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Qualitative research exploring community food provision

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Report of findings

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Authors: Ipsos

Contents

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Introduction

Background

There has been a steady increase in the use of community food providers[1] over the last decade, and this has been exacerbated by the pandemic.[2] [The FSA's Consumer Insights Tracker](#) found that 15% of people (aged 16+) said they had used a food bank or food charity at least once in March 2022.[3]

The Foods Standards Agency (FSA) has commissioned Ipsos UK to explore the journey that food takes from suppliers to end consumers in the community food provision sector in the UK. The overall aim is to understand what support community providers might need in relation to food safety. It is important that people who receive food from community providers are considered when it comes to food safety. This research aligns with the FSA's Food You Can Trust strategic objectives to ensure that food is safe for everyone, whatever their personal circumstances. The [FSA's strategy](#) outlines how this will only be possible when "everyone is able to access the food they need and to make informed choices about the food they eat".

This research was conducted as a small-scale exploratory piece of work aiming to address the following overarching objectives:

- How can we ensure that food from community providers is as safe as it should be?

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[1] Within this report, 'community providers' refers to registered charities and community organisations providing food for free or at significantly reduced cost to people in need. This includes food banks offering parcels of food for people to take away, prepare and eat; community kitchens offering cooked food; and meal delivery services. It also includes organisations offering non-perishable food, fresh food and prepared meals.

[2] [A survey of food banks operating independently of The Trussell Trust food bank network.](#) Rachel Loopstra, Sabine Goodwin, Barbara Goldberg, Hannah Lambie-Mumford, Jon May, Andrew Williams. 2019.

[3] Food Standards Agency (2022).

- How can the FSA best support community providers to comply with food safety guidance?

This research aimed to explore how existing community food providers operate, how food safety is managed in these settings, and how the FSA can support these organisations with different aspects of their supply, food handling and operations. Findings from this research will be used to improve knowledge of community food provision within the Achieving Business Compliance (ABC) programme, and to inform future work to design improved advice, guidance, and tools for key stakeholders in the system.

Methods

Phase 1 - Rapid evidence review and scoping interviews

Phase 1 was intended to provide a broad overview of the existing evidence on community food provision relevant to this research. This was informed by a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) approach. The assessment explored the extent of community food provision; how food is distributed; and food safety considerations and risks in community food provision. This was enhanced by using both purposive and systematic searches.

Sources consulted included academic texts accessed through Google Scholar, as well as 'grey texts' and government reports. Ipsos also reviewed the websites and social media of key community food provision networks to capture information relevant to the research questions. A full list of search terms and data sources is available in an annex to this document.

It is important to note that the extent or scale of the REA (i.e., how much literature was sought and reviewed) was determined by three key factors:

- Availability of relevant literature and evidence: as much of the literature about community provision was published prior to the COVID-19 pandemic it was anticipated that there would be a limited amount of post-pandemic evidence.

- Timescale: this was a rapid evidence review, with seven weeks to complete data identification, extraction, and synthesis.

- Limited scope: The scope of the project allowed for 20-25 pieces of evidence (equivalent to full length journal articles) to be included.

From this data extraction, Ipsos developed a search protocol encompassing search terms, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and relevant types of data, as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Criteria for rapid evidence review

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
2018 to 2021 (3 years)	Pre-2018 studies (may not represent current sector landscape)
English language	Languages other than English
British literature (focusing on England mainly, if possible, Wales and Northern Ireland)	International literature
Peer reviewed, policy documents, monitoring reports, empirical data, conference proceedings, primary and secondary studies (for example, reviews) Grey and unpublished literature Opinion and commentary pieces, letter, notes, editorials, and media articles	-

The search protocol was designed to address the following research questions:

- Who uses community food provision?

- What food is distributed by community providers? Where is this sourced from?

- How is food distributed by community providers?

- How are food safety considerations taken into account?

- What evidence is there about the use of social media and food sharing apps to distribute food in communities?

Ipsos also conducted three qualitative interviews between 6th to 10th December 2021 with representatives from sector organisations involved with community food provision. Those

interviewed were identified through desk-based research. Each interview lasted up to an hour and followed an agreed discussion guide.

The overall scope of the study intended to include a broad range of different types of community organisations providing food for free or at significantly reduced cost to people in need. During Phase 1, the evidence review and scoping interviews focused on food banks and national food support networks including Trussell Trust, FareShare and the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN). This reflects the scale of these networks and their importance to community food provision, as well as the amount of information available about how they operate. As such, they provided a good starting point for understanding community food provision. The outcomes of the rapid evidence review and scoping interviews with stakeholders informed the direction for Phase 2.

Phase 2 - Online qualitative research

Qualitative research was conducted between 14th February to 21st March 2022. This involved carrying out eight case studies with community food providers from England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The aim was to capture a range of experiences from different community food providers, ensuring a mix of the following characteristics (agreed during Phase 1):

- Providers of a mix of perishable and non-perishable foods;

- Urban and rural community providers;

- Independent organisations and those involved in wider networks; and

- Those offering collection and delivery to recipients.

The original aim was to conduct eight case studies in total, and eight organisations agreed to take part. Some organisations were suggested to Ipsos by the community food networks engaged in Phase 1. The rest were identified through desk research, where the characteristics outlined above were used to ensure a range of community providers were included.

All case studies included at least one interview with a project manager or founder. These individuals were able to provide key insights into the day-to-day operations of the food services. Other interviews were conducted with volunteers, recipients, and suppliers, who

were able to supplement the management interviews with additional perspectives. All interviews were conducted online or via phone due to ongoing COVID risk. Audio was recorded to support rigorous, systematic analysis of the material using a two-phase approach: constructing thematic categories then identifying linkages and patterns. The resulting narratives are supported with verbatim quotes.

Case study Number	Region	Type of provision/ service	Number of interviews
Case study 1	London	Community kitchen and delivery service	5
Case study 2	South-West England	Independent community food provider	3
Case study 3	Northern Ireland	Non-perishable foodbank	2
Case study 4	West Midlands	Food parcel service	2
Case study 5	North-East England	Independent food bank	2
Case study 6	Central England	Community support organisation	2
Case study 7	North-West England	Emergency meal delivery service	1
Case study 8	Wales	Community social action and hot meals project	1

Details of the operating model for each case study organisation are included in Section 4. Interviews were conducted following a discussion guide. Topics covered included how

community providers sourced food, how they managed aspects of food safety, and what risks they encountered. The full discussion guides for managers and volunteers can be found in the annex.

Section 1: Phase 1 findings

Food banks

Food banks are becoming ever more common in the UK as a response to food insecurity, with reported demand and numbers of people receiving provision steadily increasing.[4] Food banks were rare in the United Kingdom until 2010[5]. The clearest evidence of their increasing prevalence comes from the Trussell Trust food bank network. In 2010, the Trussell Trust was a social franchise of networked food banks[6] operating within 29 Local Authorities, but this has increased to being present in just under 300 Local Authorities. This research also found that food banks are more likely to operate in areas with higher rates of unemployment and child deprivation, and indeed the expansion of Trussell Trust has been linked to Local Authority budget cuts, welfare reforms, and reduced welfare entitlements[7]. As of February 2021, there were over 1,300 Trussell Trust food banks in operation across the United Kingdom, and around a further 900 independent food banks.[8]

Pre-pandemic

Food banks were typically recognised as organisations that provided emergency food for people, either by receiving food to prepare and consume at home (via collection or

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[4] For a historical perspective of emergency food provision in the UK see: Hungry Britain: The Rise of the Food Charity, Hannah Lambie-Mumford, Policy Press, 2017

[5] Food bank operational characteristics and rates of food bank use across Britain. Rachel Loopstra, Hannah Lambie-Mumford and Jasmine Fledderjohann, 2019

[6] Ibid

[7] Ibid

[8] Food banks in the UK, Gloria Tyler House of Commons

deliveries), or through shared meals provided on site usually through community kitchens[9] and similar provisions. Food was generally sourced through three main avenues: large supermarkets donating surplus food or holding food drives and donation bins, through private donations (individuals or collective donations like faith groups) or from local vendors. Surplus food distribution was not the most common method for food charities in the UK[10], with many instead following the Trussell Trust model of donations and food drives.

Food banks typically shared characteristics such as offering free provision of food that was intended to meet temporary emergency needs. Often these organisations were run by volunteers, though there were some paid staff. Some common challenges faced by food banks at this time were being unable to provide fresh foods or meet other dietary requirements, relying on a voluntary workforce that could be insufficient, and dealing with an ever-increasing demand for food provision.[11]

Impact of COVID-19

Existing literature exploring the impact of the pandemic found there had been unparalleled rises in the need for food provision: across the UK there was a 177% increase in demand between March 2019 and March 2020[12]. The Trussell Trust reported a 33% increase in the number of three-day emergency food parcels it distributed in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20. There was a 47% increase between April and September 2020

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[9] Community Kitchens typically involve a group of people who meet regularly to prepare, cook and share meals within a particular community or organisational setting. They can be run anywhere there is a kitchen, such as town halls, faith spaces, schools, neighbourhood houses and so on.

[10] The Rise of Food Charity in Europe: Surplus food distribution, Hannah Lambie-Mumford and Tina Silvasti, 2020

[11] A survey of food banks operating independently of The Trussell Trust food bank network, Rachel Loopstra, Sabine Goodwin, Barbara Goldberg. Hannah Lambie-Mumford, Jon May, Andrew Williams,

[12] Independent Food Aid Network, Independent food banks and increased need for emergency food parcels since the outbreak of COVID-19. (IFAN, 2020)

compared to the previous year. Both comparisons saw a marked rise in the number of parcels going to families with children[13]. In 2020/21, The Trussell Trust's Food Bank Network provided 2,537,198 three-day emergency food supplies and support to people in crisis across the UK. Of these, 980,082 went to children.[14]

During the pandemic, the food bank landscape changed substantially, and food provision was offered through both existing and new initiatives[15]. Existing community food providers had to adapt to meet the needs of local communities, often having to draw on new or alternative forms of resources and support. Many received government and private sector funding and were able to move unprecedented amounts of food through their networks. Local charities who either could no longer offer their usual services due to restrictions, or those whose beneficiaries also began to need food aid, started to provide food as part of their work to support communities through the pandemic. Most of the charities in this case had not been providing this form of support before and did so in response to changing needs.[16] There were also more informal 'pop up' community food providers, such as ad hoc or neighbourhood supplies. These were often organised via social media (WhatsApp or Facebook) and targeted one very local area or were businesses providing food assistance using their premises.[17]

Desk research on national networks

In addition to the evidence review, focused desk research provided further insights about how food banks and other community food providers typically operate. Most providers distribute food on an ad-hoc basis, aiming to support recipients when they are in crisis. However, there are some providers that have different arrangements and can support recipients longer term, either through food parcels or community meals. Food is supplied

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[13] Food banks in the UK, Gloria Tyler House of Commons,

[14] Trussell Trust End of Year Stats, 2021

[15] Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID 19 across the UK (March - August 2020), Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S.

[16] Ibid

[17] Ibid

to community providers either through donations or surplus food redistribution, which is then sorted and stored on site until the food reaches the recipient.

Developed from information taken from organisations' web pages[18], the below infographics illustrate the operational models, and the journey food goes through for two of the largest community food provision networks in the UK.

It should be noted that there are at least 1172 independent food banks in operation in the UK, outside of these major networks.[19] The operating models for these may include elements from the findings below but are likely to be more varied with regards to who is involved and how food is sourced and distributed.

Trussell Trust

Figure 1 highlights that people are referred to Trussell Trust food banks via professionals and support organisations like Citizens Advice and shows the journey people go through before receiving their food parcel.

Trussell Trust food banks rely on food donations from a range of sources, including individuals donating food, donations gathered by community organisations and faith groups, as well as national food drives through supermarkets. Supermarket donation bins have become a more prominent way to receive donations, as it means food banks do not have to manage this themselves. However, the type of food that food banks receive from supermarket collections is determined by what gets donated and how much. Trussell Trust provide information on their website for those looking to donate, outlining the non-perishable goods they accept. They also have an operating manual for people running food banks, which includes information about food safety.

FareShare

Figure 2 demonstrates how FareShare operate as a surplus food redistribution initiative. They redistribute food that would otherwise go to waste to charities and community groups. They source donations from across the food industry, including national supermarket chains, restaurant chains, and local providers. FareShare are ultimately

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[18] See Trussell Trust and Fare Share about these organisations.

[19] Mapping the UK's Independent Food Banks, IFAN, 2022

dependent on what food is made available to them through their providers' supply chains and this can often be unpredictable. This can result in challenges around the appropriateness of food and not always having enough food. To supplement the donated foods, FareShare purchase surplus food at cost with money they have received from funds, such as from Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). To assist with the additional costs associated with diverting surplus food to community food providers and charities, FareShare launched their Surplus with Purpose Fund in 2021.

FareShare uses food management systems that operate to the same food safety standards as the rest of the food industry. These systems ensure full compliance and traceability, and Regional Centres are independently audited every year.

Figure 1: Trussell Trust Operating Model and Food Journey

Trussell Trust

Example Trussell Trust food parcel

E.g. the Citizen's Advice Bureau

Person hits crisis and goes to referral organisation

Voucher details the number of adults and children the food parcel needs to support, the ages of children, and any special dietary requirements.

Typical food can include:
Cereal,
UHT milk, Fruit juice
Soup, Tinned tomatoes/ pasta sauce
Pasta, Rice, Lentils, beans and pulses
Tinned meat, Tinned vegetables, Tinned fruit
Tea/coffee, Biscuits

Given referral voucher or code for local food banks

Visits the local foodbank in person to collect parcels (or online/over the phone for parcel deliveries where applicable)

Volunteers prep and pack food parcels

Client leaves with food parcel

Parcels sent out via delivery

95% of people referred to Trussell Trust food banks in early 2020 were destitute, meaning they were unable to afford to eat or stay warm

18% of households referred to food banks in Trussell Trust network during the pandemic were single parents – more than twice the rate in the general population

Private donations

Supermarkets / national food drives

Community and faith organisations

Sources of food for foodbanks

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Figure 2: FareShare Food Journey

FareShare

Food Acquisition Team

Surplus food from various sources

Supermarkets and blue chip companies

Regional suppliers, local vendors

Work with variety of charities, all who support vulnerable people in some way

Work with partners such as Asda, COOP, Sainsbury's, Tesco, John Lewis Partnership

Food comes to FareShare **Regional Centres** though various partners. Ultimately they are dependent on what food is made available to them through retailer's supply chains

Regional Centres are audited every year

Volunteers sort through and forward to charity partners

Local community kitchens

Foodbanks

Other community food aid

FareShare operates at same food safety standards as the food industry and have a food Management System that ensures full compliance and traceability.

FareShare take good quality surplus food from right across the food industry and get it to more than 10,500 frontline charities and community groups.

The majority of food sources are through national-level relationships, but ratio of local v national sourced provisions varies. **RCs are encouraged to establish local relationships with regional suppliers.**

Map of RC's across the UK

Inverness
Aberdeen
SCOT.
Edinburgh
N. IRE
United Kingdom
Ireland
Nottingham
WALES
Cardiff
London

In June 2019 FareShare launched their **Surplus with Purpose Fund**, a new £3m fund which offsets the additional costs faced by the food industry for diverting surplus food to charities.

DEFRA provided a grant of £1.9 million towards this fund, as part of their £15 million scheme to help organisations across England overcome barriers to get surplus food onto people's plates.

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Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

During the pandemic, greater numbers of people from increasingly diverse backgrounds became reliant on community food provision, including those recently discharged from hospital, those having to self-isolate because they had COVID-19, those shielding because of clinical vulnerability to COVID-19, and those that lost jobs or were having to miss work due to childcare or sickness.[20] Evidence compiled by the Trussell Trust's shows that families with children were among the hardest hit during the crisis.

In addition to an increase demand for community food provision, the way community food providers operated also had to adapt. Most providers had to deliver food, as pandemic restrictions meant people were unable to access drop-in services.[21] Fewer existing volunteers (older people in particular) were available to help due to restrictions and illness, although the overall impact is hard to quantify as many new people volunteered while on furlough. [22]

Sector stakeholder engagement

Ipsos conducted qualitative interviews with representatives from three national community food networks. This provided context for Phase 2 of the research. The key findings from these interviews are summarised below.

Operating models

The networks said they sourced food from a range of places, including public donations, business surplus or donations, and redistribution networks. In general, they felt that donating surplus food to redistribution organisations was low on large retailers' priorities.

The networks varied in the ways they operated. One accepted and provided only ambient goods that were long-life, another accepted all surplus food types, and the other did not handle food themselves but offered support and guidance to their members.

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[20] The Food Foundation, Impact of COVID report

[21] Research briefings, CBP report

[22] Ibid

They typically relied on stock rotation processes to make sure food was used in date order. For large networks, this seemed to rely on databases that log food coming in and where it has been sent. The variation in supply resulted in changing delivery days, some unsuitable stock, and unpredictable quantities.

Food safety

The networks said they operate the same food safety and hygiene standards as the rest of the food industry. They were aware of all risks and considered themselves very cautious as they did not want the reputational damage that would come with poor safety standards or risk enforcement action from local authorities. The networks all identified some issues with the traceability of food donated from some suppliers.

All three networks had vetting processes in place for organisations looking to join and these often involved an audit of food safety and hygiene, as well as inspections of the premises. The networks said their local centres had staff with specified roles to check the quality of food as it comes in, and to make sure it was clearly labelled with dates and stored correctly.

Large redistribution networks have resources for refrigerated vans, operating to the same standards as the rest of the food industry. Organisations usually have operational safety management procedures in place that cover everything from transporting, sorting, storing, and packaging food safely. Non-perishable food banks deal with fewer risks and manage this with stock rotation and clear labelling on all items.

Food insecurity

With infection rates rising again in late 2021 and early 2022, food networks were expecting an ongoing increase in demand for their services, with other contributing factors including: (1) the end the £20 Universal Credit uplift; (2) the end of the furlough scheme; (3) a large increase in energy prices and other inflationary pressures.

The networks were also clear they did not want the establishment of community food providers to become normalised as a response to food insecurity. They said that any additional support or guidance from the FSA should acknowledge that community food provision is not an answer to the growing issue of people struggling to afford food. Support from the FSA to monitor levels of food insecurity was also cited as helpful.

Section 2: Phase 2 findings

The case studies developed for Phase 2 illustrate the different ways community food providers operate. These case studies should be considered as examples of how community providers operate and manage food safety risks, rather than as a comprehensive overview of the community food provision sector. All of the providers were already engaged with many good food hygiene and safety practices.

Despite differences in how these providers operate, the services they provide and the people they support, there were some common themes at different stages of the food journey and in terms of the challenges they faced. This section provides a summary of some of these key themes. Please see the annex of this report for the discussion guides used to engage with organisations on each of these topics. More detailed summaries of each case study are included in section four of this report.

How community food providers operate

Most organisations sourced their food from several different suppliers, including networks like FareShare or through national supermarkets, as well as local suppliers they had built relationships with over time. Many dealt with surplus food from redistribution companies, local businesses, and national chains. They often had an approach that emphasised both reducing food waste and tackling food insecurity through their work.

The case study organisations had mixed models for offering food support, including providing meals, collection, and delivery of food parcels with non-perishable and fresh food. Some of this mixed provision was a result of pandemic, but others had developed their operating model previously, using surplus food in different ways, and offering social spaces and other support alongside food. Not all had [Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) ratings](#), with some registered as exempt. Some others had been told it would be difficult to achieve a rating of 5 because they were dealing with food near or at its use-by date, and sometimes beyond best before dates.

Some 'emergency' providers required that individuals received a referral to use their service in order to reduce ongoing reliance or to ensure people who needed support were linked to other organisations that could help them. Others operated on a self-referral model, arguing that only those who really needed help would ask for it.

Among the case studies, most had at least some paid staff. All relied extensively on volunteers, particularly for packing and delivering food. The staff were likely to take overall responsibility for operations, although this role was also played by volunteers in some cases. There were examples of providers where an individual had started the organisation and continued to lead on delivery.

Another impact of the pandemic was that many organisations had to change the way they supplied food to recipients, many of whom were vulnerable or shielding. Organisations also had a responsibility to protect their staff and volunteers, and so a shift to delivering food parcels or meals had often been established. In most cases, organisations were still offering delivery options even though most of their other procedures had returned to pre-pandemic practices.

Several community providers, particularly those supported by larger networks, felt that their existence highlighted the economic and social challenges many people are facing. They discussed the role of the pandemic in exacerbating this, but also said that there were ongoing changes in the number and demographics of people requiring food provision. Providers pointed to factors such as the ending of the Universal Credit £20 uplift, rising fuel costs and general inflation as all contributing to the demands they faced.

Working with suppliers

During the pandemic, providers often experienced an increase in donations from retailers that had to shut due to lockdowns. They therefore had stock that they needed to work through before it become unusable. These more ad-hoc relationships with suppliers that formed during the pandemic had mostly become less important as restrictions ended. Organisations were returning to more typical pre-pandemic supply chains through established partnerships.

Relationships with suppliers varied across the case studies, but one common theme was the unpredictability and variability of the food they received. The food available was dependent on what suppliers had at that time, and this could change from one week to the next. This was usually described as being a normal part of dealing with surplus or donated food.

While relationships with suppliers were generally working well, there was some sense among community providers that some suppliers saw giving them surplus food as a way

to help with their own food waste or food disposal costs. There were also some common supply challenges experienced by community providers, such as a lack of labelling on fresh foods (e.g., baked goods with no allergen labelling) or items not being suitable to give to people in need of food (e.g., bulk quantities that are not suitable for domestic use). Providers often felt unable to raise these issues with suppliers because there was a perceived expectation that they should be grateful for what they received.

Facilities used by community providers

Community providers described operating from a wide range of different types of premises, and in some cases worked from several different sites. For example, some used community spaces offered by the council that were also used for other activities, some had converted existing shops or were renting commercial space at a low rate, some operated in part from a private home, some separated out different aspects of their operations with storerooms and preparation areas not always in the same building.

Providers said they had to make do with the space they had, including some where preparation areas were less than ideal, or working from buildings in need of repair. To maintain cleanliness and hygiene standards, providers typically assigned cleaning responsibilities to volunteers or team leaders.

