses crash before they start due to cashflow. One small challenge for all of us is, when do we pay our bills ie window cleaning bills, when you get it or when you feel like it?

We all need to listen, hear, feel, sense and begin to understand that all of our actions or our non-actions contribute. If you're in debt, just paying a fiver, is increasing that debt! See the reports or the Youtube films - <https://youtu.be/CYYxrW8s88E> created for more information.

Support Work, including counselling - The demand for this service is increasing hugely and subject to funding we will be looking to recruit a third support worker. Our Support staff work intensively with families and individuals to help them get their lives back on track, whether that be through helping with benefit claims, debt advice, advocacy, emotional support and referrals to other services. We also help source white goods, school uniform and baby items plus many other things. Our staff actively invest time and resources to help their clients. A pantry would be a further resource to refer

clients to as they begin to move forward and a safe welcoming space to meet with clients and offer advice and support.

As we have discussed the idea of opening a shop based on the Pantry model we have had numerous conversations with our clients about whether it would be effective and is it a direction in which we should be travelling? They are all in agreement that ways that give people a choice as opposed to a handout, give you far more dignity and something they feel would benefit the Borough.

Potential Achievement - A community without poverty

To do this there are many challenges. Two key challenges related to this project idea are:

- 1) Choice – Genuine choice. For so many of us we talk about choice and often it is whether we have Chinese or Curry on a Friday night, for example. For many of our clients it's not a choice, it's a dilemma – turn the heating on, or use the electricity to cook a meal?
- 2) Cash – Cash is king, it allows you to choose where to spend your money, not vouchers, not gifts or resources. We need to be supporting people to have cash.

There are two routes to cash 1) Increase benefits to make them viable to live off or 2) Support people to improve their economic independence by ideally improving their ability to get a job, but also by providing them with ways to get what many with no money worries take for granted at a level they can afford.

By opening this Pantry/shop, we hope to work towards meeting these challenges by providing two key things:

- 1) A place where people can go and choose food they want, to use at a cost that they can comfortably afford and save money for addressing debt or other issues.
- 2) A safe place where people go, knowing they will be treated with dignity, build up trust and work towards breaking out of poverty and dependency on projects such as the foodbank.

Early evaluation analysis of the Peckham Pantry who are supporting us through the process suggests that they are meeting the objectives around dignity in choice, community connectivity and healthy food choices. Members who were supported during the first lockdown also described their gratitude at 'not being forgotten' during an uncertain time:

“The food come every two weeks [and] what a Godsend the Pantry is. I'm so grateful for everything I get from them... We have what we need for now I know that the Pantry has been there for me and my family and am grateful. I can't thank them enough”. Member

- 97% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that this fee represents good value for money.

The challenges and opportunities of Covid-19

The global pandemic has brought both challenges and opportunities. On a national scale, the 2020 Spending Review outlined the scale of the financial challenge as a result of Covid-19, as waves of unemployment - and furlough schemes – have led to huge increases in financial and food insecurity.

Redundancies are at an unprecedented level, at a scale not seen since the 2008 financial crash, as illustrated by the graph below:

Redundancies at record levels

Number of workers made redundant in the three months to September 2020

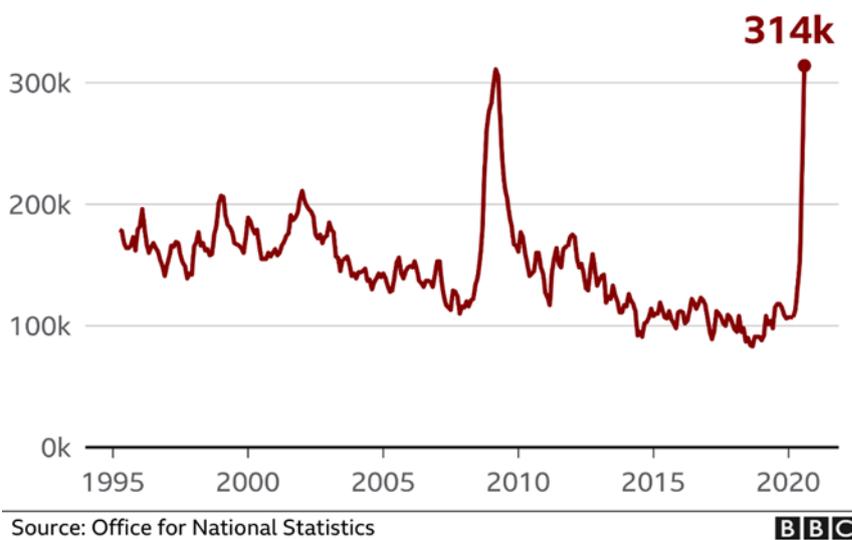


FIGURE 1: NUMBER OF WORKERS MADE REDUNDANT IN THE THREE MONTHS TO SEPTEMBER 2020

Evidence suggests that job uncertainty and redundancy has affected disadvantaged and vulnerable groups disproportionately hard; particularly those working families in lower-paid retail and hospitality roles. Social distancing and other lockdown restrictions, combined with the wider uncertainty has had adverse effect on the mental health and wellbeing of population, including children and young people and those who were already in receipt of social care.

Aim of Pilot

- To support low income families and households across Epsom & Ewell to gain easy access to good quality and healthy food. In so doing reduce health inequalities and obesity.
- To support people to reduce the effects of low income and poverty through paying a fixed membership price rather than pay for individual items and so saving up to £20 per week from their food costs.
- To provide people with a dignified way of accessing food at reduced costs.
- To create a sustainable and social system of providing good quality food to local communities at low cost, in areas where there are significant levels of poverty and poor access to good food.

- Through the shop we aim to generate increased community spirit, friendships and reduce isolation. By using ethical food sources, we will also tackle issues of surplus and environmental damage.
- We aim to work in partnership with Epsom and Ewell Borough Council and to bring on board other agencies we already work with through the foodbank and our community work.
- To run for a minimum of 6 months, ideally 12 months, at which time we will know the impact of the pilot and we can pursue another venue to continue if needed.

Key Features

- To be open up to 5 days a week across the borough.
- Led by a team of staff and volunteers as part of the foodbank to deliver the work.
- Achieve membership of 100 households in the first 6 months.
- Work towards generating 80% of expenditure through membership fees.
- If each family is receiving 3.5kg of food that would otherwise be deemed as surplus per week this would mean 5.2 tonnes of good quality food is diverted to low income families.
- Members paying £4.50 per week and able to choose 10 – 15 items with a retail value of at least £20.
- Offer a 'space' whilst members are waiting to visit the shop – helping to create community interaction and to help combat loneliness and isolation.

Long term

- Develop a savings scheme for members in partnership with a Credit Union or bank.
- A venue where people can meet other agencies.
- Develop a training, work experience scheme for those long term unemployed

The Pantry Model

Pre Covid we were aware of the Pantry model and had been talking to the Peckham Pantry about arranging a visit. We felt it was offering a step on from the foodbank and would be a good initiative to explore for our community. We also felt that it was important to run a project based on providing dignity and choice.

We also knew and had considered similar models such as the Community Fridge and Foodbank Clubs.

In Mole Valley they run a number of community fridge projects. It is based around collecting surplus food mainly from the supermarkets via Fareshare and giving it out to people in the community via fridges based at several locations. Over lockdown this model changed as there was more waste food available. It was bagged and delivered, before reverting back to a bagged and queue system, where people just turned up, most not referred, to collect, however due to rising costs they are now looking at charging people similar to the Pantry model. The main concern for us compared to the Pantry model is that there was limited choice involved. We want to give people the choice to pick their food, be involved in the process and purchase food requested. We don't believe in the ethos "You're poor, therefore you can only be offered excess waste food".

In Reigate & Banstead they set up a number of Food Clubs, which are like a hybrid of the Fridge and Pantry model. Donations and waste food is brought from FareShare and laid out on a table, people become members and then pay £2 a visit to choose from what is on offer.

Our approach is to become part of the 'Your Local Pantry network' of community food stores. The franchises of the network are Member-based, and all share the aim of creating a sustainable and long-term solution to food insecurity.

How does it work?

The infrastructure of the project will be based on the social franchise model Your Local Pantry, www.yourlocalpantry.co.uk this has been created by Church Action on Poverty and Stockport Homes and works with FareShare as their key supplier, which we plan to join. The model is a membership scheme (co-operative) where in time, members will ultimately share responsibility for the project. Alongside these economic circumstance, physical health and mental health outcomes are all important agendas for promotion among the users. Please see appendix 1 around the current Theory of Change and how it links.