How food safety is managed

In general, community food providers described managing food health and safety in ways they thought were comparable to practices across the food industry. Organisational staff and volunteers seemed aware of hygiene and food safety risks.

Many of those taking responsibility for food safety and hygiene had previous experience of working within the food industry. For some organisations, the people who developed their operating models knew about good food hygiene practices because they previously held roles in the food industry, in businesses like supermarkets and food manufacturers. Individuals with this experience included those running the organisations, the chefs, and other staff involved with food handling. The providers that handled fresh food or prepared meals all had at least one staff member or volunteer with Level 2 Food Hygiene and Safety qualifications overseeing any food preparation.

All organisations had some form of food safety management processes. Some used informal inductions and training for volunteers, which covered where and how to store

food, and the best way to prepare food safely. Others were part of the FHRS scheme and have received formal inspections and ratings from the local authority, with all the necessary systems and paperwork.

Key food safety considerations across organisations focused on:

- **Managing best before and use-by dates** – providers had processes in place to ensure they used food before it reached the end of its shelf life. This included using food with soonest best before or use-by dates first. For dry-storage, foods were stored in the order of use, whereas fresh foods were distributed quickly, or prepared then chilled or frozen to increase shelf life.
- **Labelling** – most organisations did not accept food if it was not clearly labelled with the full ingredients list. This was how most organisations ensured they managed allergens effectively. Some organisations that had received unlabelled fresh food from chains or local vendors said that these items would come in bulk and without labelling. Providers would either destroy the items or only offer them to people with no known allergies. They would also make people aware of the risks and lack of allergen information. Organisations discussed how they met the requirements of Natasha's Law[23] which requires that all food outlets must clearly display a full ingredients list for all Pre-Packed for Direct Sale foods (PPDS), with allergen information clearly shown.
- **Temperatures and storage** – organisations handling perishable foods had volunteers responsible for checking fridge and freezer temperatures. This often happened at the start and end of volunteering shifts, as well as when chilled foods were delivered or collected. Providers had guidance for volunteers about what food needed to be stored and how. This ensured food was not at ambient temperatures for more than a short period. Organisations also had processes for delivering food to recipients to make sure this was done safely. They had short

[23] [Natasha's Law came into effect on 1st October 2021](#) and requires all food outlets to provide full ingredient lists with clear allergen labelling on Pre-Packed for Direct Sale foods (PPDS). The change comes after a teenager, Natasha, died from an allergic reaction after eating sesame seeds that were baked into the dough of a baguette.

delivery routes or used refrigerated delivery vans or cool boxes to manage temperatures.

- **Working with suppliers** – some community providers raised concerns about the safety of fresh food received from suppliers. They highlighted challenges around not knowing how some food had been handled and stored before it reached them. This included a lack of paperwork from suppliers making it difficult to trace how the food had been managed.
- **Managing incidents** – this involved reporting problems to the manager on shift, then passing issues on to their local authority or supplier and disposing of any food that had raised concerns.

Perceived risks

Providers were asked about key areas of perceived food risks during the discussions. The relevance of each depended on the particular operating model of the community provider. For example, some community food providers did not handle fresh or frozen foods, so did not have to address these issues. The main issues across the community providers included:

- **Unpackaged items** – organisations were unclear how to correctly handle unpackaged items, including baked goods like pasties and bread. They were unsure whether they could offer these items to people with appropriate safeguards to manage allergen risks. For most, this was the main risk around allergens, as they felt more confident handling labelled food, either for food parcels or in preparing meals.
- **Frozen food** – organisations noted that they were unclear how long frozen food can be kept out of the freezer before it becomes unsafe. This was seen as a particular risk when frozen items were being transported, including being delivered to recipients. Organisations were also unclear about how long food could safely be frozen.
- **Bulk items, for example, meat** – these needed to be broken up to be distributed to individuals and organisations had concerns about preparing, labelling, and storing this food appropriately.
- **Eggs and dairy** – perceived as carrying greater risks around food safety if not handled correctly and consumed before their use-by date, but also an important staple for many people.

- **Meat** – some providers would only accept packaged meat; some would take loose meat but freeze it as soon as they got it. The organisations were cautious about meat that they were unsure about.
- **Damaged tins** – this was a common issue when dealing with non-perishable items, and not all were clear how best to deal with this.
- **Transporting chilled or frozen food** – some had refrigerated vans, which made them more confident to accept and distribute meat. Some delivered with cars, meaning they had to be more cautious.
- **Preparation areas** – while some had good facilities, some of the providers were limited by space or equipment, or because others were also using the space.

Section 3: Support Suggestions

How the FSA can support community food providers

Providers and network representatives were asked to suggest ways that the FSA could either directly support organisations to manage food safety and hygiene or ways they wanted the FSA to encourage others to address food safety concerns.

Clear, digestible, and consistent guidance and resources around key food risks that community food providers typically deal were a common recommendation. Many cited challenges in finding consistent information all in one place. Suggested guidance included:

- How to best deal with food close to or at its use-by date, and what is appropriate around best before dates. For example, how to manage and label food frozen near to its use-by date, and how to use that food when it has been defrosted. Some also mentioned the importance of having this in place to reassure their insurance providers.
- The right approach to allergen labelling and Natasha's Law, particularly for food received unlabelled that providers do not want to see wasted, given that it is suitable for many people without hypersensitivities.
- Appropriate equipment and cooking area ventilation, given the constraints that community providers often faced in terms of resources and space. Some organisations were able to obtain grants or funding from local authorities or government, allowing them to purchase new equipment. Any guidance or signposting from the FSA about these funding or grant opportunities would be appreciated by organisations. Some also wanted the FSA to encourage funding from local authorities or government for equipment for community providers.
- Posters, videos and other 'bite-sized' resources summarising key principles would also be welcomed by providers. This was seen as particularly important for independent providers not part of national networks that offer operational support.

"I know FSA have good resources already, but if more could be done in smaller bites in various formats not just printed – people don't have time to read. Videos and animations would be more accessible. If we could share clear short brilliantly put together info that would be really helpful.

Sometimes there are questions where we have to go through impenetrable information."
– Network representative

There were also a small number of specific suggestions for clarifications to guidance that was viewed as causing problems overall when it comes to community food provision, particularly when also trying to tackle food waste.

"The best example is the scenario where the use-by of midnight for a consumer means, eat it or put it in the freezer by midnight on the use-by date, but for a charity there is a different guideline. That guideline says it has to be frozen by midnight or at a particular core temperature, depending on which authority you're seeking guidance from. And that isn't manageable for the retail network because companies have to have the best opportunity to sell their food. If they're being told that they have to take it off the shelf at 8:00pm for it to reach a core temperature by midnight, then that's not sustainable for them. And it's also not sustainable for the charity either because the charity would have to make sure it was eaten by midnight rather than it going in the freezer."
– COO food sharing platform

Other providers mentioned bringing clarity around how community food provision fits with other food industry and consumer standards. The case study organisations all felt confident in their own practices, but wanted the FSA to prioritise:

- Ensuring community providers are meeting appropriate standards, with some concern that charities may be missed or not prioritised by local authorities because they are not selling food.
- Clarifying which providers have exemptions from FHRS ratings and ensuring this is being applied consistently in different places to manage risk effectively.

Some providers would also like the FSA to work with large supermarkets and other suppliers to develop guidance on the best ways to pass on surplus food to community providers safely. This included:

- Making it clear what suppliers need to do to ensure food is appropriately labelled and given to community providers in a way that minimises risks and burden on the organisations.
- Ensuring food is donated with all the correct paperwork to help with traceability.
- Providing reassurance for national supermarket chains that independent and smaller community food providers can adhere to the same standards as large networks, such as Trussell Trust.

A big challenge voiced by networks was that community food providers tend to be so worried about doing something wrong that they err on the side of caution. This can result in less food going to those that require it and more food waste generated. Providing organisations with reassurance about their practices was suggested as something the FSA could do to support community providers, as well a way of offering a consistent framework for insurance companies.

Another issue raised frequently was the cost of training. Some wanted free or subsidised Level 2 Food Hygiene and Safety training and qualifications to be offered for community food providers. They felt this would help raise standards and ensure knowledge is not held by one or two individuals within a community provider organisation.

Community providers had often signed up for FSA alerts about products being recalled. However, they noted that follow up information about when alerts for certain products no longer apply would be appreciated.

Given the ongoing cost of living pressures, networks and providers said they were concerned about an ever-increasing need for community food provision. These networks wanted the FSA to engage with community providers and the wider food industry to improve the way food is provided to people who need it.

> **"We work with food businesses, retailers, manufacturers, distribution centres and because of that we can see into business operations very easily and can help with any suggestions on, 'Hey should we tweak it this way or that way?' We could instantly give support and insight into what works well and what doesn't. We're desperate to help and create change in this sector because we have some problems ahead of us and, if we collaborate well, then we have a chance of fixing them."**
> **– COO food sharing platform**

Section 4: Case studies

Case study 1

Summary

The organisation's aim was to support communities through food provision and activities around health and well-being. Based in a busy part of London the organisation offered a range of food provision, from food bag deliveries or on-site collection twice a week and community meals prepared by a partner organisation once a week. The organisation has previously supported people with furniture, cleaning products, baby products and toiletries. Prior to the pandemic, they also offered exercise classes, movie nights, quizzes, and other community activities for free or very low cost.

The organisation was deeply embedded into the local community, often relying on word of mouth to raise awareness about the services they provided. During the pandemic, residents in the area came together and created a mutual aid group, communicating via WhatsApp groups. This was started to connect people in need with either support services in the area or other local residents that wanted to help.

People who used the service did not need to be referred, or even have to provide personal details, other than what food they required. Self-referrals were important as they wanted to be a 'no-borders' organisation as they felt many people are not getting the help they need. They were particularly concerned for those with no recourse to public funds, as well as the frequency in which people were made to continually get new referrals from doctors or agencies like Citizen's Advice.

> **"You turn up, you don't even have to tell us your names. They have to explain to us that they need, and if they're there then they need the service because no one wants to queue for an hour otherwise."**
> **– Recipient and volunteer**

During the pandemic, Friday night community meals could not happen. The partner organisation instead moved to offer daily delivery meals throughout COVID-19. Meals were prepared fresh in the on-site kitchen and then frozen, and volunteer drivers collected these and distributed to households. Even after lockdowns ended, the site was not large enough to operate with appropriate social distancing, so the community meals

have only recently been reinstated. During COVID-19, the organisation received funding from central government, local councils and other organisations. This has now stopped as restrictions have ended.

Different groups of people needed help with food during the pandemic because they were shielding, or they had lost their jobs. Volunteers at the organisation recognised this type of support as emergency provision but were concerned as they were supporting more people long term dure to the rising costs of living.

> **"The emergency is lessening, although it's also deepening actually, it's just changed in its nature. It's not an emergency anymore, it's more about government policies and so on and we need to change how to support people, rather than giving them bags of food weekly."**
> **– Coordinator and Cofounder**

Where they sourced food from

Their food came from a range of sources. They purchased food using donations and grants as there was typically not enough surplus to meet demands. They also received some non-perishable food from a local food wholesaler, and fresh food from both a national redistribution service and a local 'last mile' redistribution[24] charity.

Food donations came from the public as well as local businesses. For example, local bakeries and cafes often donated surplus bread or pastries. These typically came together and unlabelled despite the organisation asking for all items to come with ingredient lists and to be separated. To prevent the organisation from having to dispose of hundreds of loaves of bread every week, they included labels stating, 'This could have all the allergens in' and listed all 14 allergens.

> **"For example, some bread has sesame seeds and it all comes in big bin bags, great big bags, and they just shove the loaves all in. Even if the loaves you're looking at don't have sesame on it, it could have touched sesame in**

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[24] 'Last mile' redistribution refers to the last leg of the journey comprising the movement of food within the food supply chain, specifically redistributing surplus food that would otherwise go to waste and providing it to people experiencing food poverty.

the bag when it got there. We can't be sure, so we have to say it has all the allergens in, so don't touch it if you have an allergy to any of those things, which is a bit crude, but otherwise we'd have to not use it. We're doing about 290 loaves a week, and they just get thrown away.”
– Coordinator and Cofounder

Staff and volunteers from the organisation felt some businesses and retailers donated surplus food as a way to manage their own costs for disposing food.

"They have to pay to throw food away and if they give it to us then they don't have to pay, so they actually save money. We want to see the food system change to be much more just and fairer. We feel that this food aid is actually keeping the industrial food system going and that's not what we want to do.”
– Coordinator and Cofounder

One volunteer described a rare time a retailer donated spoilt ready meals. They explained this was a one off but there had been other cases of businesses donating out of date items.

"Some companies, I think, like to get rid of their out-of-date stuff through us and that's a bit tedious and annoying. Especially as then we've got to try and find a way to get rid of it if it's all off.”
– Volunteer and recipient

The organisation has also received some additional food from a nearby food bank, which had recently closed. This food bank received food from local supermarket donation points, and although the food bank had closed, the supermarket continued to collect and provide donations for the food bank. These donations were shared with the organisation as an additional source of food.

What was provided in the food bags and community meals changed regularly depending on what was donated and what surplus food was available through their providers.

Local redistribution charity

The local redistribution charity was also interviewed as part of the case study. They worked with surplus food through individual relationships with businesses such as supermarkets, retailers, manufacturers and farms in the area. Food was delivered or

collected through pre-agreed arrangements and brought to the warehouse to be sorted and stored. Once at the warehouse, the food became the responsibility of a logistics team, who ensured ambient, frozen, and dry foods were stored correctly and shared with the relevant member organisations.

> **"The logistic team are aware of what each project needs or wants, and they'll try to get it out daily. I think they try to move the stock as quickly as they can generally and hold onto some long-life stuff as well as a bit of reserve."**
> **– Employee at local redistribution charity**

Food providers who wanted to receive food from the redistribution charity were placed on a waiting list. The redistribution charity had strict protocols in place that determined whether a community provider would be approved onto their system. This included an online survey sent to all prospective organisations asking about food requirements as well as their premises, what facilities they had and their procedures. All information was stored centrally on a database.

The person responsible for collecting the food from the redistribution charity had to have a Level 2 Food Hygiene Certificate. These are required to be renewed every three years.

Community providers were also required to sign a food agreement that confirmed they would use the food correctly; they would not sell the food and they would handle it in line with health and safety. This was followed up by an assessment of the providers that inspected the kitchen facilities and equipment. The agreement passed liability to the community provider for further food handling and storage.

Where they operated from

The organisation operated from a local council-owned community building they rented through a Trust. These premises were shared with the community meal partner organisation and other community projects. The Trust were responsible for cleaning and maintaining the building. However, cleaning did not always happen, which meant the provider either had to clean themselves or complain to the council. The community food provider had a FHRS rating 4 from before the pandemic.

> **"It's a whole long story, we've been fighting for these buildings for a long time and for the community to have spaces to use and play and celebrate**

The building included a main room where food bags were prepped and where weekly community meals were served. There was a separate kitchen where food was delivered and prepared for the community meals. The provider had scheduled daily, weekly, and monthly cleaning tasks associated with the kitchen.

The partner charity had their own small kitchen where they sometimes prepped food and brought it to the main organisation's kitchens on Fridays. Food was chilled and transported in chilled vans or cool boxes to the main building in under half an hour. The other kitchen was solely used by the partner organisation. This partner charity had an FHRS rating 5 from before the pandemic.

The chef from the partner charity was responsible for cleaning and food safety and had a Level 3 Food Hygiene and Safety certificate which they had obtained from previous work as a chef.

"I'm a Level 3. I've got my professional catering certificate and I've got my Level 3 hygiene as well. I dedicate a day to deep clean the kitchen, and generally, the cleaning side of stuff, I tend to do."
– Volunteer chef from partner organisation

Food journey and processes

Food bag deliveries

Donated food was sorted through, with non-perishable food stored in the storeroom and perishable items stored in fridges or other suitable places. Most fresh and frozen foods were purchased and would be delivered already sorted into separate crates.

Food was sorted through and packed into food bags by volunteers. Bags were separated into driven deliveries and walking deliveries. As recipients mostly live within walking distance, volunteers walked most deliveries to recipients who received the standard food bags. Fresh food was only added to food bags at the very last minute, such as milk, to keep items fresh and at a good temperature.

"Obviously we keep the walking routes as in walkable. They're not far. It tends to be the 2 leading estates next to us, we do the walking routes

> **there…Even though the walking routes might take a couple of hours, it's because we can't carry all the bags in one go, so we're back and forth, but realistically the furthest we walk is 15 minutes away. We just have to sometimes do it three or four times, depending on how many volunteers there are.”**
> **– Volunteer and recipient**

They had separate lists for people who had dietary requirements and for those who did not have cooking facilities and relied more on microwavable ready meals. These ready meals were typically purchased from supermarkets and kept in the freezer right up until the bag left the premises. Those receiving frozen meals were contacted before the delivery took place to ensure meals were frozen in good time. The frozen meals came with an information sheet explaining how to store, defrost and cook the food.

> **“I will pack their bag. I will place their bag in the fridges that I use next to the freezer and when they're about to go, I take their meals out and add the meals to the bag. Then they know, from when we spoke to them on the phone, when the bags get there, within half an hour to unpack and put them straight away again. That way they don't defrost and then be frozen again. That's not going to be very helpful or good for them.”**
> **– Volunteer and recipient**

Those with dietary requirements or those that wanted additional items such as meat often collected bags in person from the provider. This allowed for individual conversations about any allergies or dietary requirements and what food the person wanted.

> **“We do encourage people to pick up because they get more, but some can't get out…We try and learn what people like but it's not always that simple. If you pick up, you have other options, you'll have the meat. They choose if they want them or not.”**
> **– Volunteer and recipient**

Volunteers doing walking deliveries generally had the same routes, allowing them to develop rapport with recipients and learning about what food they enjoyed. To avoid food waste, they would check with recipients in advance and not include food they did not want.

Community meals

Food packing volunteers vacated the premises by 3.00pm on community meal days, when the partner organisation volunteers arrived and started to prep for the meal. Donated food was delivered to the kitchen by a driver and the chef had a chance to look through the food and reject anything they did not want. There were large fridges and a freezer in the kitchen to store food not for immediate use for the meal.

The chef would base recipes on what ingredients they had received that day. All meals were vegetarian which meant there were fewer concerns around cross contamination, and they tried to provide a main and side dish for all that attended. The chef would have one or two other volunteers to support with this meal prep.

> **"Because I've been doing it for so long I do it out the top of my head now. If I have a large amount of a certain item, then I will base the dish on that. I'll put aside what I think I can use. We've got big fridges, so we can keep them fresh in the fridge…Literally everything from when it's unloaded, everything's unpacked, I'll choose what I want to do, and then I'll cook then and there really."**
> **– Chef volunteer from partner organisation.**

Food safety

Food safety was taken very seriously, and the provider felt they followed the same procedures as many businesses:

> **"If anything goes wrong, then it's our reputation at stake, isn't it? I don't think that people can afford for that place to close, so we don't take any chances with anyone's health." – Volunteer and recipient**

The organisation had a Food Safety Programme developed by the coordinator based on FSA guidance published online. This documented the organisation's food safety procedures. The coordinator offered Level 2 Food Hygiene training to many of their

regular volunteers, which covered food preparation and storage. Since the passing of Natasha's Law this programme has been updated to include labelling all bread received from local bakeries and cafes. This was costly, requiring them to buy a label machine and was time consuming for the volunteer.

> **"Since Natasha's Law, we've put a label on all our bread. I bought it off the internet, you know what I mean, it's a little sticky label and we just tick the whole thing saying it could have any of these allergens in. It's very time-consuming and expensive for us to do that." – Coordinator and Cofounder**

Anything unlabelled or past best before dates was put in a specific volunteer area and made available only for volunteers to take at their own discretion. Items that were beyond use by dates, showed signs of decay, or were high risk such as unlabelled meat, were immediately disposed of.

The main food risk the organisation dealt with was from the public donating items that have been damaged or opened. There had been incidents where people had seemingly cleared out home cupboards and donated items they no longer wanted, which were often uns. Depending on the condition of the item, it would either be disposed or offered only to the volunteers.

Any items past their best before were put aside and only offered to people who came to collect the food bags in person so that individuals could chose to have the item or not.

> **"And we say to them, 'Look, we've got these crisps. They're out of 'best by' date but we think they'll be fine.' And then some people say, 'No' and other people say, 'Of course, they're fine' and take them. Whatever it is…We have to tell them that they're out of 'best by' date, not 'use by' date. So we do stress that to people…they don't want to feel demeaned by having to eat food that is worse in any way than the normal population." – Coordinator and Cofounder**

The community meal volunteers managed food safety by only serving certain types of food, minimising allergen and contamination risks. They only served vegetarian dishes and offered non-dairy options that were kept separate from dairy items. The kitchen was a 'nut-free zone', and all ingredients were clearly labelled.

> **"We've got a label machine… Everything's stated on each box, what it contains, so everyone's aware of what's in it, basically." - Volunteer Chef for partner organisation**

Care was taken with all hot meals that were to be frozen, to avoid the food temperature danger zone.

> **"We've got to cool it down, then put it down in the fridge, so we're not just putting hot to cold surface straight away. Let it cool down first. That could be a food safety risk." – Volunteer Chef for partner organisation**

Food bags as standard did not contain items with ingredients from the 14 allergens, or high-risk items such as meat. Volunteers packing food bags would keep items with major allergens separate unless someone collected it and could chose to take it or not. They used allergen stickers on any items containing allergens.

> **"We tend to keep things, with major allergies, peanuts, stuff like that, separate, and when they pick up, they choose to take it or not. Otherwise, we're taking a lot of risks, aren't we?" – Volunteer and recipient**

All surfaces in the food bag prep area were disinfected before every shift, with volunteers wearing gloves and aprons. Volunteers did not have specific cleaning roles, the ethos being no one would be made to do anything and that all tasks were taken on by choice. Any tasks that did not have someone volunteer to do, would be done by the coordinator.

Awareness / use of any existing guidance or support

The coordinator regularly used guidance from the FSA website around food safety. They took training offered by the FSA on allergens around Natasha's Law, which they found very helpful. The coordinator was responsible for providing all new volunteers with an induction of safety processes and was the person who volunteers said they would ask if they had any queries.

Ways the FSA can support with food safety

The main suggestion was free courses for Level 2 Food Safety and Hygiene. Having to pay for courses restricted the organisation's ability to offer this to all their volunteers.

> "I did the FSA course on allergens and the new law which was brilliant and if they could do a Level 2 Hygiene that would be fantastic. Because we have to pay for it, we can't give it to too many people. But if they did it free, on their website, then we could get loads of our volunteers to do it."
> – Coordinator and Cofounder

While the organisation understood the need for Natasha's Law, it posed a challenge for the organisation around accepting unlabelled surplus, particularly from bakeries. Ideally, they wanted businesses donating surplus food to include ingredient lists, rather than the community provider having to include all possible allergens. Guidance for food businesses donating surplus food around labelling and allergens was suggested as a means of support.

> "If you asked [the bakery] 'Which of your bread has sesame?' I would assume that they would be able to dig out the ingredients and tell you. Whereas we can't. We don't know which of their bread matches, because they do 20 types of bread."
> – Coordinator and Cofounder

There was a request for the FSA to investigate best practices for storing vegetables in materials other than plastic. The organisation said vegetables wrapped in plastic tended to rot much quicker.

> "I think if the FSA looked into that, that would be really, really good. Because I think it doesn't keep as long or as well. It's like bananas, who puts bananas in plastic bags? That's crazy. You open the plastic bag and it's all wet and black and even if it can be yellow, it looks fine, you touch it and it's soggy inside. It's just mush."
> – Coordinator and Cofounder

Best before dates were cited as being challenging for the organisation to manage in terms of food waste. For items such as vegetables, they were able to use loose vegetable for much longer than packaged items with best before dates. It was felt that best before dates were contributing to society's problem with food waste.

> "I absolutely 100% wish that they would get rid of 'best before.' It's unhelpful, it's misunderstood by everyone… you'll get some broccoli

wrapped up in a bag that says, 'best before yesterday' and then you'll be given a whole load of broccoli that's not in a bag that looks like it's from last week and you can give that away but you can't give the 'best before' away… There should only be 'don't eat this food because it's bad after this date."
– Coordinator and Cofounder

Figure 3: Summary of case study 1

Community Kitchen

- Food journey
- Food safety risks and processes

Region: London
Type of food: Perishables and Non-perishables
How offer food: Food bags and community kitchen

Pre/post pandemic Founded in 2014

FOOD HYGIENE RATING
0 1 2 3 **4** 5
GOOD

Most food bought by the organisation. They also receive some donations from the public and local businesses.

They operate from a community building, shared with other community projects. They have their own room to prepare food bags and host community meals on Friday evenings.

Donated food is sorted through. Non-perishables stored in storeroom, perishables stored in fridges. Food delivered to kitchen for community meals and sorted by chef.

Food sorted into food bags. Fresh products like meat and milk added last to reduce any food safety issues. Community meals prepped, cooked and served onsite.

Food bags delivered, or collected by recipients, twice a week. The onsite community meals happen every Friday evening.

Concerns around food donated by the public. Anything received that is damaged or out-of-date is discarded. Meat and fresh products bought from suppliers to mitigate risks.

Unpackaged items labelled to indicate possible presence of all 14 allergens to reduce food waste. All food in kitchen clearly labelled and stored correctly.

Standard food bags do not contain meat products and all ingredients clearly labelled to reduce food safety risks. All community meals are vegetarian and nut free.

Those with dietary requirements receive tailored food bags. Community kitchen ensure any hot meals for freezing avoid the food temperate danger zone.

Case study 2

Summary

The provider was an independent food bank based in Southwest England and serving mainly communities in small towns, villages and rural areas. It has been running for more than a decade. It was started by older volunteers from a church on a small scale but has grown over the years. The aim was to provide emergency relief for households who have temporary needs, rather than providing permanent additional support. Recipients were restricted to using the service a maximum of eight times every six months.

It had one full-time manager, three part-time staff (a warehouse manager, a driver, and an administrative assistant) and "many" volunteers. The volunteers could be involved in collecting food in their cars from providers, helping sort food in the warehouse, staffing the physical food banks during the set sessions in two locations (creating food packages for people turning up in person), and doing deliveries by car. At the sessions, there were sometimes representatives from other community services there who could interact with recipients before, during or after they had received the food parcel. They used two main food bank sites with a warehouse between the two. The warehouse manager worked part time for the food bank.

The food bank offered a wide range of food, including meat, dairy, fresh vegetables, cakes, and pasties as well as tinned and packaged ambient goods. They used to take furniture and children's clothes too, but this became too much to organise, and they chose to concentrate on providing food. As a result, the organisation signposted people to partner organisations when they needed other essential items.

Recipients were by referral only. They had to have a voucher, provided through a professional that worked with them and knew their circumstances. There were two main reasons for running a voucher scheme. Firstly, it gave confidence to food donors that food was going to people in genuine need:

> **"They have to have vouchers. Really, I think if you're asking people to donate food, you need to know that the people that you're giving food to are in need of it."**
> **- Food bank manager**

Secondly, the vouchers were a way of making sure the recipient was not struggling alone and that other agencies were aware of their needs:

> **"The other thing about having a professional doing a voucher is, you're making sure that somebody knows that they're struggling. Because otherwise, they could be coming to the food bank and nobody who's working with them has a clue that they're financially struggling."**
> **- Food bank manager**

Most recipients came in to collect, which could be on foot, on public transport or, frequently, by car. (In this rural area, more people who are financially disadvantaged have cars than might be typical nationally, because public transport is limited and expensive.) On foot, people came with trolleys, bags and rucksacks to help transport the food. Some support workers collected on behalf of their clients and used a variety of types of transport to do so. During the pandemic, the food bank started doing deliveries in addition to this, and it plans to continue.

The organisation also had a Facebook page, mainly for the benefit of donors, to communicate what foods were most needed.

During the pandemic, the organisation had to manage significant changes to how they operated. One change was the profile volunteers. Before the pandemic most volunteers were older retired people, but because of the lockdown and pandemic guidance, many of these were confined to their homes during the crisis. In their place, the organisation saw an increase in the number of younger people who volunteered and offered help. Some people who had been working in or running cafés also got involved, as those businesses were closed.

The council, which had previously had an arm's length relationship with the food bank, became much more closely involved with the organisation during the early stages of the pandemic. The food bank felt that they now became recognised "in a more official manner". They also had closer relationships with the agencies who refer people to the food bank. Reflecting this, they have found more partnerships with other agencies like food waste charities and volunteering organisations, which has helped to better co-ordinate their efforts.

One of the other changes during the pandemic was introducing deliveries. Prior to the COVID-19 restrictions, the organisation had chosen to avoid using deliveries. They felt people saw this as an "easy option", and it limited the way that the organisation could provide support. The organisation introduced deliveries to reach people in need as restrictions were introduced and people were self-isolating. The organisation also moved towards using e-vouchers, rather than paper vouchers, for when people came to access food. This was because the people requiring the service were not able to access the referral partners, who share the vouchers in-person. The organisation said this had helped their service and has also improved their relationship with their referral partners through better communication.

Where they sourced food from

The food bank regularly received food from several different sources. The used donations to create meal plans for their recipients. One of the main ways that they sourced food is through partner relationships with several large supermarkets in the local area. Generally, they had a weekly collection from each of these stores, and the food they received could be different each time. They also used the app 'Neighbourly', which matches food banks with potential donor locations. These donors include supermarkets and other food retailers. The food bank organisation received an alert and then had to respond as soon as possible, to say that they would like to accept the food.

The food bank typically had good relationships with staff from their main supermarket donors. However, the quality of the relationship varied by organisation, and even between individuals within the organisation. An example was given where one store manager will take care to ensure food is put out at the right time, but another store manager at the same shop will turn away the organisation claiming not to have known about the collection visit. Further, the use of the Neighbourly app did not always work well:

> **"The communication is not [always] great. So, we'll get a text and go up there, but the store hasn't been told they can release it."**
> **- Food bank manager**

The food bank has also received some unusable food from supermarkets. One example was mouldy bread and rolls, and this was only noticed after the food had been collected. This meant that the food bank was left with the costs that were associated with disposal,

as they had to pay for commercial food waste collection, for the foods that were unsuitable to eat. The manager discussed that on occasion it can feel like they are being used as a means for large organisations to discard their food waste.

> **It's a funny thing, because sometimes you feel like you are a bit of a way of the supermarkets getting rid of food without having to pay for food waste.**
> **- Food bank manager**

The food bank also had a strong, positive relationship with a local food waste charity project. This food waste charity provided regular deliveries of food items. What the food bank received from the charity varied, with deliveries often including frozen, fresh, and non-perishable food. The food bank said that this partner was very helpful for them, but they have experienced some challenges. One challenge was not knowing what they might receive, which makes it hard to plan in advance. Another issue was receiving large quantities of food in bulk, such as frozen chicken which is hard to store. The food bank had to spend time separating these bulk products into smaller quantities, and they have reservations about whether this is safe. Furthermore, the organisation also discussed concerns about receiving large quantities of frozen food, as they cannot be sure how long that food has been frozen before it goes into their own freezer storage.

> **I think my worry would be, we might be quite careful how long we keep things for and we know that because we're busy things go out quite quickly, so you don't think, 'This has been sat here in our freezer for 6 months,' but I'm not sure how late we get them. Have they been somewhere else frozen for a very long time before they come to us?**
> **- Project Manager**

The food bank also received deliveries from a local bakery three times a week. This was at the end of the day and included foods such as pasties, sandwiches and salads that have gone unsold at the end of the business day. The bakery delivered food to the food bank's warehouse, where it was stored in boxes until it was distributed to the individual food bank sites the following morning. The food bank also received a small amount of baked goods from the public. These are generally put on display at the food bank, with labels saying, 'at the recipients' risk', for people to take. However, these were not included in the food parcels, because of the issues in tracing how the food had been handled and stored and not being sure about the ingredients.

The organisation also took part in something called the Gleaning project. This involved local farmers allowing food bank volunteers access to crop fields to gather excess produce.

One challenge that the organisation noted around many of their suppliers, was that they were often unsure about whether food was transported properly. Many of their deliveries involved a long journey and therefore there was a risk that food may not be stored at the correct temperature.

Where they operated from

They had two main food bank sites: a church where there were sessions four times a week, and a secondary food bank in another church hall which ran once a week. There was a warehouse half-way between the two, which served as a food sorting, storage, and distribution centre.

At the main church site there was a hall with two floors, both with big spaces. The food bank was in the main downstairs hall, having moved there during the pandemic from a smaller side room. Half of the hall held food bank stock, the other half was left empty and was set up with tables and chairs for food bank sessions. It was also used by other community groups (e.g. a toddler group). The building had kitchens used for serving teas and coffees to people coming to the food bank. The building was in "an OK state of repair, but it's not fantastic" (Volunteer, Southwest England, community food hub). Generally, the different groups cleaned up after themselves.

The organisation rented a warehouse in an industrial park. All stock that they collected or was delivered, goes to the warehouse. Once there, all food is dated, and then packed into crates, which are then taken to each of the individual food bank sites.

Food journey and processes

Collection and delivery from suppliers

Supermarkets: volunteers collected the donated items put in baskets. One supermarket had also donated through Neighbourly. The supermarket shares how many crates of excess food they have on the app. The food bank will then receive a text message, which will invite them to collect whatever they wanted from the food supply. However, the service does not always work well. For example, the organisation may receive an alert

that food is ready for collection, but when volunteers arrive onsite, they are told by store staff that they cannot collect the food yet.

Food on-the-go retail outlets (sandwich and pasty shops etc.): a pasty company provided loose excess pasties, sandwiches, and salads in sealed containers. This was delivered in a car by an employee of the pasty company, three times a week. The pasties were often still warm when they arrived. They would sit in the warehouse overnight (not refrigerated) and were collected the next day by volunteers from the food bank.

Food waste charity: this organisation had use of a freezer van, so food could arrive fresh, chilled, or ambient from this supplier. Items would be stored immediately in fridges and freezers in the warehouse. Sometimes food came in large quantities, where a food producer had a bulk batch of one item to offload. The food bank tried to freeze items like meat even if it came chilled or in smaller quantities, because it made it easier to deal with. Anything already frozen was delivered in portable freezer boxes that kept things frozen for up to four hours.

"Gleaning" projects and farms: produce came straight from the fields of local farms. Eggs were brought in every week from a farm, typically with 2-week best before dates.

Those interviewed seemed to assume that whoever had physical possession of the food was responsible for it. For example, one supplier felt that their responsibility for food safety ended when they had delivered it to the food bank's warehouse.

Storage and prepping of food

At the warehouse

When non-perishable foods arrived at the warehouse, volunteers dated the items and sorted them into different product categories. Stock was rotated on the shelves according to best before date, which means that the longest-dated items were stored at the back. Any fresh food was inspected to ensure that it was of an appropriate quality. If food was deemed unsuitable, these products were be disposed of. Once food was on the shelves, volunteers were provided with laminated lists providing guidance on how the organise the food. This separated food into different types and specified where it should be stored. Some of the food was separated and sent straight for delivery. However, the bulk of the food was kept in crates and then sent to the two main food bank sites, where it was then sorted further.

At the food bank centres

Once the food has been distributed to individual food bank centres, a team of 4-5 volunteers reviewed the contents of the delivery and stored items on shelves in the community space. The main site had a kitchen which had three freezers and three fridges. All freezer items were kept in storage, before being moved to freezer boxes which were kept in the main hall area. This was done to reduce the risk of food defrosting. Any vegetables were kept in the hall, as that was cold enough to ensure that the food remained safe.

Most of the items the organisation handled were either tinned or packaged. Very few of the products were fresh, and these were often smaller products like yoghurts. Any fresh food was kept in the fridge for as long as possible before being added to deliveries at the last moment.

When recipients arrived at the site volunteers took their details. A different volunteer prepared a food bag for the recipient. The volunteers asked about any dietary needs, and these were factored in when selecting items. The volunteers tried to cover a wide selection of food products, so that the recipients always received a good mix. Volunteers also asked whether the recipient has a fridge or freezer, so that they received food they could store appropriately.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the organisation had a box on display which featured items that had just gone beyond their best before or use-by date. These were available for recipients to take, with the note making clear that it was at their own risk. However, following an increased focus on hygiene during the height of the pandemic, they removed this feature and have not re-introduced it.

Delivery of food to recipients

While most food was collected from the food bank, some deliveries were carried out by volunteer drivers in their own cars. Journeys could be up to around an hour.

Food safety

The manager of the food bank held a Level 2 Food Hygiene qualification. She was responsible for all food safety and hygiene procedures. All paid staff need to have at least a Level 1 Food Hygiene qualification. Volunteers did not need qualifications and were guided through the appropriate actions and procedures by qualified staff.

There were a number of food hygiene risks that concerned the organisation. One of these was around freezing food. The organisation suggested that when they receive large amounts of frozen food, it was not always clear how long that food had been frozen for before they received it. This meant they had reservations about how safe it was to share with recipients. The organisation also said that they transported and stored their food in cool boxes. Although they have been advised that these are safe to use, they mentioned that they had concerns about whether it was best practice.

> **"The freezer boxes were bought on the Internet because it said on there that you could stay frozen for four hours. But it would be really nice if someone official could tell you that, not just the people that you bought it off …"**
> **- Food bank manager**

Moreover, the organisation explained that a further food risk came from when they received loose products. For example, they referenced when they receive large numbers of bakery products such as pasties. The organisation cannot be certain how this food was handled and managed before it was delivered to them, and whether it has been stored at the right temperature. On occasion the organisation will take leftover and surplus food from business lunches in the local community. The organisation did not have a set procedure for how to approach these supplies of foods. Rather they approached it on a case-by-case basis.

When receiving loose food, baked goods and other items like sandwiches were sometimes not labelled with ingredient lists. The organisation still distributed these products and had not had any issues. They assumed that if the bakeries were asked to provide labels, that they might be less likely to donate the food due to the additional work that would be required. The organisation explained that they always asked recipients about any allergies to ensure they did not receive unsuitable products.

For food received from supermarkets and other retailers, they relied on the suppliers to manage food safety appropriately. This included labelling and ensuring that food was checked before it is shared with the organisation.

Awareness and use of any existing guidance or support

Overall, the organisation felt that they had a good general understanding of food hygiene. However, the manager had a limited awareness of the FSA's current guidance. The manager explained that she would use online resources if she knew about them, but she

did not know what the FSA offered and had not thought to look at the FSA's online resources.

As employed staff hold Level 1 Food Hygiene qualifications, they understood basic food hygiene. Conversely, volunteer knowledge was more variable and based on any previous experience, in the catering or food industries (e.g., some volunteers used to own cafes themselves).

Volunteers were asked who they would approach if they became aware of a food safety incident or had questions about food safety. They suggested that in the first instance they would approach the manager of the food bank organisation, who would then escalate it to the local council.

When faced with any questions or food safety issues, the manager explained that they would work with the environmental health department of their local council. The organisation would report any incidents to this department and would also approach them if they had any general questions about food hygiene. The manager also explained that they had recently attended "food bank round table", which the county council had arranged. This included the council, Public Health England, and other food bank organisations in the local area. The organisation found that this was a valuable development and found it useful for gaining access to information.

Ways the FSA can support with food safety

The organisation was asked how the FSA could provide support with food safety.

The food bank manager highlighted several areas the FSA could consider when providing further support. This included: Sending leaflets and information packs which signpost the FSA's online resources.

- Providing training, which could be through online videos, on "best practice and how it could be improved".
- Producing materials specifically for food banks.
- Developing an easy-to-read chart or poster on rules around freezing different types of food.

The supplier (which was also a food waste charity) had some additional suggestions for how organisations could be better supported by the FSA and more generally:

- Having FSA or other suitable experts on the ground coaching, mentoring and upskilling key people involved in the process, including volunteers responsible for deliveries.
- Helping to develop a safe, joined-up process for handling food – but making the communication of it clear and light-touch, as volunteers have to be able to take it on board.
- Work to understand how the entire food system works in the local area.
- Grant funders making basic food safety knowledge a condition for any organisation wanting to offer food to people in need.

Figure 4: Summary of case study 2

LARGE RURAL FOOD BANK

- Food journey
- Food safety risks and processes

Region: South-West of England **Pre/post pandemic** Operating for 12 years
Type of food: All types, including frozen
How offer food: mainly collection at food bank, also direct delivery since pandemic.

FOOD HYGIENE RATING
EXEMPT

Food is sourced from supermarkets, specialist food retailers, a food waste charity, and gleaning from farms.

They operate from a warehouse which has fridges and freezers. This serves two main sites which are based in church hall / community spaces.

Some food is collected by volunteers from supermarkets and other retailers and brought to their warehouse. Some food is delivered to the warehouse by a food waste charity, or businesses themselves.

Food is stored by date order and category in the warehouse. This is then put into crates, and either delivered by volunteers directly to recipients or transported to food banks.

Food parcels are made-up on the day. Recipients arrive at the foodbank sites to collect their parcel.

Bakery products do not have dates, and are accepted on trust. With frozen goods, it can be unclear how long things have been frozen for already.

Very conscious of time of goods out of chiller or freezer. Also rotate packaged goods so longest dated goods at back.

They do not have refrigerated vans, and use freezer boxes in cars for delivery. Drive times for deliveries are short.

Recipients checked for allergies. Frozen or chilled items added at last moment to minimise risk.

Case study 3

Summary

The organisation is based in Northern Ireland and part of a non-perishable food bank network. They had a warehouse, an office and four individual distribution centres within a ten-mile radius of the warehouse. Recipients collected their food parcels from these sites. Three of these distribution centres were in urban environments, the fourth was based in a more rural location.

Traditionally, people needed to have been referred to the food bank by one of 85 referral partners. These referral partners include community leaders such as councillors or headteachers, as well as organisations like Citizens Advice.

> **"If someone suddenly finds themselves in a position that they don't have any food in their house or they've run very low, can't feed the family that week, we would see ourselves as being that point of relief"**
> **- Project manager**

Recipients received a form, after their referral, which they took to the food bank centre who then assisted them. Sometimes recipients were given an e-voucher, which is more private and does not disclose the reasons they are seeking help. Recipients were asked a series of questions including how many people are in the household; how many children; how many adults, and then received an appropriate amount of food. Recipients will usually only visit once or twice, but there have been instances where recipients have received food for longer. There have also been cases where a recipient was between addresses, which has affected their access to benefits, and they have attended the food bank for an 8-week period. However, this was not typical.

The food provided was emergency food to keep recipients sustained for 3-5 days and was all non-perishable. Food products included tins, dried goods like pasta, and treats like chocolate for children. Food was provided to the recipient in new supermarket carrier bags "because it gives the client dignity". They generally produced 30-40 parcels a week. During the height of the pandemic, the food bank provided essential foods to people who were self-isolating. This was then reduced and has now been removed as the COVID-19 situation has changed.

There were some changes to the operational side during the pandemic, and the organisation became delivery only. However, they had steadily returned to collection only, apart from a few recipients who had difficulties getting to one of the distribution centres. One important reason for returning to a collection model was the ability to offer further support to recipients. This included providing details on other organisations that could help address recipients' current circumstances: "In the past, when people came to the food bank, we would have invited them into the actual distribution centre, they would have been able to sit down at a table and one of our colleagues would have maybe chatted to the person and give them some sort of support."

Where they source food from, including:

Over 90% of the food was supplied through supermarket donations from local supermarkets. These were items bought by consumers and are then deposited in drop-off points at the entrance to the store. These were then transported to the community food providers' warehouse up to twice a week. The community food providers liked this method as "We're confident that the food is in date, it's fresh, it's of good quality" – they felt it reduced the risks regarding food safety significantly as it was coming straight from supermarket shelves.

They had a limited relationship with their main suppliers. The supermarket had a community champion that they liaised with to explain what products they needed and what they already had enough of, but in terms of tailoring what they received, that was limited.

> **"To some extent it has worked, there have been some frustrations as well. We're depending on the general public, their generosity, so we can't be too harsh about it either. It would be easy if we could just put a shopping list and say, 'Right, this is what we need each week.' But it doesn't work as simply as that."**
> **– Project manager**

The remaining 10% of the food was mostly made up of private donations from the public direct to the community food provider. People can drop-off donations at the warehouse or any of the four distribution centres. At Christmas time they see an increase in private donations from businesses who do a collection for the food bank. This cannot always be used if the food in question is perishable.