Ewell & Ewell Foodbank will host the project, providing the management and legal structure. The foodbank is an open project to all people in the community who have at any time struggled with a bill. Promotion will be focused on people on low incomes who are in contact with variety of agencies and the Foodbank will actively encourage people to join who now have a regular income that may not cover all outgoings.

Membership is managed through an online database developed by Your Local Pantry. Each member pays a weekly subscription of £4.50 when they attend, to be eligible for at least 7 blue (lower value) items and 3 red (higher value) items. Each member makes their own choice rather than have a pre-selected bag of food. As part of the membership offer all members are provided with a freezer bag to take home the frozen and chilled products. These need to be brought with them each visit.

We hope to have a couple of small tables where people will have a safe space to sit, where they can meet with other members, through signposting and information resources it is also an opportunity to find out about other activities and support in the community.

The Foodbank will employ a project coordinator who will be responsible for ensuring that the project is open each week and stocked with enough appropriate food as well as administrating and marketing the project. They will be supported by the Foodbank team of staff and volunteers from the community.

Food Supply

Each member will be choosing around 3kg of food each visit (10 - 15 items). This is in effect two shopping bags of food. Using our standard food crates this will mean that we are supplying one crate per member.

Food provided will include;

- Fresh fruit & vegetables
- Chilled and frozen items such as milk, meat, cheese and yoghurt
- Bakery products
- Store cupboard staples – pasta, rice, cereals, tinned food, tea and coffee
- Hygiene products – soap, shampoo etc

We would aim to work with FareShare to supply the main bulk of the food. Their costs are approximately £1 per member per week, which is covered though the membership scheme.

As the project develops we will use a range of different suppliers to ensure a good supply of products for the shop. We are beginning to explore who these might be. In the past week alone we as Foodbank have been offered two supplies of wholesale food at subsidised rates.

Resources needed

Alongside the actual venue we will need the following:

- Fridges & freezers to display and store the food
- Racking and some display units for the ambient food
- Table & chairs for the waiting area
- Shelving for the ambient produce
- Tables for fruit and veg
- A WiFi hub / payment machine
- Cash box
- Freezer bags
- Laptop
- Mobile phone, till
- ID card for members

Transport for the Pantry's food supplies will be needed, but we will cover that as part of our existing foodbank work with our two vans.

Office space, insurance, management oversight and IT support will be provided by the Foodbank.

Members systems

Once someone becomes a member (which is free), they will be entitled to visit the Pantry once a week to choose from the stock available. There is a 'symbol system' that categorises items on mix of retail price, volume, nutritional value and stock levels. This helps to ensure that all members get a fair spread of items. Members will usually be entitled to 10 to 15 items a week.

The aim is that the pantry will be a shared ownership by the members. They will be able to influence the direction and development of the pantry through regular forum meetings. These meetings will cover items such as food quality and supply, volunteer support, signposting advice and added value services.

Paying for the food

Pantries work best when money is paid in advance for food. This way the Pantry team can ensure they order enough food to support the demand. Payment is best done through online transfer.

The reality is that people prefer to pay on the day and most people pay in cash. We do have an izettle machine if people want to pay by debit or credit card.

Exit strategy

We are aware that the decision has not been confirmed whether it will be a 6 or a 12-month lease. We want to assess the impact of the shop and we would then decide about how we were to move forward. Ideally it would be good to review the work at 6 months as it continues so that a clear decision could be made at 9 months about its future.

This would be either by closing the project or by continuing it at the same venue on a rental basis or by looking at other venues. In all cases we would apply for funding, as we have previously, to establish our work in order to make this happen. Overall, the concept fits as part of our strategy to address poverty in our community and work towards a community not needing to use the Foodbank.

2. Recommendations and next steps

Poverty, health and food inequality is a major problem throughout the UK in general. The Pantry programme is a sustainable way for families living on low incomes to access healthy good quality food at a fixed low cost.

This pilot will allow us to see what the appetite for such an initiative is in our community and meet waste food challenges plus bring people in the community together either as volunteers or clients.

This document has been signed off by the Trustees of the Foodbank, so if EEBC agree, then the work needed to make it happen with a proposed start date in September can begin. The key work being the recruitment of staff, volunteers and the arrangements for food supply.

Appendix 1 Theory of Change