They have used social media to publish lists of the foods required, but they have found that this has had limited impact on what they actually receive.

Staff had some concerns about the private donations and whether they are being used as a way to get rid of waste food, rather than as a genuine desire to help:

> **"I think on some occasions people clear out their cupboards, and the things that they aren't going to use, it's 'Oh, I'll donate that to the food bank,' but quite often we don't have people who will want that type of food either. So, sometimes we can't get rid of it, and we just have to dispose of it."**
> **- Lead volunteer**

> **"We tell the people donating it, if they wouldn't buy it themselves then we don't want the clients getting something they would-, somebody might phone up and say, 'I've got a lot of out-of-date vegetables in the cupboard, can you take them?' No, we wouldn't take anything like that. It gives the people dignity, the people we're serving, it is food that they'd expect to buy in a supermarket."**
> **- Project manager**

Where they operate from

The central operations of the organisation work from a main office and warehouse. The warehouse is managed by a warehouse manager who works on a voluntary basis. The warehouse also has its own volunteers. All food is stored in the warehouse from the point of its arrival until it is distributed to the individual centres.

There are four distribution centres. These are based in community buildings such as churches. In each building, the food bank had their own separate office or room. They are responsible for the cleanliness and upkeep of this area. Before the pandemic, sites would welcome recipients into the building for tea and coffee, and to offer any additional support. This would usually be in a communal area of a church building. However due to the pandemic and social distancing measures, this changed to operating from behind a window that would open into a hallway or outside area. Two sites were back to being open two days a week, the other two sites were open only once a week. It varied by site, but the main distribution centre has sixteen people on their team, who are split into four groups, and each group covers one evening per month.

Food journey and processes

Food parcels

Supermarket customers buy additional food during their shopping, and deposit it at the donation point at the entrance of the store. Some may bring food with them from home to the supermarket.

Supermarket staff then check the donated food 1 or 2 times a week. This is done to confirm that there are no unsuitable foods, or perishable items that the food bank organisation cannot accept. On average the food bank receives 160-180kg of food each week. Once these checks are done, the supermarket staff will contact the food bank's office to let them know that it is ready for collection. Representatives from the food bank will then collect from the supermarket and deposit it in their warehouse.

Storage and preparation

Food is deposited at the warehouse. Once in the warehouse, the staff will check again that all the food is suitable for their recipients and discard any products that the supermarket staff may have missed. Food is then labelled with a black marker so that the use by dates and any allergen information is clear. Food is then sorted onto trays labelled 2022/ 2023/ 2024 (dependent on when the product expires) and is positioned so that the items with the closest dates are always at the front of the tray. For standard essentials like baked beans and pasta, they estimate they have a four-year supply.

Food is then sorted into parcels. This will be made up of several non-perishable items intended to provide 3-5 days of food. Food parcels are grouped together and moved to the van, where they will be delivered to the relevant distribution centre. This will usually be done either the day before or on the day that the centre is open, depending on their opening hours.

No instructions are included with the food parcels regarding storage or recipes. The lead volunteer explained that they often include leaflets on wider community support groups, and issues relating to finance, in the food parcel for first-time users.

> **"We've talked about this a few times, maybe including recipe ideas and things like that. At the minute, no, we don't have anything. They just get the food and that's it. I think storage, each item would probably have some**

Once on location at the distribution centre, food was stored in the office until the centre opens. Each centre has a limited additional supply of food in case any changes need to be made to the food parcel when the recipient arrives.

Food safety

Some staff had food hygiene training; however, it was not a requirement. Staff that had Level 2 Food Hygiene qualifications may have got this through other work in the community building where the distribution centre was located. All volunteers had to attend an internal training course, which ran through information such as what to expect and what they require of their volunteers. This training includes some guidance on hygiene.

> **"Because we don't have fresh food, it reduces the risk significantly. But there might be a damaged tin of peas, but the risk is quite low with something like that, and I'm pleased to say we haven't really encountered that. If someone ever discovered that, that they had something wrong with an item they received, hopefully they would catch on and tell us before they would consume that item."**
> **- Project manager**

The main food safety risk was ensuring that all foods are in-date. Warehouse volunteers would do checks on all food that arrives in the warehouse, and a volunteer would do weekly spot checks on some food items in the warehouse to check they have been labelled and stored correctly. Volunteers would also do checks to ensure labels are still present and that packaging has not been tampered with while in storage. If something like pasta has been split open by mistake, staff would dispose of the product.

Sometimes they would receive food products from house clearances, which can include vast quantities of out-of-date food or food with damaged packaging. Volunteers would go through these products and assess them and discard any products which are in an unsuitable condition.

Food bank volunteers noted that they had very rarely been asked to provide food for people with allergens. But they have prepared lists that identify what foods are suitable

for different people, depending on their specific requirements. If someone had an allergy, volunteers would ask them what they would eat, and want to eat, rather than giving them a pre-selected option that they think they might like.

In terms of any food safety incidents, no one involved could remember one happening. But they have procedures in place to determine the course of action (depending on the severity of a specific event).

Awareness / use of any existing guidance or support

The project manager previously worked in the supermarket industry, so he explained he had strong knowledge of food safety guidance. A lead volunteer at a distribution site explained that most of the food bank volunteers also worked/ volunteered for the church, so some of volunteers had food hygiene training and were aware of guidance from events the church had held separately to the food bank.

The project manager regularly has conversations and meetings with the warehouse staff to highlight potential issues.

They were aware of the FSA and also the help that the local authority can offer but have not required it. The project manager used the FSA's weekly bulletin announcements, which identify any recent products that have been recalled – but in general these do not affect the stock they receive and hold.

Ways the FSA can support with food safety

In terms of support the FSA could provide, there was a consensus that there was nothing significant that the FSA could do to help with food safety in the organisation. This is mostly because of the ambient, non-perishable nature of the food, which is almost always going directly from the shelves of the supermarket to the shelves of the warehouse, with limited interference.

There was also a mention of the alerts, but the project manager explained he only signs up for the weekly ones.

This was partly because of the role of supermarkets, who they assumed were ensuring food was safe to pass on and use. They wanted the FSA to focus on further up the food chain with the supermarkets and manufacturers, to ensure that the food the food banks receive is appropriate and safe to eat.

"If they had a knowledge of what we actually do then they would maybe guide us in the areas we need to know, because it's hard to gauge what we need to know without them coming and saying, 'Well look, as a volunteer or as an organisation you should be doing this and this'. If they had a better knowledge of what we do maybe, they could suggest stuff to us?".

- Lead volunteer, distribution centre

Figure 5: Summary of case study 3

Non-perishables Foodbank

- Food journey
- Food safety risks and processes

Region: Northern Ireland
Type of food: Non-Perishables
How offer food: Food parcels

Pre/post pandemic Pre pandemic

FOOD HYGIENE RATING
EXEMPT

90% of food from customer supermarket donations. Remaining 10% are private donations from the public direct to the foodbank.

Donations are received by the organisation and stored in a warehouse until they are ready for use. On arrival all food is checked again by warehouse volunteers and stored in use- by date order

Food is separated into individual bags and then transported to distribution centre that is open that day.

Recipients attend a distribution centre on their particular day to collect food parcels/ bags, with 3-5 days emergency food relief included.

Supermarket and warehouse staff check to ensure no perishable food has been left in collection points, and if it has they remove it.

Food is checked to ensure labels are present and have not been damaged or removed. All tins and packaging is checked again for any damage, eg rust or split bags

Lists are submitted to recipients to check for any dietary/ religious/ vegetarian requirement. Suitable alternatives are arranged if a recipient has any particular needs.

Case study 4

Summary

The organisation's aim was to relieve food poverty in the area. They were considered an emergency service to support people when they experienced crisis. Located in the English Midlands near the Welsh border, this organisation operated with over 100 volunteers and a small number of paid staff, with their building open Monday-Friday. The main reasons that recipients had recently used the service included housing or benefits issues, unexpected bills, furlough ending, and people being made redundant. The number of recipients using the service had more than tripled over the last two years. Prior to the pandemic, they offered a maximum of 3 weeks of food parcels at a time. However in the last eighteen months, they have increased the maximum number of food parcels that a recipient can access in a year, offering twice as many as before the pandemic. They found that during the pandemic that needs had shifted from being shorter-term to more long-term support.

Recipients were mostly referred from partner agencies locally, but as a result of COVID-19, the trustees made a decision to accept some self-referrals. Organisers found that people who self-referred typically required more support than just food and the organisation signposted to other services.

> **"I tend to guide people when I speak to them about, 'Yes, of course, we can give you a food parcel on this occasion, but let's look at the bigger picture now and how we might be able to help you go forward,' because a food parcel one week might not be sufficient for that particular crisis… Signposting to me isn't just about, 'Here's another telephone number, get on with it,' I actually have all the forms and the right people to talk to so that we can get these things rolling pretty quickly."**
> **- CEO**

Their food parcels included enough food for 3 meals a day for 7 days, suitable for the family size, plus personal hygiene products and pet food as needed. They also provided cooking utensils like pots and pans for people in emergency accommodation, including purchasing microwaves on occasions for people who needed them. The organisation has connections with other charities in the area that could provide larger equipment, such as white goods or cookers.

The organisation used their website and social media channels, including Facebook and Twitter, to share information for potential recipients, as well as for the public and donors about how they could support the organisation.

Prior to the pandemic, recipients received food parcels by either collecting them on site or through agents who collected parcels on behalf of families and delivered them via home visits. To keep volunteers as safe as possible during the pandemic, the organisation created volunteering 'bubbles' so that volunteers worked with the same group of people to minimise interactions and provided regular COVID-19 tests before shifts.

The organisation lost volunteers during the pandemic because many were considered vulnerable and needed to stay home and shield. This meant they needed to invest in training for new volunteers, whose demographic has now changed significantly over the last two years, with more younger people now volunteering. Since restrictions ended, some recipients collected food parcels in person, but due to poor transport links in the area, many were still reliant on deliveries.

The provider received funding from the local council to deliver food parcels to recipients, though this grant only covered deliveries within the city and did not include those who lived further afield. The organisation has applied for another grant, allowing them to purchase a van that could drive anywhere in the surrounding area.

Where they source food from

The organisation received most of its food as donations from local people. Donations were normally non-perishable goods, but often this has resulted in people only donating certain items (e.g., pasta and beans). This has meant they have been inundated with stock and not been able to find use for it all. They have also previously received food not suitable for distribution, including products intended for animals or tins that were 10 years or more past their best before date. They have tried to guide people on what items were appropriate to be donated.

As one of the main community food providers in the area, the organisation received donations from supermarkets via collection points in their stores. These were collected daily by volunteer drivers. The organisation experienced challenges with receiving donations from one supermarket chain because they already had a wider partnership

with another food bank network. Donations beyond this partnership are left to manager discretion.

> **"It's on managers' discretion and that comes and goes. We've had staff who've fundraised for us in the past and have been absolutely fantastic, but their managers have then turned around and said that, 'Head office say…', and breaking up relationships that have been going for a long time… several of them are now collecting for us which we're very grateful for, but it is difficult.'"**
> **– Trustee and volunteer**

They also received financial donations from the public and spent this on buying fresh food at cost from local butchers, bakers, and farmers to supplement food parcels. The volunteer responsible for sourcing fresh food had developed relationships with these local businesses. For example, a local dairy farmer regularly delivered milk to the premises, and a butcher donated packaged and labelled portion sizes of mince beef. There was a local church that raised money each week and bought eggs for the provider – sometimes as many as 120 packs for the week.

During the pandemic they received ad hoc donations from retailers that had shut due to restrictions and had excess stock. While this was welcome, they also faced challenges, with some donations perceived to have been given to help businesses with disposing of items they could not sell.

> **"Sometimes people are looking for the publicity. I always say, 'If you want me to put a thank you up on Facebook or on Twitter, then I'm happy to do so,' but sometimes, you realise there is actually an ulterior motive, in terms of it looks like public interest, but they're just getting rid of stuff that they've never been able to get rid of themselves…You're just thinking, 'Really?"**
> **- CEO**

The organisation also had relationships with other community providers in the local area and worked together to ensure food was shared if one organisation could not use supplies. For example, while the organisation itself was not signed up to receive supplies from FareShare, a local charity was and would share these supplies with the organisation when they had extra. One example was passing on around 100 bananas a few weeks previously. As the organisation did not operate on weekends, they often shared surplus

fresh food with other charities in the area at the end of the day on a Friday. For example, they received baby milk powder close to its best before date and contacted a local mother and babies' group who took this surplus.

Where they operate from

The organisation operated out of a number of premises; one building that was the main area for food storage and where volunteers prepped food parcels, a warehouse to store the van, and a storeroom used to store dry goods such as pasta and beans. The warehouse and storeroom were located about two miles from the main building, requiring the use of a van to transport the dry stores to the main prep building. During the pandemic, the organisation was also given access to a local unused store front, which they used to collect donations. The buildings used by the organisation were exempt from requiring an FHRS rating.

The provider had sole use of these buildings and had volunteer Team Leaders who were responsible for the cleanliness, managed by a rota system. There were usually two teams per day, and Team Leaders from the morning gave Team leaders for the afternoon session handovers outlining what had been done and what needed doing. Volunteers had clear job descriptions for shifts and were made aware of who was responsible for what.

Food journey and processes

On a typical day, food was collected from donation points by volunteers in the morning and brought to the storefront to be checked, categorised, dated and sorted into trays. Trays were collected by volunteer drivers and taken to the main building and integrated into the internal dated system and stored accordingly.

Requests for parcels started to come in from about 9.30am. Recipients were required to complete the online questionnaire detailing any dietary requirements or allergies, how many people the parcel needed to feed, what cooking facilities they had and whether they had any pets. These details were printed on forms, with exact packing lists on the back, and given to volunteers to prepare the parcels as all were made to order on the day. This was described as like a supermarket with shelves full of different foods and volunteers walking around with trolleys and specific lists of what to pack for each parcel.

Food was prepared ready for the driver to deliver, with fresh and frozen food only being added just before the driver left the premises.

Food safety

The referral questionnaire included information about any dietary requirements or allergies. Parcels were tailored for families who had several different allergies, to make sure they were not required to cook multiple separate meals. There were set areas for particular products and for gluten-free and other dietary requirements and allergens. Everything was clearly labelled. They had to be particularly conscious of products that were high in sugar as many of their recipients were diabetic.

Food provided by suppliers, such as local butchers, was mostly delivered in refrigerated vans and the delivery van owned by the organisation had cool boxes for fresh goods. The only frozen items received tended to be mince, which was packaged and frozen at the butchers then delivered frozen. Recipients received clear instructions about freezing and defrosting food safely if they were sent frozen food in the parcels. On site at the organisation, fridge and freezer temperatures were checked regularly by a specific volunteer, who was also responsible for routinely checking the fresh produce. Fridges and freezers were all installed with alarms that alerted volunteers if the door was open for too long.

> **"That's been really helpful so that people don't make mistakes and not close the door properly. Temperature checks are done at the beginning of the day and the end of the day."**
> **- CEO**

Once food left the premises, volunteer drivers were responsible for recording the time it took from food being taken from the building to being delivered to the recipient. Most deliveries were within a 15-mile radius of the premises and drivers were only given the number of deliveries they could make within half an hour, to ensure food parcels were not in the van for too long. For journeys to further afield, the recipient would be called in advance, so they know when to be there and whether any food requires being refrigerated or frozen straight away.

Meat donations were not accepted from the public, unless these were pre-arranged and there were records showing the amount of time the meat had been out of the fridge or freezer.

They managed their stocks of dairy by being careful of how much they ordered. In general, they did not tend to accept donated dairy products. Dates were clearly visible and managed with stock rotation. Eggs were donated by a faith group, the organisation would request amounts each week so this was also managed carefully, and dates could be monitored.

All food collected from donations was checked thoroughly for any out of date or damaged products. Volunteers were all aware of the procedures around dates and stock rotation; as products were sorted through, dates were written in large to ensure food was used within this time.

As a result of Natasha's Law, the organisation stopped accepting pastries and other bakery items from some supermarkets as they were not labelled or dated.

> **"We would only let items go out if it's got proper labels on it. We're very clear about that. Even if it's been donated, if it's not clear we don't use it."**
> **– Trustee and volunteer**

The CEO had previously had food safety training, but most volunteers did not, though this was something planned for all Team Leaders soon. The organisation was able to get a cheaper training course made available to them through a local support service for voluntary organisations.

The CEO and Team Leaders were responsible for in-house training. All volunteers were trained in organisational procedures, such as not adding fresh goods to parcels until the recipient was on site or the delivery van was just about to go

> **"Until you see the whites of the eyes of the client who's collecting or it's going to go in the van, none of the fresh food goes in the food parcel until it's ready to go out. You could have all the dry ambient food sitting there for a couple of hours before the driver comes back, the moment the driver's ready, then it's allowed out of the fridges or the freezers. Nothing is ticked off until it's the right moment to move it."**
> **– CEO**

Shift rotas were drawn up to ensure there were enough volunteers with different levels of training/certifications for each shift, so a suitable person was allocated to specific roles. If a food safety incident was identified, it would be shared into the volunteers and Team Leader WhatsApp group conversations to alert all members immediately to ensure the items do not get used and were disposed of appropriately.

Awareness / use of any existing guidance or support

The provider had signed up to FSA allergen and product recall alerts. These were printed and put up in the store and prep rooms to make sure volunteers were aware of any donated items that matched the alerts. Team Leaders were also notified.

They would like more follow up guidance with these alerts so organisations can be informed about whether the issue has been resolved or ongoing. The CEO gave an example of an alert for poisoned courgettes last year and explained they were still cautious to give out courgettes as they were not sure if the poisoned batch of seeds were still in circulation or not.

The CEO took food safety very seriously but raised concerns that other community food providers they are aware of do not necessarily do the same. They were concerned that there were smaller providers not yet on local authorities' radar and this can be more of an issue because food is not being sold.

> **"No money's changing hands, I think that changes us as a food outlet, but I don't think it should personally. I think we should be all signed up. I'm a registered food outlet with Environmental Health but I know some colleagues who are doing similar things aren't. I've actually had to press them on, 'I don't think keeping it in a garage is a really good idea.' In terms of pest control and what have you."**
> **- CEO**

Ways the FSA can support with food safety

The organisation offered a number of suggestions for ways that the FSA could provide support with food safety. These included:

- Clearer guidance tailored for charity and community food provision sector to help with public liability insurance

- The CEO had to make strict decisions as there was not detailed enough guidance on things like dented or unlabelled cans – they typically refuse these donations as they cannot guarantee the integrity of the food.
- In supermarkets, these damages are offered at a reduced price and down to individuals' discretion – would be useful to have a similar procedure for community provision.

- Specific guidance on how to keep eggs and how to safely move them in and out of different temperature zones.

- Clearer guidance on best before dates – any item past its use-by-date is disposed of and not given out, but they felt it would be helpful to understand more about how long after best before items could still be consumed. It would also be useful to understand more about freezing items and then how long until they need to be consumed.

> **"Everyone thinks my line's pretty strict but without guidance from anyone else, I had to make that decision. I think from my insurers across the board now with food banks, because originally we didn't exist, they didn't even know how to insure us, I've made those assurances that we are really strict which what goes in and out."**
> **– CEO**

- Any support to link up with national supermarkets for community food providers who are not part of the national networks. They felt it might be helpful for the FSA to publicly acknowledge that there are other food banks out there that follow all the legislation and advice and should be considered by supermarkets and other large chains.

> **"Our biggest frustration is actually not being [part of a national network], we find it much harder to link with the national supermarkets and chains, and bits and pieces to do anything because they seem to think that by dealing with the Trussell Trust they've covered everybody…It can get really frustrating trying to get this message out to organisations that by working with the one large group, you haven't covered everybody… If we can do anything to change that message, that would be really helpful, because it is a**
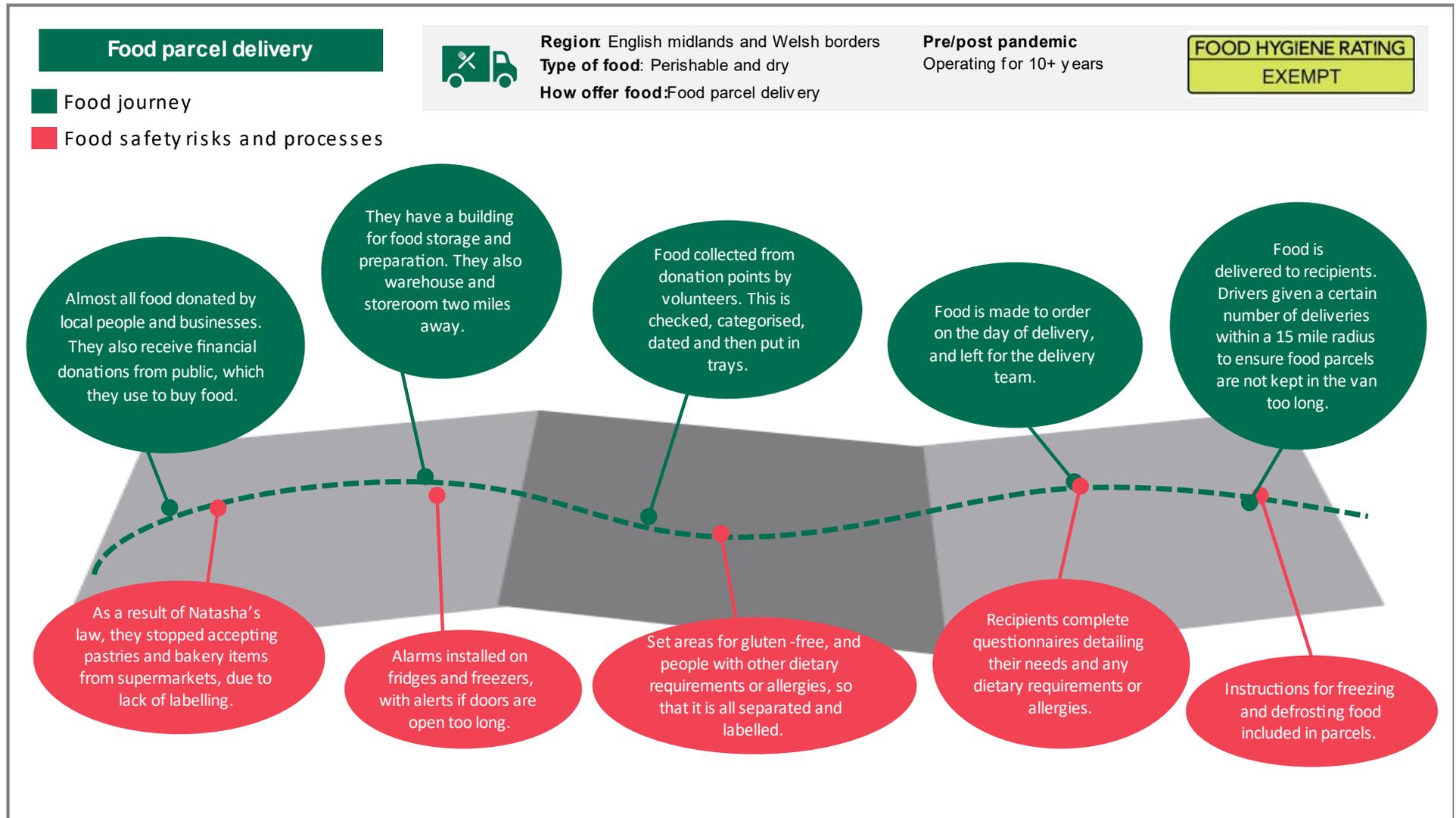
- More guidance and signposting to suitable equipment for the sector, for example temperature gauges for fridges and freezers. The organisation has previously bought several of these, but they tend to break after a couple of months.

- More guidance and support for the stages after community food providers have set up and passed their Environmental Health checks by the local council.

Figure 6: Summary of case study 4

Food parcel delivery

- Food journey
- Food safety risks and processes

Region: English midlands and Welsh borders
Type of food: Perishable and dry
How offer food: Food parcel delivery

Pre/post pandemic
Operating for 10+ years

FOOD HYGIENE RATING
EXEMPT

Almost all food donated by local people and businesses. They also receive financial donations from public, which they use to buy food.

They have a building for food storage and preparation. They also warehouse and storeroom two miles away.

Food collected from donation points by volunteers. This is checked, categorised, dated and then put in trays.

Food is made to order on the day of delivery, and left for the delivery team.

Food is delivered to recipients. Drivers given a certain number of deliveries within a 15 mile radius to ensure food parcels are not kept in the van too long.

As a result of Natasha's law, they stopped accepting pastries and bakery items from supermarkets, due to lack of labelling.

Alarms installed on fridges and freezers, with alerts if doors are open too long.

Set areas for gluten-free, and people with other dietary requirements or allergies, so that it is all separated and labelled.

Recipients complete questionnaires detailing their needs and any dietary requirements or allergies.

Instructions for freezing and defrosting food included in parcels.

Case study 5

Summary

This provider was primarily a food bank, operating for the last 10 years, and covering urban and rural areas in parts of Northeast England. It moved to mainly doing deliveries since the pandemic. Every month it delivered about 600-650 "emergency food parcels". The food bank also supported other organisations with donations   of its excess stock.

The organisation felt that they should be the last resort for people, but because of a lack of other economic and welfare support, they were increasingly required by people early on in the crisis they were facing. They were hoping to get back to providing food only in emergencies.

> **"We should be right at the bottom of the ladder, as it were, and be for emergency use only. But because those other steps aren't there, everyone comes through to us. So we're dealing with the whole thing at once. So, I'm very keen to take us back to emergency provision only, and to try and support clients a bit better."**
> **- Trustee and volunteer**

The provider mainly received donations of non-perishable foods, often from supermarket donation points. However, they did also receive and distribute some fresh items, either through direct donations in bulk from a wholesaler, via big supermarkets or from a bakery chain. The food bank also purchased some fresh items themselves.

As well as providing food for those in need, a major focus was waste reduction. The provider saw its role as taking excess from retailers and wholesalers to avoid waste in the food system. They also passed food on in bulk to partners such as the YMCA or local schools, or anyone else that could benefit.

> **"It's poverty alleviation as well as food waste reduction. It's a no-brainer, in terms of tying those two together, and trying to make the most of it."**
> **-Trustee and volunteer**

Around half of recipients were referrals from the local council, based on a service level agreement. A volunteer estimated that only 20% of recipients were in employment. Those that did work were self-employed or were on unstable zero-hour contracts. Prior to

the pandemic most of their recipients came from some of the least-affluent parts of the city. However, they have seen a significant increase in the number of recipients who are based in more affluent areas. They felt that they increasingly served individuals from all socioeconomic backgrounds.

The food bank had 7 paid staff members working part-time, and around 40 volunteers. They had two vans with dedicated drivers, including volunteers. On a typical day, there would be 3-4 paid staff and 4-5 volunteers working. Of the two drivers typically working at any one time, one was paid staff and one was a volunteer. Paid staff are in overall charge and took overall responsibility.

Where they sourced food from

Most (roughly 70%) of their stock was non-perishable items from collection points in supermarkets. They also received some bulk donations of excess food from wholesalers and other retailers. This could include fresh food.

> **"Somewhere like [the wholesaler] when we go, because of the size they're operating at, the donations we get from them, although they're regular, there'll often be a lot of one item at once. Like, you might get 500 chickens in one go, which we can't get rid of in a day. So we stick those into cold storage or in the freezer to buy a bit of time, to find a good home for them."**
> **- Trustee and volunteer**

Some supermarkets had community champions who donated surplus food. Regional managers of the supermarket chains also know them. This might happen once or twice a month, often with a bulk batch of items.

> **"We'll get a phone call saying, 'We've got 4,000 eggs', and we'll be there 20 minutes later, picking them up. A lot of the local regional managers from the supermarkets know us, and they know, whenever they've got excess, to phone us up, and we'll go and collect it."**
> **- Trustee and volunteer**

The food bank sometimes bought in fruit and vegetables to ensure the parcels they were giving out had some fresh items.

Impact of the pandemic

During the pandemic there was a sharp increase in referrals. There was also a huge increase in donations, partly due to restaurants and retailers closing and donating their stock.

Operations have otherwise carried on growing as before – growth was 10% a year before the pandemic and overall, that has continued to be the trend during it.

The organisation took food safety and hygiene more seriously as a result of COVID-19. The pandemic brought public health to the forefront of society's consciousness, and the organisation has felt an increased responsibility to keep themselves and their recipients safe.

During the pandemic, they moved to using deliveries. Previously recipients had to collect food from the depot, as that had become a community hub, where they could provide further support. However, the social distancing and lockdown measures made a difference to this. Since changing to deliveries, they found that deliveries were a more effective way of working. They now deliver to 90% of their recipients. The remaining 10% are recipients who live very close to the site, and it is easier for them to visit and pick up the food. As a result, they now had a dedicated driver, which they could not previously justify.

Where they operated from

The organisation had a dedicated warehouse. This warehouse consisted of three shipping containers, which were used for food storage, and two onsite offices.

Most of the food is non-perishable and was easily stored in shelving in the containers. They also had commercial fridges and freezers, which were used for things like the bulk donations of meat.

Food journey and processes

How well collections from suppliers worked varied considerably. The organisation worked with nearby supermarkets, who arranged donation points in their stores for customers to donate ambient foods. Some supermarkets they work with would also supply additional food. However, the organisation found that some supermarkets were very strict and careful about what they provided to the community food organisation. For example, one

of the supermarkets would not provide fresh meat or fish, as they were concerned about food safety. Instead, they would offer eggs and bread. This was because these supermarkets had concerns about food safety, which mostly centred on liability risks that came with donating food and who might be responsible if there was an incident.

The organisation has also partnered with a bakery chain. They have worked with them for several years, and the bakery has supplied the organisation with items such as sausage rolls, pasties and doughnuts. However, it took several years for the organisation to come to an agreement with the bakery chain to persuade them to also share their freshly prepared sandwiches. This was despite the same bakery donating other perishable products. The bakery felt the sandwiches were higher risk, and in order to offer them for donation, they did a site visit of the community food providers' premises and made them sign a waiver to accept responsibility for the products. The provider was required to use cool bags and load any products from the bakery chain into them straightaway, then transfer straight into their own fridges. Sandwiches could not be outside of a fridge for longer than half an hour.

In addition, the organisation also worked with a wholesaler, and generally had a good relationship with them. However, they found that this wholesaler had fewer food hygiene and safety controls in place compared to other suppliers, and this had caused some challenges. The wholesaler would usually provide excess food for collection twice a week. This included perishable food such as bread, root vegetables, prepared sandwich platters and a lot of meat. In total there would usually be 4 to 5 trolleys worth of food that has been collected that day. One of the main issues of working with the wholesaler related to how they transported the food donations. The organisation suggested that volunteers were told by the wholesaler to load food into a non-refrigerated van and were told not to stop anywhere on their way to the warehouse. This was to limit the time that the food was not in a chilled environment. Therefore, the food bank would often turn down the food donations because they were concerned that it had not been stored correctly. The basis of this relationship was an informal agreement with staff that they knew at the local store, rather than at a corporate level, which made it difficult for them to encourage the wholesaler to improve their food safety behaviour.

Other potential suppliers have set strict criteria for how the food bank operates, so that the food bank could not take food from them:

Storage and prepping of food

Everything that the organisation received was sorted almost immediately. Any products with longer shelf-life, such as tins with 2024/25 dates would be put into 'deep' storage. Dates were added to the tins with permanent marker, so that it is clear when a product needs to be used by. Any products with a shorter date, were placed onto shelves and arranged so that they are ready to be used with in the food parcels.

The organisation also received perishable food, which was more challenging to store correctly. Often this food had very short use-by dates, and needed to be processed quickly and included in parcels for the YMCA or schools. In some cases, this food would not even be unloaded from the van and put into storage. Rather it would be taken directly to these sites for use.

Among the perishable food that the organisation kept, meat products would be unloaded onto stainless steel benches, which had their own separate area in the corner of the warehouse. In this area, any bulk packages received would be separated out and then repackaged into more manageable sizes. If the item was going out that day, it would be stored temporarily in the fridge. If the product was not for immediate use, this would go into the freezer where it would be stored until the following week, when it would be used.

Only three members of staff handled raw meat directly. These staff members all had Food Hygiene certificates and followed a clear set of procedures so that the food was safe. This included:

- washing their hands beforehand

- wearing gloves

- making sure the bench is clean and tidy

- only ever doing one type of meat at a time, and wiping down, and changing gloves and washing hands in between.

However, the organisation did admit that they need a more suitable workspace for these procedures. For example, they noted that it was a 30-metre walk from the workbench to the nearest hot water and sinks. To rectify this issue, the organisation was exploring installing a custom kitchen with hot water basins, proper sinks, and stainless-steel benches.

Packing food parcels

Volunteers used shopping lists to pack parcels for the recipients. Volunteers would collect products from the storage centre, and identify non-perishable items with a long date, which could be used in the food parcel. Once the food bag was full, and made up of a mix of different products, it would be left at one end of the warehouse, The bag would then be collected by a different volunteer who would add perishable products from the fridges and freezers. This could include items like meat, dairy products, eggs, and fruit and vegetables. Once the bag was packed with the fresh items, the parcel was given to a volunteer for immediate delivery. Drivers were only given 45-minute deliveries to ensure that any perishable products were kept safe between leaving the fridge and then being received by recipients.

Delivery of food to recipients

About 10% of the recipients were based in rural locations. This presented the organisation with a challenge as it could be a 45-60-minute round trip to pick up the food, deliver it, and then return. The organisation felt this was not a cost-effective approach, and they also said that it was a concern that fresh or frozen items were not at an appropriate temperature for longer than they would like. However, overall, this was not a seen as a significant issue, and most of their recipients lived within a short drive, where they could be confident that they would not encounter any food safety issues.

Food safety

All key staff at the organisation had either Level 1 or Level 2 Food Hygiene training. The operations manager had a higher level of qualification, and therefore had overall responsibility for food hygiene procedures in the organisation. Any staff members or volunteers who handled perishable foods had to have at least a Level 1 Food Hygiene qualification. Most of this training was run internally and used an online course. Every paid staff member has taken this training course, at the cost of £20-25 per staff member.

The main concern for the organisation was dealing with food-borne illnesses, in particular ones that could derive from handling fresh meat. However, they placed an emphasis upon taking the risks that came from allergens, and biological, chemical and physical contamination, seriously. The organisation froze meat and when it was ready for use in the food parcels, it would be placed in separate labelled bags. The organisation did not use cool bags in this process.

> **"We just make sure that it only comes out of the freezer when the parcel is ready to be delivered, and it goes straight onto the van, and then, maybe, three or four parcels at a time will be delivered to different addresses. So, we try and eliminate that time that is out of the freezer."**
> **- Trustee and volunteer**

The organisation had never given out any products that were not labelled properly. If the organisation received any meat, they would not label it with full allergen information. Instead, they labelled it with aa short description including the type of meat, and a use-by date. If someone required the allergen information, the organisation was able to share it with them.

All recipients that were referred to the service were required to complete a questionnaire and some notes. This covered any dietary requirements including conditions such as diabetes or allergies. These responses were then shared with staff.

The organisation said that they were aware of Natasha's law. They thought that the vast majority of food that they sent out was compliant and had labels and other key information but acknowledged that they were "probably not fully compliant". For example, they offered products such as sausage rolls received from a bakery chain. These items were not labelled for allergens.

In terms of reporting and dealing with food that is not safe, the organisation did not have formal procedures in place, but an unsafe item would be discarded immediately. If a product at the supplier's location was found to be unsafe, such as if meat was off, they would not accept it and see that it was discarded. If the product had arrived in the food bank's warehouse before being identified as a risk, it would be thrown away before being taken into the storage area or near any of the other food supplies. When discarded, these products would be deposited in double black bin bags, in external bins which are collected daily.

Awareness and use of existing guidance or support

The food bank had adopted food safety procedures based on FSA guidance:

> **"I think it might have been an information pack they [the FSA] put out a few years ago, that we've adapted to make it site-specific. I think it's something they published, that we've now got on the wall, to make sure that we do, because it's quite easy to forget to do certain things, particularly when you're doing them 5-6 times a day. It's very easy to cut steps, so having that visually there is quite helpful."**
> **- Trustee and volunteer**

Ways the FSA can support with food safety

The food bank would like the FSA to speak to some of the food providers who are put off of donating food through being risk-averse and being worried about being held responsible. If it came from the FSA, they felt it could have a huge impact.

> **"Our biggest issue, in terms of food standards and food safety, is very much that relationship with suppliers. The fact that they're so risk-averse that they're not willing to support, and I think that is by far our biggest issue, that we need someone like the FSA to speak to them and reassure them, and to maybe offer guidance to them on how they can support us … So, if the FSA can have that conversation, I think that would help us hugely."**
> **- Trustee and volunteer**

Knowing there was further stock coming that needed it, the food bank would then be able to justify investing in refrigerated vans. The food bank was very willing to adapt to what suppliers need, within reason.

Figure 7: Summary of case study 5

MAINLY URBAN FOOD BANK WITH SOME RURAL COVERAGE

- Food journey
- Food safety risks and processes

Region: North East of England **Pre/post pandemic** Operating for 10 years
Type of food: Mainly non-perishable items, but also some fresh and frozen items
How offer food: Mainly delivery but a limited number collect

FOOD HYGIENE RATING
EXEMPT

They mainly collect from supermarkets. The also source food from wholesalers, which can include some bulk fresh items.

Collected in (non-refridgerated) vans, usually by volunteers. They are based in a depot, which is close to the communities they serve.

The organisation mainly handles long-life goods. Anything that is refrigerated or frozen is immediately stored in chillers or frozen. Frozen items are usually sent out again within a week of arrival.

Large packs of meat are divided up into smaller portions and marked with date for freezing.

Food parcels are made up at the depot / warehouse.

Parcels are delivered mainly by volunteers in their own cars. No chiller vans. Some of the rural deliveries are an one hour round-trip.

Some wholesalers are lax with where they leave the crates for collection, which can cause some meat to spoil

Sometimes they only identify at the warehouse that food is spoiled. If so it is double-bagged and binned.

The facility is not purpose built. There is a 30 metre walk from where any meat is handled to sinks.

In summer, some concerns about fresh and frozen goods being in car for too long for rural deliveries.

Case study 6

Summary

This organisation did not want to be referred to as a "food bank" but instead as a community support organisation. The organisation was founded in December 2019, which means that they only had a short period of time in operation pre-pandemic. They handled 25 tonnes of food per month and have delivered 300,000 meals so far.

> **"We're a different kind of organisation. We do provide emergency food support, but we're not actually a food bank, which throws some people. We're a community support organisation, and we do so many other things other than just food, so we're not actually a food bank. However we do provide large volumes of emergency food to people every week."**
> **- Manager**

When the service first started, it operated as "emergency" provision only. However recently they have found that their recipient base has expanded. Some of these new recipients included individuals who needed some "bridging" support for a short period of time. They also had new recipients for whom the organisation has agreed a one-year support plan to access food.

The ethos of the organisation was based on giving people "a hand up, not a hand-out." The organisation has attempted to support people, with a more holistic approach, and has offered all-round advice on how individuals could improve their current circumstances. The organisation said that they have helped over a thousand families to no longer be reliant on employment support. The other key part of the organisation's founding ethos was to make a positive environmental impact, which they achieved through re-directing food waste.

The organisation operated three services that focused on food. The first of these services were food hampers, which were created by the organisation, and then delivered to recipients by car. On average they delivered 25-30 of these parcels every day. A large majority of the recipients who accessed this type of food provision were referred through public sector organisations such as the local authority or the probation service. They have also had some self-referrals. All recipients were required to complete a form, which outlined their personal circumstances, their current household make-up, and any dietary

requirements. This information was also shared with the council and relevant government agencies.

The organisation's hampers aimed to provide a well-rounded, healthy balance of food. As such, these hampers can contain fresh fruit, vegetables, chilled items, and sometimes frozen items, as well as longer life items like tins. Delivery time was the main limitation on who they could support. Long journeys were avoided because of concerns around issues that might arise with frozen and chilled food being in transit too long.

The organisation also runs a low-cost food shop. This was opened in January 2020, shortly after they started their food delivery service. The shop was open to anyone, with no referral being required, and it is presented as an "opportunity to shop affordably". The shop had long opening hours, setting it apart from most food banks, which tend to be open for a more limited time. Sometimes staff would shop on behalf of a recipient and usually it would cost £3 to fill a basket with re-directed food waste food. The organisation also provided a hot meal service, where hot meals are provided on site for homeless people.

The organisation had four full-time members of staff, and fifty volunteers. About 70% of the volunteers were drivers. Some of the volunteers were given keyholder privilege, which meant that they could collect and deliver food to the site themselves, without needing a member of staff to be there. Most of the volunteers were older, retired people, but they also had a number which were young students.

The food service worked alongside a range of other agencies and food providers, as well as local support networks, including church groups, schools, and community groups.

Where they sourced food from

The organisation had a number of suppliers from which they sourced food. The main suppliers were supermarkets, where they estimated that around 90% of their food came from. There were different ways that supermarkets provided food to the organisation; through collection baskets inside the shops where customers can donate items in-store, and through direct surplus. This was provided from local depots, or from the storage areas at the back of the supermarkets themselves. This surplus food would be comprised of food which had reached its best before date.

"It's 90% surplus food collected from supermarkets at a scheduled time every week, food that they can't distribute any longer. Because it carries a shelf life or a 'best before' and for many reasons, supermarkets cannot re-distribute. We can take it and, within current guidelines, we can safely re-distribute. And if it's a product with a use-by, if it's freezable, again, using the correct guidance, we can freeze those items, as long as it's on that day."
- Manager

The organisation had arranged times with each store where a volunteer could go to collect food each week, including one supermarket who were a particularly strong supporter of the organisation. How the supermarkets communicated with the organisation varied. Some communicated directly with the organisation, whereas others used Fare Share as a way of providing food to the organisation.

"[The food is] usually in the supermarket crates so that they're easy to stack on one another, so we just literally pick up the crates from the supermarket. They package it, so they'll have bread in one crate and vegetables in another and meat in another."
- Volunteer / assistant manager

The other main supplier that the organisation used was a bakery chain which provided left-over pastries and cakes. However, this relationship had recently broken down as the supplier felt that they could comply with Natasha's Law without individually labelling the items. Instead, they felt that if they had put notices in their shops this was sufficient. This meant that the loose goods they passed on were not labelled. The community provider decided that this was too unsafe and stopped accepting donations from this chain.

Occasionally, the organisation would receive donations from other community organisations. However, because these types of donations were not common, they did not provide further details on who these organisations were.

The pandemic did impact upon the ways that the food service organisation initially intended to operate. They received an increase in referrals from people who needed help, from demographics different from those they had imagined would use, and had previously used their service. For example, this included people from more affluent areas, and many self-employed people. The organisation also found that donations increased considerably, compared to before the pandemic.

One other significant change was that the provider found they carried out more deliveries than initially planned. This was partly because deliveries were the most appropriate method to manage risk during the height of the lockdown, where collections were not possible. Since the organisation introduced deliveries, they have continued to use them, and deliveries now form a large part of the way the organisation now operates.

> **"We did more deliveries and we've just carried on delivering parcels, it's a far more low-risk setup anyway… you don't leave yourself vulnerable to any issues that might arise. Delivering can be very low contact, we drop at the door, so we don't even have to engage too much. It has worked much better in that respect."**
> **- Manager**

Where they operated from

The organisation was based in an urban location, with excellent links to public transport and close to a car park. This was important for the organisation, as it made it easier for recipients to access the site and to collect their food. The organisation has rented a single building that contained both a community food shop and a larger storage area. This storage area was where food was sorted after being collected, and where the hampers were made up for delivery. There was also a kitchen area with large fridges near the front, which was used for milk, bread and yoghurts, and a smaller back room with fridge-freezers.

Food journey and processes

Collection and delivery from suppliers

The supermarkets packaged the goods for them and sorted them into crates, which volunteers then collected in their own cars, usually in fixed evening slots. The organisation did not have their own refrigerated van for collections.

Use-by dates were supposed to be no sooner than next day, but some supermarkets did include food with same day or expired use-by dates, which could not be taken. Volunteers collecting the food were trained and knew what not to take. Where a volunteer took items that could not be used, these items would then have to be disposed of, at a cost of the community provider.

It was a major frustration to the food service organisation that some supermarkets, or some managers within supermarkets gave the provider food that should have been disposed of. They felt this could be a way for supermarkets to reduce the costs of dealing with food waste. The food service had meetings with the supermarkets about the issue, including with head office representatives, but the practice continued. This was an area where FSA intervention would be particularly welcome, through talking to the supermarkets to encourage better practice.

> **"Obviously everything we pick up, most of our collections are in the evening, so it has to at least have a use-by date of the next day. A couple of supermarkets have given us items where the use-by date has been that particular day, and therefore we can't redistribute that. It just has to go into our waste."**
> **- Volunteer / assistant manager**

The organisation received fresh and frozen items as well as ambient goods. They would not accept any raw meat that was unpackaged, for food safety reasons. Any fresh meat that the service received, would be frozen upon arrival at their storage building. Volunteers would use cool bags and cool boxes to transport fresh and frozen food, to compensate for a lack of a refrigerated van. The organisation planned for journeys, between the supplier and to the organisation's freezer, to be no longer than 20 minutes.

Storage and prepping of food

The building had storage areas for both the food shop, and for hamper preparation for the deliveries. Food would be driven from supermarket sites to the storage building by volunteers, where it was then unloaded. Ambient items were stored by date order and category and rotated, so that longer life items went to the back.

Milk, yoghurts, and bread were stored in a large fridge in the kitchen area. Frozen items were labelled with date stickers and stored in freezers in a separate back room adjoining it.

Packing and delivering hampers

Food was packed in the storage area of the building. In each hamper, the organisation would include a slip of paper. This would outline what was in the hamper and explain the meaning of use-by and best before dates. Frozen items were added to the parcels at the

last minute, to reduce any food safety risks. Journey times for deliveries were limited to twenty minutes for frozen goods. This is because the organisation had no way of guaranteeing that frozen goods would remain frozen during the journey.

Food safety

Four key staff members had Level 2 Food Hygiene qualifications, and they had responsibility for the site. Many of the volunteers had Level 1 qualifications, and the organisation encouraged all their volunteers to aim for this. Staff also provided further training on allergies, and the organisation had a good awareness of Natasha's Law.

> **"Most of the team have got some sort of food safety training, we do that with all our food handlers … They've got food safety awareness training; they've got food allergen training. Recently we've been training around Natasha's Law, so we're always keeping up to date with our food-related training because it's so important."**
> **- Volunteer / assistant manager**

The food service also provided internal training for their volunteers a few times a year. This training would be specific for each volunteer's particular role. For example, drivers were trained on what they were allowed to accept, and those handling food were trained on food safety.

The organisation had a licence to prepare food on the premises. Food would only be prepared by staff with Level 2 Food Hygiene qualifications. The main food preparation involved making sandwiches during the school holidays. These sandwiches were included in £1 children's meals.

The main food hygiene risks that the organisation was concerned about included:

- Cross-contamination (for example, Natasha's Law and following procedures around allergens) and storage temperature (for example, daily checks on fridges to make sure these are at the right temperature).
- Eggs and dairy as managers perceived these items to be riskier when they were past their use-by dates, and wanted to be careful about how they managed this. The organisation would usually have these items in their possession for no longer than 24 hours. A related concern was the how to dispose of surplus milk correctly and safely.

- The organisation were also very careful with meat. They preferred to freeze meat as soon as they received it as this reduced the potential food risks.
- The organisation ensured they carried out daily check on all fresh items, which was a constant issue for them to manage.

Disposing of excess food was a burden on the organisation and something that concerned them, particularly from a cost perspective. They had to pay for commercial waste disposal for everything they could not use. They tried to mitigate these costs by passing surplus products onto farms or to a local zoo for animal feed. However, this was not a suitable solution for all food items.

> **"We try not to waste anything, we've got a couple of farmers, and we've got a local zoo that come and collect our waste so that it goes to the animals."**
> **- Volunteer / assistant manager**

The organisation felt that some other organisations they dealt with do not adhere to food safety standards, and they had reported at least one to the council. This partner handled food but was not registered and was suspected of not storing their food correctly.

The organisation had internal procedures for reporting food safety incidents. All staff would report any food safety issue to the lead manager of the food service. This manager would then either take measures such as removing a whole batch of food or making a report to the council. However, the organisation did not have any examples of where they have had to make a report to the council.

Awareness and use of existing guidance or support

One of the managers interviewed was familiar with the FSA website and used it to check on food safety information and guidance. Staff believed that their volunteers were not checking the FSA guidance but that they should have been.
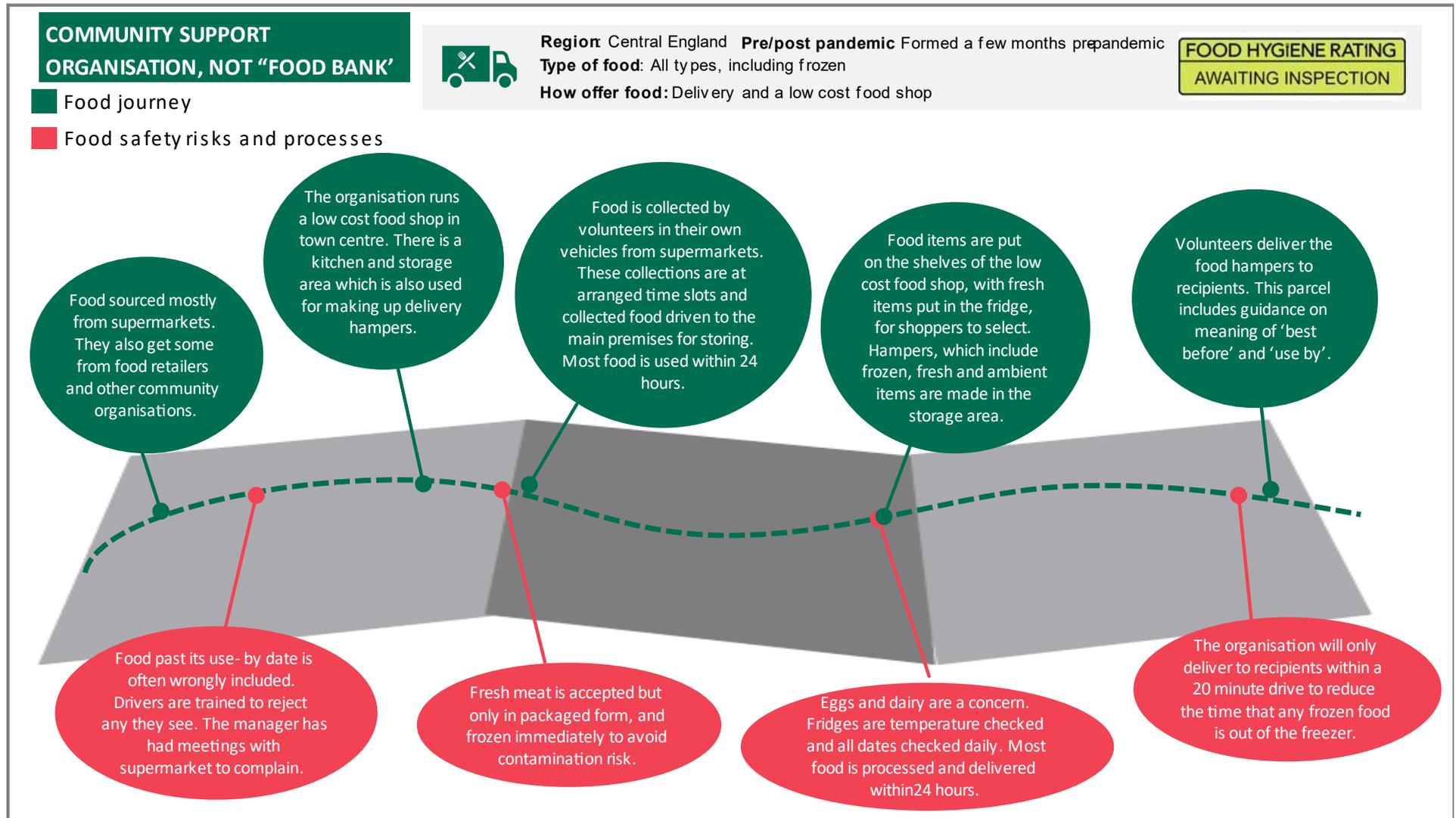
Ways the FSA can support with food safety

The organisation noted ways that the FSA could provide further support for promoting food safety. This included:

- Opening a dialogue with supermarkets, to prevent supermarkets from providing food that was past its use-by-date, or that was generally unsuitable for community food providers.

- Providing more support and training around food hygiene and safety to all those involved in community food provision. This included suppliers, food service staff, volunteers, and those receiving food.
- Producing posters and leaflets with basic reminders of 'do's and don'ts'. They felt these would be welcomed, and regularly used.

Figure 8: Summary of case study 6

COMMUNITY SUPPORT ORGANISATION, NOT "FOOD BANK"

- Food journey
- Food safety risks and processes

Region: Central England **Pre/post pandemic** Formed a few months prepandemic
Type of food: All types, including frozen
How offer food: Delivery and a low cost food shop

FOOD HYGIENE RATING
AWAITING INSPECTION

Food sourced mostly from supermarkets. They also get some from food retailers and other community organisations.

The organisation runs a low cost food shop in town centre. There is a kitchen and storage area which is also used for making up delivery hampers.

Food is collected by volunteers in their own vehicles from supermarkets. These collections are at arranged time slots and collected food driven to the main premises for storing. Most food is used within 24 hours.

Food items are put on the shelves of the low cost food shop, with fresh items put in the fridge, for shoppers to select. Hampers, which include frozen, fresh and ambient items are made in the storage area.

Volunteers deliver the food hampers to recipients. This parcel includes guidance on meaning of 'best before' and 'use by'.

Food past its use- by date is often wrongly included. Drivers are trained to reject any they see. The manager has had meetings with supermarket to complain.

Fresh meat is accepted but only in packaged form, and frozen immediately to avoid contamination risk.

Eggs and dairy are a concern. Fridges are temperature checked and all dates checked daily. Most food is processed and delivered within24 hours.

The organisation will only deliver to recipients within a 20 minute drive to reduce the time that any frozen food is out of the freezer.

Case study 7

Summary

The organisation was set up as a response to the COVID-19 crisis in 2020. Located in North-West England, they primarily offered a low-cost 'meals on wheels' delivery service. They also delivered some meals to people from vulnerable groups for free. They had several voluntary staff, including five delivery drivers. The initiative operated throughout the week. The number of recipients has fluctuated during the time it has operated. At the peak of the pandemic, they were providing roughly 1,500 meals a week, but this has decreased as restrictions have eased. However, they noted a recent increase in demand, related to the cost-of-living crisis.

The organisation offered meals which have been prepared and cooked at their own premises on the day of delivery. These meals would then be blast chilled to reduce the temperature quickly and ensure longevity, before going out for delivery. Recipients were given a four-weekly menu and were asked to make their selections, usually from five meal choices for each day. The organisation tried to make sure that all meals were nutritious and included fresh fruit and vegetables. The food used for these meals, was mostly provided by FareShare and was therefore surplus food. The organisation received a variety of items, which would vary with each delivery. Foods that they received would be either very close to their use-by-date or were beyond their best before date but still safe to eat.

> **"It's like a ready meal from a supermarket. Cooked fresh on day of delivery. We do everything: meat and potato pie and vegetables, corn beef hash, stew, chicken and chorizo paella. It's a mix of all sorts but try to do it so that they are getting at least some of their 5 a day and mix of foods. We also do emergency parcels for families that are struggling."**
> **- Founder**

Most recipients came through referrals from partner organisations, although people could self-refer, and the founder reviewed their application. The founder has yet to turn anyone away. They received referrals from stakeholders, including MPs, councillors, and adult and children social services. They also received referrals from a local support network, which provided help and advice on other issues such as managing gas bills, how to access benefits and support, as well as access to low-cost food. The organisation also

explained that community members and organisations have put them in touch with individuals who might not fit the appropriate criteria for them to be referred to other larger food provision organisations. In terms of who used the service, the organisation did not have a set of a fixed set of recipients, and there was no fixed time period that recipients could receive food for. The founder noted that some recipients had been with them for a long time, and some had been with them from the earliest stages of the organisations' existence. However, the organisation has recently changed some of their procedures, so that only those who needed the service most were able to continue to access it.

They said they were looking to open a low cost-café service in the future, so that people could visit, and as another way to raise money to support their work.

The provider used their website and social media platforms such as Facebook to advertise their services. Some people contacted them directly through the platform asking for assistance, but it was also used as a means of reaching out to the wider community. They will soon be working with the Prince's Trust, who will provide support with their website and social media.

Where they source food from

When the organisation was founded, donations from supermarkets were the main source of food supplies. The founder of the organisation explained that they now received almost all their food from FareShare. They had received twice-weekly deliveries during the height of the pandemic, but this has recently been scaled back to once a week to avoid food waste. The founder manages the partnership and explained that they have an excellent relationship. To be supplied by FareShare, they had gone through a very strict approval process, which they praised as it highlighted the strength of the business.

> **"Anything we get from FareShare is delivered in their refrigerated van to us. If we get our van, we will be able to go to them. We pay a small additional fee per kg to deliver rather than collect. But this way we know it is all safe. They were very strict about approval."**
> **- Founder**

FareShare would usually call the day before they make a delivery. This call would explain what they currently had available, and the founder would decide whether they want to take that particular product. From this they would then create their menus.

"They usually call day before, go through what they have ingredient wise, we say yes or no to the food types. Then we create a menu – a little bit Ready Steady Cook."
- Founder

The food they received is a mix of perishable and non-perishable foods, and the products on offer vary each week. They currently receive a minimum of 150kg of food a week, but at the height of the pandemic this was between 300-400kgs a week. FareShare have occasionally sent blind orders when they were unable to speak by phone, and these have needed to be returned, as it was unsuitable for the organisation – for example they received nappies. However, this has been very rare, and they said they an excellent relationship and rapport with them.

The organisation would also sometimes receive food from local supermarkets. This was not a core part of the organisation's supply, but they would sometimes receive a call offering available products. Usually these were items that were beyond the best before date, so they could not be sold, but were still safe to eat. For example, they recently accepted onions which were beyond the best before date, which they added to the meals. At times they have had to decline these offers if they felt the food was not safe. The provider also used small financial donations from supporters to bolster food supplies.

Where they operate from

The organisation operated from a large mill, which they shared with their landlord. They have a good relationship with the landlord, who uses most of the building. They currently have access to three storage rooms, an office, and a kitchen that they are responsible for. These rooms are not shared with the landlords' own business. They are also looking to work with the Prince's Trust to convert a room into a low-cost community café, which members of the public will be able to visit. They described their premises as a large space, which helped them to separate the different types of food and to have different areas for different types of food preparation.

The building has a fully functioning kitchen, with blast chillers and double sinks, comparable to a commercial kitchen. They received funding to have the kitchen put in, and the rooms had previously been used as a catering kitchen, so equipment like extractor fans were already in place. They also ensured that the premises had been fire boarded and had special wipeable materials on the wall.

Food journey and processes

The day after agreeing their order, FareShare would deliver the food to the site. This food is delivered in FareShare's refrigerated vans. Organisations pay a small fee for this, but the organisation felt this was worth it, as they knew that the food would be delivered safely. The organisation is looking to get their own refrigerated van and have applied for a grant. Once they have a refrigerated van, they would be able to collect from FareShare, reducing ongoing operational costs.

Once the delivery arrived, the founders' first job is to receive the delivery note and check that everything matches. She then checked and recorded the temperature of the van to make sure everything is as it should be. Food that required refrigeration and freezing was dealt with immediately, and any stock in its place rotated out for use. Usually, they would work through storing fridge goods, then freezer goods, followed by vegetables that do not require refrigeration, and finally dry stock.

If they accepted surplus food from a supermarket, the founder took freezer boxes to collect the food in her car. This was the most effective approach until they have a refrigerated van.

Menus were prepared in advance based on the stock available, and preparations would happen either the day before or on the day of delivery. For example, on a Tuesday they prepare 150 meals that go out for delivery later that day.

Food would then be collected by a driver. Currently the organisation has five volunteer drivers, plus the founder who also carries out some deliveries. Each of them would use their own vehicle and are provided with cool boxes to store the food. One driver worked each day and would deliver along a similar route and many of the same recipients as the week before. The cool boxes kept food safe for up to four hours, but drivers were not given any properties more than an hour away, as this ensured food is as safe as possible. Usually, a driver has around five drop-offs. Meals are grouped into households in bags that are numbered, corresponding to each address.

Food would then be received by recipients, with instructions on how to store in the freezer as soon as possible and instructions for how to cook the food safely.

> **"Food is given in clear plastic containers. All microwave safe. Then I have a special printer, and obviously check each time that right ingredients are**

> **there, and then stick that label on the lid. So that when the family take it out, it is all clear. Any allergens are highlighted in bold red."**
> **- Founder**

Food safety

All new recipients had to undertake a self-report allergen check before they received their first meals. Before every round of deliveries, the organisation would check the allergens list to ensure recipients received suitable food. At the time of research, there were only two recipients that have specific dietary requirements. If people had such requirements, they would prepare their food in a separate area. In terms of labelling and allergens, the organisation has their own printer and would print labels for each meal that would be displayed on the container. This would list the ingredients, use-by-date, and cooking instructions. Any allergens were highlighted in bold red, so that they were clear to the recipient.

The founder was very conscious of the issues that surrounded labelling and allergens. Previously she worked in ready meal manufacturing and although the meals would be the same each week, she would check the ingredients list each week just in case there had been any changes. She has applied this approach to running the community food provision. The organisation has recipes and ingredient lists saved on the computer and these will be consulted each month, to make sure that nothing has changed in terms of the make-up of ingredients they use.

In terms of their donations from FareShare, they have received jars that lack labels, but are accompanied by pieces of paper outlining the use-by-date, ingredients, allergens, and any other key details. This has been very rare, only happening twice in the time the organisation has operated. They have few concerns about their partners not taking the issues surrounding allergens and labelling seriously.

One of the main food risks the organisation faces is that they work with food that is very close to its use-by date. This means that they have had to work quickly when receiving food, to ensure that it is stored properly. For example, they recently received sausages that went off the next day. As soon as they were received, they were cooked and then frozen as that will prolong the time they can be used. They noted that many organisations would put them straight in the freezer, which limits the time they can be used.

"Yesterday we got sausages and they have tomorrow's date. So I have cooked them and then freeze them off as that prolongs the life. Others would just put them straight in the freezer without cooking. We give 30 days to use them by and this helps us plan ahead."
- Founder

With foods that has short best before dates, the organisation tried to get this food out as soon as possible. For all foods, the founder kept all the details that came with the delivery sheets. She kept all of these original copies and also inputted this information into the computer in case there is an issue where it needs to be checked.

Another key food risk is temperature control. In the kitchen they had blast chillers, as well as fridges and freezers, which enabled them to make sure that food is stored safely on their own premises. However, the founder acknowledged that it is the delivery process that poses "the risk factor" and they were applying for funding for their own refrigerated van, so that they could be confident that food is stored as safely as possible while it is in transit.

They have had some recipients who struggle to read, and have not cooked the food properly, despite the organisation's instructions. For example, some have cooked the food in the oven, rather than the microwave. It took time for the staff to become aware of this. Now when food is given out, they have asked recipients to contact them by phone if they are unsure about anything that concerned heating up the food at home.

The organisation has an FHRS rating of 4. This inspection took place just over a year ago. They were informed that one of the reasons for receiving a 4, rather than a 5, was that they handled food that is at its use-by-date or beyond its best before date. They have also changed the chef who was present at the time of inspection. The founder felt that the chef did not deliver all food safety procedures appropriately, and they have since changed things to act upon the FHRS inspection's suggested improvements.

The organisation recently experienced a pest issue. They noted that community food providers are often small and have limited funds, so may struggle to have pest control and fire extinguishers in place. The incident was isolated and contained away from the kitchen, but they had pest control come every day to ensure the issue was resolved.

Overall, the organisation had no significant worries about food safety. If food was in date but looked or smelt off, they would discard it immediately. They have had occasions where food has spilt when they have received a delivery, and they have told FareShare to bin that product and have arranged for a replacement. They have not had any food safety incidents, but have procedures in place to deal with this. As well as cleaning the premises throughout the week, on Fridays the founder leads a thorough clean on large equipment such as extractor fans, fridges and freezers, and ovens.

All volunteers involved with handling food are qualified to Level 2 Food Hygiene, while the founder is currently preparing to take the Level 3 Food Hygiene qualification. The founder felt it was important that voluntary staff are trained. They have approached this by taking each new volunteer through a series of food hygiene steps and teaching them their methods. This included things like why they used two sinks; teaching them prepping and knife skills, and then move on to cooking and the importance of food temperatures. After four to five weeks of this, the founder will then allow them to use the office computer to take the qualification. This is paid for by the organisation. All volunteers have passed with at least 90%, so they feel this is a good approach.

With delivery volunteers, the founder has run through the importance of food safety and storage, but they do not receive formal training.

> **"One of the things I want to do with a second kitchen, is that there are lots of community organisations that don't have the qualifications, even the basic food hygiene and prepping. My dream is to offer and teach that and then filter it out in the community."**
> **- Founder**

Awareness / use of any existing guidance or support

Overall, the organisation had limited knowledge on current FSA guidance. They were aware of the website and said they would direct someone there if they had any concerns. Partly, this was because of staff experience in the food industry, including the founder and the other chefs who prepared meals, as this meant that they felt confident in their understanding of food safety issues already. In terms of support, they had not received consistent external support. As an elected councillor, the founder had excellent links to the local authority, including the environmental health team. This meant they were in a
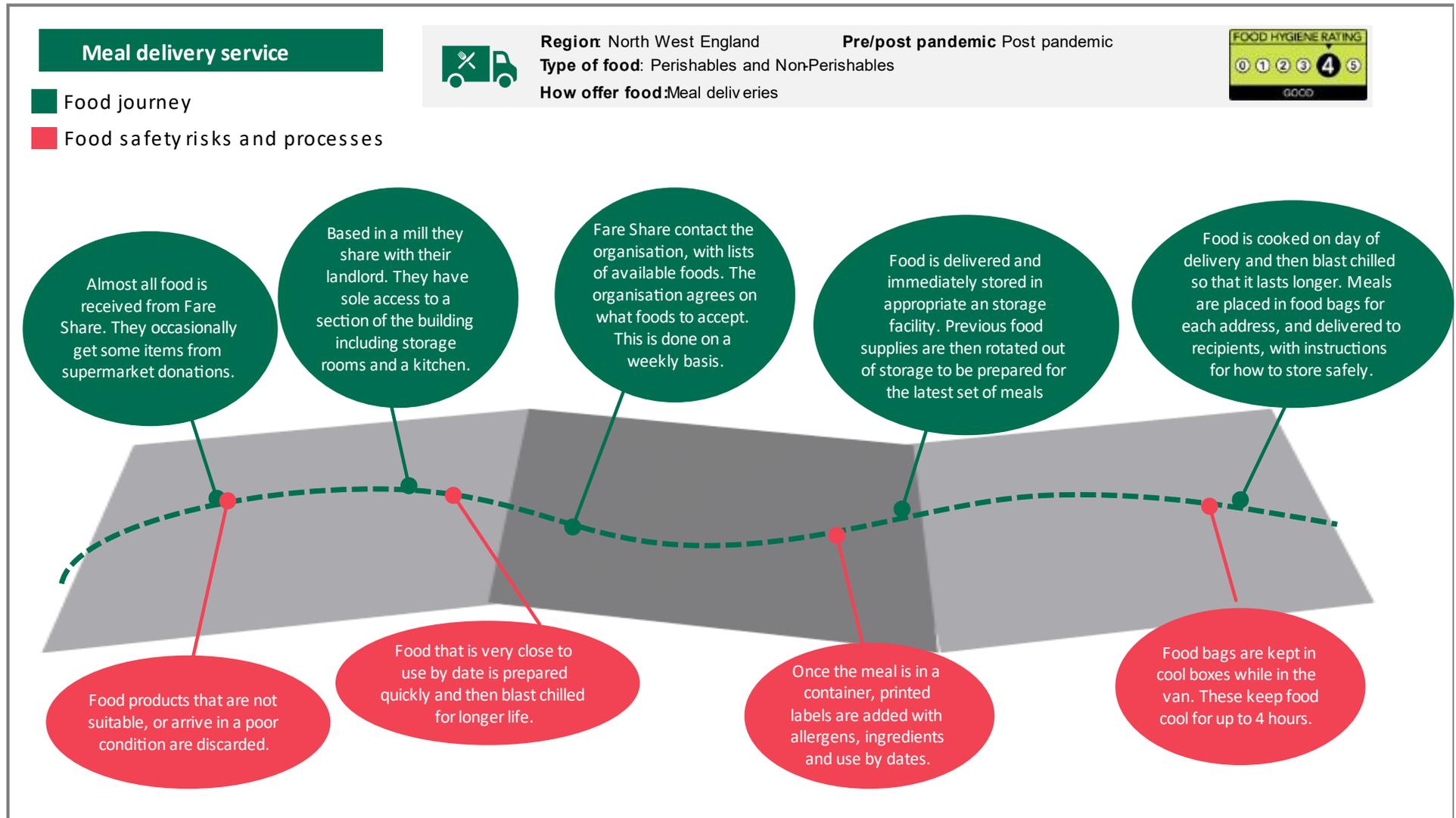
position know who to contact and what to do to make sure that all procedures were organised correctly.

FSA support

In terms of support from the FSA, the main thing that they suggested would be offering subsidised or free training. This would allow them to focus their resources on supporting people and ensuring the organisation is sustainable.

They also mentioned whether there is anything that could be done to support organisations through funding the buying and maintaining of equipment. This was seen as important for food safety. The founder's connections meant that as an organisation, they had good networks and could ask for help from the right people - for example, they know a refrigeration engineer who does regular servicing checks and will carry out repairs for free – but recognise that not all community providers are able to do the same.

Figure 9: Summary of case study 7

Meal delivery service

- Food journey
- Food safety risks and processes

Region: North West England
Pre/post pandemic Post pandemic
Type of food: Perishables and Non-Perishables
How offer food: Meal deliveries

FOOD HYGIENE RATING
0 1 2 3 4 5
GOOD

Almost all food is received from Fare Share. They occasionally get some items from supermarket donations.

Based in a mill they share with their landlord. They have sole access to a section of the building including storage rooms and a kitchen.

Fare Share contact the organisation, with lists of available foods. The organisation agrees on what foods to accept. This is done on a weekly basis.

Food is delivered and immediately stored in appropriate an storage facility. Previous food supplies are then rotated out of storage to be prepared for the latest set of meals

Food is cooked on day of delivery and then blast chilled so that it lasts longer. Meals are placed in food bags for each address, and delivered to recipients, with instructions for how to store safely.

Food products that are not suitable, or arrive in a poor condition are discarded.

Food that is very close to use by date is prepared quickly and then blast chilled for longer life.

Once the meal is in a container, printed labels are added with allergens, ingredients and use by dates.

Food bags are kept in cool boxes while in the van. These keep food cool for up to 4 hours.

Case study 8

Summary

The organisation was part of a social action project, which was set up by a local church over six years ago. Based in South Wales, the aim of the project was to provide hope and hospitality to vulnerable members of the community. They worked with people who were rough sleeping, homeless, and anyone who may have been struggling with managing their home or personal life. The organisation offered support in a range of different areas. This included support with laundry services, showers, and sanitary products. They also looked to offer social activities such as a choir. The organisation aimed to restore dignity to people that used its service.

However, the main focus of the project was the community food service café. This ran three days a week and has served over 130,000 meals in the five years that it has been fully operational. Meals run on a pay-as-you-feel concept, with recipients not under any obligation to pay for food. The organisation had an open, colourful, welcoming space, where recipients would eat their meals. This was accompanied by music, and other support, so that everyone who uses the service felt welcomed and valued.

People were not required to have a referral to use their service. The organisation sought to operate as a route for helping people out of their current circumstances. Everyone that they support has an opportunity to join the volunteering team.

Just prior to the formal announcement of the first lockdown, the organisation became a founding member of a local network. They worked alongside other homeless charities, and organisations like the local NHS to provide a single point of access for a range of support in areas such as housing, health, and access to food. From this they developed a food poverty network, which is still running, that has 40-50 partners across the city, who help to alleviate food poverty. Due to lockdown restrictions, the organisation could not run its traditional community meals. During the first lockdown they delivered 180 hot meals every day for four and a half months, which went to hotels, hostels and B&Bs, and anywhere else the vulnerable were housed.

What they have found is that the pandemic, and the general willingness of the public to want to help, has meant that people have become more aware of the organisation.

> **"And that's what COVID's done is people have realised they can now rely on us, even though they could before."**
> **- Founder**

The organisation also used an app, of their own creation, and social media to highlight their services. As the impact of the pandemic has reduced, the organisation has removed the deliveries and takeaway options from their service. This was because they wanted to understand why people accessed their services and felt they could offer further support if people visit them in-person. If they used deliveries and takeaways, the options to provide any additional support is reduced.

> **"The reason being is, what we've found is we don't want to be an enabler where we throw food at people, and we don't get to find the reason why they needed that food in the first place. All we're doing is deferring the issue, not looking to see whether we can fix it at all."**
> **- Founder**

Where they source food from

They received food in two main ways. The first they called the 'surplus food den'. This was food that they collected from different businesses across the city. This was surplus food that would otherwise be thrown away due to its use-by or best before dates. The co-founder estimated that 90% of this food was perishable. Some of their partners were registered to collect chilled and frozen food. The organisation has other partners who are registered to only provide fresh ambient foods like vegetables and any non-perishable products.

The organisation carried out twenty-five food collections from their surplus food suppliers each week. Food was collected by members of the volunteering team from the relevant store and transported in cool boxes and other appropriate storage facilities. This food was then taken to the main building where it was weighed. Volunteers recorded the date of the collection and what items were included in that day's collection. It would then be stored in fridges, freezers, and storage cupboards as appropriate.

As the organisation has grown and become more well-known, they have been able to prioritise which partners they work with. For example, they did not work with some suppliers for chilled foods, as the food they previously received from them had not been

consistently good quality and therefore difficult to deal with. This also included suppliers who provided a limited supply of food, where the costs of travel are too much to justify using them. They now conduct food collections four day a week, as opposed to six days a week.

> **"There are those bits, it's not about how they look after their food. If we had any worries, we wouldn't do it. It's what the type of food is. We've got enough reputation at the moment, which is really helpful, to pick and choose the best ones."**
> **- Founder**

The second source of food was through public donations from supporters. The main way that the public donated food was by visiting the site and leaving food there. The majority of this food would be dried goods, which was then dated, labelled, and stored on appropriate shelves until it was ready to be used. They also received very occasional donations of chilled and frozen foods. For this they adopt the same procedures that they would for the surplus food to ensure that it was safe for use. This would involve conducting temperature checks, date checking and re-labelling if appropriate. The organisation also has collection points in nearby shops; however, they estimated that this contributed only a small proportion of the food that they receive. This food is collected every two weeks and undergoes the relevant checks and processes.

Where they operated from

The organisation had its own building, which was bought by the church's charity initiative at the start of the project. This was so that they had their own space, which would allow them to provide extensive support. Within this building, there is a large kitchen area, which has commercial-grade level service fridges and freezers. There is also separate areas for preparing and storing different types of food. Alongside this they had the communal café area space. This was where people could go to receive support and eat their meal. Making this an accessible and enjoyable space was key to the founders while developing the project.

> **"And we've just got a colourful, warm welcoming space. We have a bit of background music, just allowing people to feel like people without finance being a barrier. And again, hope and hospitality, so we thrive from being hospitable, so what people would see as our clients, our services, and**

Alongside this, they have showers and laundry rooms. This was in line with their view of providing all-round social support. In terms of staff and volunteers, they have two paid full-time members of staff, and two paid part-time members of staff. As an overall organisation they have 109 volunteers who provided support and helped to run activities across different aspects of the project. Among these they have twelve deputy manager volunteers who provided guidance and leadership among the team. Within the food section of the organisation, they had volunteers who looked after cooking, serving, admin support and food collection. Volunteers would work across different areas during their first two to three months, before taking on a more specific ongoing role.

Food journey and processes

Once received, all donated food was sorted through, with non-perishable food stored on non-perishable food unit and in food trays. All perishable items were stored in fridges and freezers. All food would be temperature checked before going into storage, so that they know it is safe to be used. Food was date checked so that the organisation knows when it can be used, and they would also check items for any damage or lack of labelling that would make it difficult to use it.

Food remained in storage until it was ready to use. Food was be prepared each morning so that it was ready for that day's set of meals. The organisation does not receive a fixed set of ingredients so decides upon what meals to offer once they know what is available.

Food safety

The organisation takes food safety very seriously. They have commercial grade fridges and freezers, which they renewed with grant funding. Previously they had an issue with one of the fridges not being up to standard, but they have now rectified that problem.

In terms of receiving food which has not been labelled, the organisation would discard this. This was because they cannot be sure where it had come from, what ingredients were in it, and how it had been stored previously. This was particularly key to them, as the bulk of their donations came surplus food or are donations from the public direct. The

organisation suggested that this did not happen frequently, but that they have received items that were not suitable for use.

> **"At Christmas, we had something like fifteen turkeys donated, frozen ones, chilled ones but they were all packaged, apart from one that came, literally a raw chicken with no packaging in a box. We were, 'What on earth do people expect us to do with this? We can't touch it. We don't know if someone's done something to it or where it's been. There's no date on it, unfortunately, it just goes straight in the bin."**
> **- Founder**

If the organisation received dried food that has had a date removed, or is passed the best before, but looked safe to use they will remove it from their processes and say that it is free for volunteers to take for themselves to avoid wasting it. However, the organisation are always keen to stress that this would be a personal choice and responsibility. This is rare, but could include items like pasta, sugar, or coffee. They have spoken to companies about this and understand that many foods will be safe if beyond the best before, but feel it is best to remove it from their own food processes. The organisation does not take this approach with any perishable food and would immediately discard it.

Likewise, if they received food from their surplus partners that had a best before date but was lacking ingredient labelling or other information, they offered this to volunteers to take – otherwise they would discard it.

The organisation identified that a potential risk in their food safety procedures was when they stored recently collected food. They felt there was a chance for human error while storing the food correctly, especially if they were managing large quantities of food from different collections. The organisation purchased new fridges with glass doors, so that the different volunteer teams could always see what was in the fridges and if anything was not labelled correctly. This way they could resolve at the earliest possible stage, rather than realising when it was too late.

In the morning they carried out checks on everything they planned to use that day. This included checking the condition of the food and equipment. All equipment is cleaned before and after use. They would also do temperature checks to ensure there had not been any issues since they were last open. As they provided hot food, they would issue clear guidance on the timings and temperatures for preparing this.

Awareness / use of any existing guidance or support

All volunteers went through different training programmes, which included Level 1 Food Hygiene qualifications if relevant once they were settled as a volunteer.

In terms of following food safety protocols, the organisation initially created their own food safety guide and management system. However, after a year of operation, they worked with local authority food hygiene officers and have adopted the FSA's food safety guide. Although most of the points were similar to their original version, they have found this a useful tool as it gives them the assurance that they are doing things correctly. This includes processes on labelling ingredients, using difference surfaces and workstations, and using different coloured chopping boards. They also have guidance on how to defrost, freeze and chill foods properly

Ways the FSA can support with food safety

One of the main areas they felt the FSA could provide support with was offering clearer guidance on the correct way of storing items in the fridges and freezers. They discussed that they previously had a poster which outlined a way to do it, but that was lost, and their replacement shows things differently. When searching online, they have found that different websites and training providers suggests different solutions. They believed that the FSA introducing a standardised poster that commercial fridges would be a significant help in helping them to know they were storing food correctly.

> **"No one has a standardised picture for a commercial fridge of where things should be, some say egg should be a little bit lower, and then some say ready-to-eat foods higher. There's a grey area… so I feel in the food safety management system that we have, that is given by the FSA, should have those resources right there, and that would just make it so much easier."**
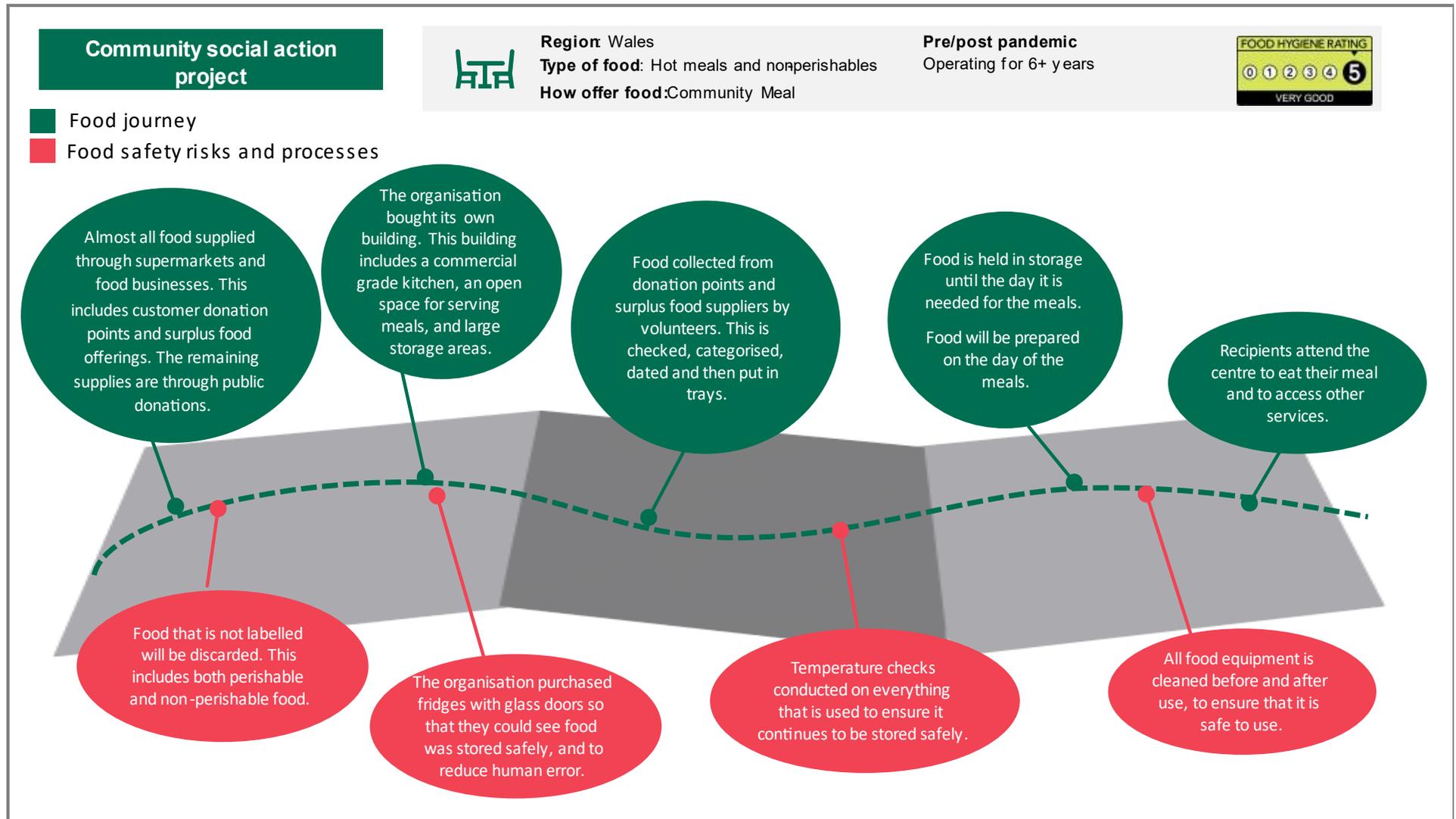> **- Founder**

They also suggested a more proactive approach to providing a welcome pack on how to be a good food establishment, and what is required for that, once someone registers a new business. From their own experiences, they felt there was a sense that the FSA and local authorities assumed that they would have had considerable experience in food standards. They felt that by a support pack would be an effective way of getting ahead of any issues that might emerge at later date. They also stated that while the food hygiene

training courses are useful, they cannot give you all the answers and information for running an organisation. By providing a guide with resources like posters and additional information, they felt that would help them to not waste time using the internet for answers that might not be relevant to how the FSA operates

> **"We would have welcomed a welcome pack, but rather when they came, I think about 10, 11 months in, they were like, 'You should be doing this, this, this,' and we were like, 'Great, yes, you could have told us that 11 months ago, it would have been done.' We did it all within 3 weeks I think, all the recommendations, and we had a 4-star, our first rating was a 4-star, and then our second rating is a 5-star because we did everything that was told of us."**
> **- Founder**

They also requested some further clarity around use-by dates for certain items. They referenced that they often receive foods like salad in plastic packaging, which have use-by dates on them. Therefore, these are not suitable to use and have to be thrown away. However, they believe this is a significant food waste issue, as they felt confident that some of these items are safe to eat – but have to be discarded. They suggested making changes to this would be an effective way that the FSA could further support reducing food waste and help community food organisations.

Figure 10: Summary of case study 8

Community social action project

Region: Wales
Type of food: Hot meals and non-perishables
How offer food: Community Meal

Pre/post pandemic
Operating for 6+ years

FOOD HYGIENE RATING
0 1 2 3 4 **5**
VERY GOOD

Food journey
Food safety risks and processes

Almost all food supplied through supermarkets and food businesses. This includes customer donation points and surplus food offerings. The remaining supplies are through public donations.

The organisation bought its own building. This building includes a commercial grade kitchen, an open space for serving meals, and large storage areas.

Food collected from donation points and surplus food suppliers by volunteers. This is checked, categorised, dated and then put in trays.

Food is held in storage until the day it is needed for the meals.

Food will be prepared on the day of the meals.

Recipients attend the centre to eat their meal and to access other services.

Food that is not labelled will be discarded. This includes both perishable and non-perishable food.

The organisation purchased fridges with glass doors so that they could see food was stored safely, and to reduce human error.

Temperature checks conducted on everything that is used to ensure it continues to be stored safely.

All food equipment is cleaned before and after use, to ensure that it is safe to use.

Annexes

Detailed Methodology

Phase 1 - Rapid evidence review and scoping interviews

Phase 1 was intended to provide a broad overview of the existing evidence on community food provision relevant to this research. This was informed by a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) approach. The assessment explored the extent of community food provision; how food is distributed; and food safety considerations and risks in community food provision. This was enhanced by using both purposive and systematic searches.

Sources consulted included academic texts accessible through Google Scholar, as well as 'grey texts' and government reports. Ipsos also reviewed the websites and social media of key community food provision networks to capture information relevant to the research questions. A full list of search terms and data sources is available below.

It is important to note that the extent or scale of the REA (i.e., how much literature was sought and reviewed) was determined by three key factors:

- Availability of relevant literature and evidence: as much of the literature about community provision was published prior to the COVID-19 pandemic it was anticipated that there would be a limited amount of post-pandemic evidence.

- Timescale: this was a rapid evidence review, with seven weeks to complete data identification, extraction, and synthesis.

- Limited scope: The scope of the project allowed for 20-25 pieces of evidence (equivalent to full length journal articles) to be included.

From this data extraction, Ipsos developed a search protocol encompassing search terms, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and relevant types of data:

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
2018 – 2021 (3 years)	Pre-2018 studies (too far pre pandemic)
English language	Languages other than English

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
British literature (focusing on England mainly, if possible, Wales and Northern Ireland)	International literature
Peer reviewed, policy documents, monitoring reports, empirical data, conference proceedings, primary and secondary studies (for example, reviews) Grey and unpublished literature Opinion and commentary pieces, letter, notes, editorials and media articles	-

The search protocol was designed to address the following research questions:

- Who uses community food provision?

- What food is distributed by community providers? Where is this sourced from?

- How is food distributed by community providers?

- How are food safety considerations taken into account?

- What evidence is there about the use of social media and food sharing apps to distribute food in communities?

Ipsos also conducted three qualitative interviews between 6th-10th December 2021 with representatives from sector organisations involved with community food provision. Those interviewed were identified through desk-based research. Each interview lasted up to an hour and followed an agreed discussion guide.

The outcomes of the rapid evidence review and scoping interviews with stakeholders, informed the direction for Phase 2.

Phase 2 - Online qualitative research

Qualitative research was conducted between 14th February – 21st March 2022. This involved carrying out eight case studies with community food providers from England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The aim was to capture a range of experiences from

different community food providers, ensuring a mix by the following characteristics agreed during Phase 1:

- A mix of perishable and non-perishable foods;

- Urban and rural community providers;

- Independent organisations and those involved in wider networks; and

- Those offering collection and delivery to recipients.

The original aim was to conduct eight case studies in total, and eight organisations agreed to take part.

Each case study included between one and five depth interviews with key stakeholders involved at different stages of the food journey for the community providers. This included project managers, volunteers, suppliers, and recipients. Due to the different nature of each case study, it was not always possible, or suitable, to arrange interviews with each of these stakeholder groups. For example, some case studies only offered emergency food provision, where recipients were referred to them on a one-off basis. This meant they were unable to put us in contact with recipients. For some providers, their main source of food was through supermarket programmes and schemes. Some providers therefore had a very limited relationship with their supplier, as the processes were coordinated at an organisational level, rather than between local suppliers and community food providers.

Ipsos arranged initial calls to discuss the remit of the research project with project leads or senior managers. Following these calls, projects sought permission to put Ipsos in contact with relevant stakeholders. Depth interviews were then carried out with stakeholders to explore different aspects of the food journey and food safety processes in community food provision. Interviews ran for up to an hour, apart from those with recipients which lasted for up to half an hour.

Rapid Evidence Assessment Sources

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Loopstra et al. (2019) Food bank operational characteristics and rates of food bank use across Britain. BMC Public Health, 19(561), 1-10.

https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-6951-6

Tyler, G. (2021) Food banks in the UK (8585) House of Commons Library.
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REA Search Terms

- Facebook food banks UK

- FareShare foodbanks

- Faith based community food banks in the UK

- Faith based community food banks UK

- FEAD in your country

- Food bank UK business models

- Food bank UK business plan

- Food banks using social media

- Food For All UK

- Food safety risks in food banks

- Food sharing apps UK

- FoodCloud

- How do food banks work in the UK

- Increase in food banks UK pandemic

- Independent Food Aid Network

- Pandemic impact on community food provision UK

- Pandemic impact on food banks UK

- Tesco Food Collection

- Trussell Trust business model

- Trussell Trust client food journey

- Trussell trust client journey graphic

- Trussell Trust Food Bank

Resulting URLS

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https://readifood.org.uk/1002-2/

https://foodforalluk.com/about-us/

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https://epsomewell.foodbank.org.uk/about/how-do-foodbanks-work/

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https://www.facebook.com/FoodBanksUk/

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"https://www.tescoplc.com/sustainability/taking-action/community/supporting-communities-with-food-distribution/food-collection/"

http://www.fbrn.org.uk/food-banks-and-hunger-%E2%80%93-what-role-faith-communities

https://www.sufra-nwlondon.org.uk/

https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/2020/07/01/questioning-the-role-of-religious-faith-in-uk-food-provision/

https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-help-the-hungry-campaign-food-muslim-sikh-christian-hindu-a9483326.html

https://www.marieclaire.co.uk/life/food-drink/food-waste-apps-686667

https://food.cloud/

https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/emergency-food/food-parcel/

https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/emergency-food/food-vouchers/

https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/emergency-food/visiting-a-foodbank/

"https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/19801/3/19801.pdfDeveloping a business analyticsmethodology: a case study in the foodbank sector. 2018"

https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/food-safety-for-community-cooking-and-food-banks

https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/food-banks-covid-universal-credit-b1910399.html

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Discussion Guides

Foodbank Manager/Operations Manager discussion guide

> ### 1. Introduction and consent (5 minutes)

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this interview. My name is [xxx], and I will be conducting the interview with you.

To begin with I'll tell you a bit about who I am, what the purpose of this interview is, and what to expect. After that you can ask me any questions before we make a start.

I work for an independent research organisation called Ipsos MORI, and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) have commissioned us to speak with a number of stakeholders within community food provision. The Food Standards Agency regulates food in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to ensure that the food we eat is safe and what it says it is. The purpose of this research is to better understand how community providers operate, any support needs they might have, and what the FSA can do to help.

Please be reassured that the purpose of this interview is not to scrutinise you or [ORGANISATION] around food safety. By participating in this interview, you will help the FSA better understand the community provision sector and identify ways to work alongside organisations to protect vulnerable consumer groups from potential food safety risks.

Anything you share during this interview will be treated as strictly confidential. We will produce an output in the format of case studies and a report for the FSA which summarises the findings in a way that does not identify any particular individual. Any quotes that we use will be completely anonymous, with any identifying details omitted from the quote. Only the Ipsos MORI project team will have access to your information, and this will be securely stored and deleted once the research has been completed.

I do have a set of questions to guide us through this conversation, but we are mostly interested in your views and experience of working within [ORGANISATION] so we will let this conversation be led by you and what you have to say.

This interview is completely voluntary, and so you are free to pause or end the interview at any point if you wish to. You can also decline to answer any question if you wish to or ask to come back to it later in the interview.

If it is okay with you, I'd like to audio record the interview so that I can listen back to make sure that my notes accurately reflect what you have said. The recording will be saved securely in an encrypted folder, only accessible by the Ipsos MORI project team, and will also be deleted once we have completed our report.

- **Are you happy for me to make this recording? TURN ON RECORDING**

- **Can I confirm that you are happy to proceed with the interview?**

- **Now that I have talked through the approach, do you have any questions?**
  - o If you don't right now, please do feel free to ask me any that come to your mind as we go through the discussion.
  - 1.
- **Are you currently in a comfortable and quiet space to start the discussion?**

If not, I am happy to call back in 5 minutes once you are.

---

2. Background (5 minutes)

- **To start with, can you please give me a brief overview of your role within [ORGANISATION]?**
  - o What does a typical day look like for you?
  - o How long have you been in this role?

- **Please can you briefly summarise the service [ORGANISATION] provides and who you support?**
  - o PROBE: food bank, community kitchen, emerging food provider, food sharing apps, social media pages
  - o Are there any additional services aside from food provision? E.g. education, other advice/support/training
- **Can you briefly tell me how, if at all, the pandemic has impacted or changed the work of [ORGANISATION]?**
  - o PROBE: during lockdowns and now as restrictions have eased

- o Has the pandemic impacted how you use online platforms?
  - For example, apps like Olio and Nextdoor / Facebook and other social media platforms
  - Do they have their own website or online platform they use?
  - Did they have an online presence before the pandemic?
- o How is this online platform managed?

What benefits or challenges has this online presence generated?

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3. How community food providers operate (20 minutes)

Thank you, that's really helpful understand. I'm now going to ask some questions about how [ORGANISATION] operates and who is involved.

Overall approach

- **Where does [ORGANISATION] operate from?**
  - o PROBE: space and location, e.g., a church, community centre, someone's house etc
  - o What else, if anything, does this space get used for/as?
  - o Who is responsible for the use of this space and how clean it is?
    - PROBE: around cleanliness and hygiene ratings and who's responsible for this
    - PROBE: whether any buildings they use have an FHRS rating and what that means for them
  - o [If not organisations space] What is the relationship between [ORGANISATION] and the owner of the space?
  - o Does [ORGANISATION] ever operate outside, for example during the pandemic or at certain events?

[Note to interviewer: make note of this answer – follow up questions later in DG]

- **Where does [ORGANISATION] source food from?**
  - o PROBE: private donations / surplus food from supermarkets / food drives

Thank you. We'll discuss more about where you source the food from later.

- **Can you talk me through the different stages of the process, from collecting/ receiving the food to providing it to those who need it?**
    - **PROBE for overall outline of model/models:**
    - Single/multiple sources?
    - Fresh vs. non-perishable food?
    - Locations? Timings? Storage?
    - Who handles/moves food?

4. Food Safety (15 minutes)

Thank you, that's really useful. Next, I want to ask you about some questions about how food safety is managed in these settings. To reiterate, anything you say to me will remain anonymous and the FSA are not looking to catch anyone out. The purpose of these questions is to identify what it involves for you to ensure food safety and where in the food journey poses the biggest risk.

- **What are the main food safety risks?**
    - PROBE: biological (bacteria, fungi, viruses), chemical (pesticides, machine oils), physical contamination (hair, glass etc), foodborne illnesses (food poisoning, food spoilage etc), allergens
    - Are these different for different stages of the food journey?
    - Are there any stages that are particularly vulnerable to food safety risks?
    - Who is involved at each of these stages?

- **Who is responsible for food safety?**
    - Are there different people for different stages of the food journey? Who?
    - What training do they receive, if any?

- **What food-specific risks are there to be aware of, if any?**
    - FOR NON-PERISHABLE PROBE:
        - Allergens and labelling
        - What impact has the passing of Natasha's law had?
        - What happens when food isn't labelled?
            - Does it get thrown away?
            - If not, what happens to ensure ingredients etc?
        - Best before dates

- What happens with food that is past its best before date?
    - o FOR PERISHABLE PROBE:
        - Anything relating to the 4 Cs (chilling, cooking, cleaning, cross-contamination)
            - Freezing/unfreezing food
        - Use by dates
            - What happens with food that is out of date?
            - Do you have any plans/procedures in place for when food does not have long before it goes out of date?
        - Meat and dairy – any particular risks associated with these food types?
        - How is this mitigated?

- **Are there any food safety issues you are particularly worried about?**
    - o All food safety risks are equally important but are there some that are more relevant in certain cases?

- [IF OPERATES OUTSIDE] **Are there any particular or differing food safety risks to be aware of specific to working outside with food?**
    - o PROBE: where and how the food is stored, timings

- **What happens if a food safety incident is identified?**
    - o [EXAMPLES OF INCIDENTS: dirty premises, foreign objects in food, visible signs of mould or decay, poor food handling or hand hygiene, food past it's use-by-date, unavailable or incorrect allergen information or suspected food poisoning]
    - o Who is this reported to?
    - o What steps are in place to mitigate this?

- **Where would you look or who would you ask if you had questions about food safety?**
    - o Does this differ at different stages of the food journey?

- **Are you aware of FSA guidance on food safety?**
    - o Do you know whether [ORGANISATION] used this?
    - o For example, General guidance for businesses, guidance on the food hygiene rating scheme, Safer Food Better Business (food safety

management procedures and food hygiene regulations for small businesses), guidance on labelling and allergens for businesses, information on the National Food Crime Unit (NFCU)

Please note: there is also Northern Ireland and Wales specific guidance

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5. How can the FSA support? [Organisation) (10 minutes)

Thank you, that's helpful. I would now like to speak to you about how the FSA can support [ORGANISATION] with food safety. The purpose of these questions is to identify where and how the FSA could best support [ORGANISATION] and community providers generally in ensuring safe food for all.

- **Does [ORGANISATION] receive any support currently around food safety?**
    - If so, what and by whom?
    - PROBE: details of the type of support
    - Is this external or internal support?
    - If external PROBE: local authorities, other sector organisations
    - PROBE: details of the type of support

- **In your opinion, what support needs does [ORGANISATION] have in terms of food safety?**
    - What are the needs throughout the different stages in this system?

- **How can the FSA support [ORGANISATION] to ensure that the food is as safe as it should be?**
    - What could the FSA do to make is easier for [ORGANISATION] to comply with food safety guidance?

What recommendations can be made for the FSA?

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6. Wrap up (5 minutes)

Thank you so much. We are nearly at the end of our conversation. Reflecting on what we have spoken about, what do you think:

- Is the biggest food safety risk the [ORGANISATION] currently manages/deals with?

- Is the main support area the FSA could help [ORGANISATION] with in terms of food safety?

This is the end of my questions. Thank you again for taking time to speak with me.

Before we finish, is there anything else you would like to raise that feels relevant to what we have already discussed that I haven't asked about?

Explain next steps of research:

- Producing report to share with FSA that describes community food provision in more detail.

Re-contact: As mentioned at the beginning of the interview, we will be developing a visual output for the FSA outlining what we know about the community food provision journey and would like to know if we can contact you again if there is anything further we'd like to ask you or to get your feedback on findings to ensure it reflects all of the relevant detail. Are you happy for us to contact you in the future, either via phone or email?

Thank you

Volunteers/ Staff discussion guide

> **1. Introduction and consent (5 minutes)**

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this interview. My name is [xxx], and I will be conducting the interview with you.

To begin with I'll tell you a bit about who I am, what the purpose of this interview is, and what to expect. After that you can ask me any questions before we make a start.

I work for an independent research organisation called Ipsos MORI, and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) have commissioned us to speak with a number of stakeholders within community food provision. The Food Standards Agency regulates food in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to ensure that the food we eat is safe and what it says it is. The purpose of this research is to better understand how

community providers operate, any support needs they might have, and what the FSA can do to help.

Please be reassured that the purpose of this interview is not to scrutinise you or [ORGANISATION] around food safety. By participating in this interview, you will help the FSA better understand the community provision sector and identify ways to work alongside organisations to protect vulnerable consumer groups from potential food safety risks.

Anything you share during this interview will be treated as strictly confidential. We will produce an output in the format of case studies and a report for the FSA which summarises the findings in a way that does not identify any particular individual. Any quotes that we use will be completely anonymous, with any identifying details omitted from the quote. Only the Ipsos MORI project team will have access to your information, and this will be securely stored and deleted once the research has been completed.

I do have a set of questions to guide us through this conversation, but we are mostly interested in your views and experience of working within [ORGANISATION] so we will let this conversation be led by you and what you have to say.

This interview is completely voluntary, and so you are free to pause or end the interview at any point if you wish to. You can also decline to answer any question if you wish to or ask to come back to it later in the interview.

If it is okay with you, I'd like to audio record the interview so that I can listen back to make sure that my notes accurately reflect what you have said. The recording will be saved securely in an encrypted folder, only accessible by the Ipsos MORI project team, and will also be deleted once we have completed our report.

- **Are you happy for me to make this recording? TURN ON RECORDING**

  Can I confirm that you are happy to proceed with the interview?

  Now that I have talked through the approach, do you have any questions?

- If you don't right now, please do feel free to ask me any that come to your mind as we go through the discussion.

- **Are you currently in a comfortable and quiet space to start the discussion?**

- If not, I am happy to call back in 5 minutes once you are.

---

2. Background (5 minutes)

- **To start with, can you please give me a brief overview of your role within [ORGANISATION]?**
  - o What does a typical day look like for you?
  - o How regularly do you volunteer?
  - o How long have you been in this role?
  - o How did you get involved with [ORGANISATION]?

- **Please can you briefly summarise the service [ORGANISATION] provides and who you support?**
  - o PROBE: food bank, community kitchen, emerging food provider, food sharing apps, social media pages
  - o Are there any additional services aside from food provision? For example, education, other advice/support/training

- **Can you briefly tell me how, if at all, the pandemic has impacted or changed the work of [ORGANISATION]?**
  - o PROBE: during lockdowns and now as restrictions have eased
  - o Has the pandemic impacted how you use online platforms?
    - ▪ For example, Apps like Olio and Nextdoor / Facebook and other social media platforms
    - ▪ Do they have their own website or online platform they use?
    - ▪ Did they have an online presence before the pandemic?
    - ▪ Do you have any involvement with managing the online platform?

---

3. How community food providers operate (20 minutes)

Thank you, that's really helpful understand. I'm now going to ask some questions about how [ORGANISATION] operates and who is involved.

Overall approach

- **Where does [ORGANISATION] operate from?**

- o PROBE: space and location, e.g., a church, community centre, someone's house etc
- o What else, if anything, does this space get used for/as?
- o Who is responsible for the use of this space and its cleanliness?
  - ▪ PROBE: around cleanliness and hygiene ratings and who's responsible for this (don't mention FHRS ratings unless participant does)
- o Does [ORGANISATION] ever operate outside, for example during the Pandemic or at certain events?
  [Note to interviewer: make not of this answer – follow up questions later in DG]

- **Where does [ORGANISATION] source food from?**
  - o PROBE: private donations / surplus food from supermarkets / food drives

Thank you. We'll discuss more about where you source the food from later.

- **[If not covered already] How is food made available for those using the service?**
  - o For example, food delivery parcels, community kitchen, food banks etc
  - o If food is being delivered – are there instructions/guidance on what to do with the food?
    - ▪ For example, how to store it, freeze it, cook it etc.

I would now like to talk to you about the different stages of providing food to people that you are involved in.

Moderator to probe as relevant based on their role

- **Firstly, can you talk me through what happens from when you collect / receive the food?**
  - o **PROBE**: unpacking and sorting through food, deciding if any food can't be used etc.
  - o How much time do you spend on these tasks?
  - o Who else is involved in handling the food that is donated?
  - o How is food stored at [ORGANISATION]?

- - How does this differ between perishable/dry store?

- **Can you talk me through the different stages of preparing the food?**
  - What are the usual timeframes from when food is donated to when it is given to recipients?
  - Where on the premises is the food prepared?
  - [IF COLLECTION OR IN HOUSE EATING]: Is there a separate place where the food is stored and prepped from where recipients [collect / eat] the food?
  - How many volunteers/people typically work together on any given day?

4. Food Safety (15 minutes)

Thank you, that's really useful. Next, I want to ask you about some questions about how food safety is managed in these settings. To reiterate, anything you say to me will remain anonymous and the FSA are not looking to catch anyone out. The purpose of these questions are to identify the burden of ensuring food safety on community food providers and where in the food journey poses the biggest risk.

- **What, if any, training or information have you been given in relation to food health and safety?**
  - When was this?
    - PROBE: when you started to work/volunteer for [ORGANISATION], one-off or regularly updated?
  - IF MENTION QUALIFICATIONS/CERTFICATES PROBE: for example. Level 2, Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) etc

- **Who is responsible for food safety?**
  - Are there different people for different stages of the food journey? Who?
  - [*If different from participant*] What training do they receive, if any?

- **What are the main food safety risks with the food you handle/deal with?**
  - PROBE: biological (bacteria, fungi, viruses), chemical (pesticides, machine oils), physical contamination (hair, glass etc), foodborne illnesses (food poisoning, food spoilage etc), allergens
  - Are these different for different stages of the food journey?

- o Are there any stages that are particularly vulnerable to food safety risks?
- o Who is involved at each of these stages?

- **What food-specific risks are there to be aware of, if any?**
  - o FOR NON-PERISHABLE PROBE:
    - ▪ Allergens and labelling
    - ▪ What impact has the passing of Natasha's law had?
    - ▪ What happens when food isn't labelled?
      - • Does it get thrown away?
      - • If not, what happens to ensure ingredients etc?
    - ▪ Use by dates
      - • What happens with food that is out of date?
      - • Do you have any plans/procedures in place for when food does not have long before it goes out of date?
  - o FOR PERISHABLE PROBE:
    - ▪ Anything relating to the 4 Cs (chilling, cooking, cleaning, cross-contamination)
      - • Freezing/unfreezing food
    - ▪ Use by dates
      - • What happens with food that is out of date?
      - • Do you have any plans/procedures in place for when food does not have long before it goes out of date?
    - ▪ Meat and dairy – any particular risks associated with these food types?
      - • How is this mitigated?

- **Are there any food safety issues you are particularly worried about?**
- [IF OPERATES OUTSIDE] **Are there any particular or differing food safety risks to be aware of specific to working outside with food?**
  - o PROBE: where and how the food is stored, timings

- **If food is being transported to recipients, how is this managed to ensure food safety?**
  - o PROBE: refrigerated vehicles, timeframes, types of food, etc

- **Where would you look or who would you ask if you had questions about food safety?**
    - o Does this differ at different stages of the food journey?

- **What happens if a food safety incident is identified?**
    - o [EXAMPLES OF INCIDENTS: dirty premises, foreign objects in food, visible signs of mould or decay, poor food handling or hand hygiene, food past it's use-by-date, unavailable or incorrect allergen information or suspected food poisoning]
    - o Who do you report this to?
    - o What steps are in place to mitigate this?

- **Are you aware of the FSA guidance on food safety?**
    - o Do you know whether [ORGANISATION] used this?
    - o For example, General guidance for businesses, guidance on the food hygiene rating scheme, Safer Food Better Business (food safety management procedures and food hygiene regulations for small businesses), guidance on labelling and allergens for businesses, information on the National Food Crime Unit (NFCU)

N.B: there is also Northern Ireland and Wales specific guidance

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5. How can the FSA support [organisation] (10 minutes)

Thank you, that's helpful. I would now like to speak to you about how the FSA can support [ORGANISATION] with food safety. The purpose of these questions is to identify where and how the FSA could best support [ORGANISATION] and community providers generally in ensuring safe food for all.

- **Do you know if [ORGANISATION] receives any support currently around food safety?**
    - o If so, what and by whom?
    - o PROBE: details of the type of support
    - o Is this external or internal support?
    - o If external PROBE: local authorities, other sector organisations

- o PROBE: details of the type of support

- **In your opinion, what support needs does [ORGANISATION] have in terms of food safety?**
  - o What are the needs throughout the different stages in this system?

- **Is there anything in terms of food health and safety support, that would help you in your role?**
  - o PROBE: receiving/collecting food from suppliers, packing and storing food, prepping food for recipients etc.

- **How can the FSA support [ORGANISATION] to ensure that the food is as safe as it should be?**
  - o What could the FSA do to make is easier for [ORGANISATION] to comply with food safety guidance?
  - o What recommendations can be made for the FSA?

5. Wrap up (5 minutes)

Thank you so much. We are nearly at the end of our conversation. Reflecting on what we have spoken about, what do you think:

- **Is the biggest food safety risk you currently manage/deal with as part of your role at [ORGANISATION]?**

- **Is the main support area the FSA could help you and [ORGANISATION] with in terms of food safety?**

This is the end of my questions. Thank you again for taking time to speak with me.

Before we finish, is there anything else you would like to raise that feels relevant to what we have already discussed that I haven't asked about?

Explain next steps of research:

- Producing report to share with FSA that describes community food provision in more detail.

Re-contact: As mentioned at the beginning of the interview, we will be developing a visual output for the FSA outlining what we know about the community food provision journey and would like to know if we can contact you again if there is anything further we'd like to ask you or to get your feedback on findings to ensure it reflects all of the relevant detail. Are you happy for us to contact you in the future, either via phone or email?

Thank You