



Food Support & Homelessness in Bristol

Prepared by Caring in Bristol on behalf of the
Food in the Homelessness Sector Steering Group, April 2021



Introducing the Food in the Homelessness Sector Steering Group

The Food in the Homelessness Sector Steering Group formed in January 2021 following close collaboration between food and homelessness organisations in Bristol in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Group aims to improve communication and increase data and information sharing within the food and homelessness sectors. Our goal is to identify and evidence best-practice of the use of food as a tool for permanently moving people away from homelessness and to accelerate cultural change in this direction across the sector.

The Group has three overarching aims:

- 1. Collecting data on services providing food and food-related skills throughout the various stages of homelessness**
 - a. Analysing data and using mapping to identify overlaps and gaps
 - b. Sharing information within the homelessness and food sectors
 - c. Bringing together evidence of impact and best practice
- 2. Increasing cross-sector awareness**
 - a. Linking into community structures and organisations via member networks
 - b. Coordination with food provision groups
- 3. Develop and deliver a communication strategy to inform cultural shift and change**



The Group comprises staff members and volunteers from the following organisations:



We look forward to hearing from you.

For more information, or to comment on the findings of this report, please contact steven.dodds@caringinbristol.org.uk.

Thank you.

Last year was a challenging year for Bristol. Homelessness became a key issue as people experiencing homelessness, particularly those sleeping rough are amongst the most at risk to the coronavirus, not only because they do not have a safe home to self-isolate but because they are three times more likely to experience a chronic health condition than people with secure tenancies.

The pandemic had seismic effects on the way Bristol worked together. One of the most encouraging outcomes of 2020 was an unprecedented level of coordination between organisations supporting those experiencing homelessness, with the provision of food remaining a source of optimism for the City.

In order to maintain this momentum and think strategically about how Bristol can work together to improve the way food is distributed to support the broader aim of homelessness organisations - that is, to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness in Bristol - Caring in Bristol and inHope commissioned a report by Maurice Di Rosso, an expert in the area of food insecurity and then-director of Feeding Bristol.

The purpose of this report was to engage with the many different organisations providing food within the homelessness sector in Bristol, analyse what it is that they provide and how they engage with the food insecurity sector. The report seeks to clarify what is already being achieved, potential areas for improvement and opportunities for longer-term collaboration.

This document is a condensed version of that report that presents its key findings and recommendations.

Introduction





Key definitions

Homelessness in this report identifies all those who are legally homeless, beyond those who are currently rough sleeping. Homelessness includes people in temporary accommodation and emergency accommodation such as hotels, B&Bs, and hostels.

The '**Bristol homelessness sector**' refers to organisations within Bristol supporting people experiencing homelessness in all of these forms.

The current state of food provision in Bristol

On March 27th 2020, the government announced the 'Everyone In' scheme that provided accommodation for everyone currently rough sleeping. At the same time, dormitory-style night shelters had to close because of the risk of the virus. Instead, people were placed into self-contained hotel accommodation.

However, there was no plan from the government for feeding people to accompany the 'Everyone In' scheme and the organisations providing food pre-pandemic couldn't operate in the same way as communal eating had become unsafe.

To respond to this, many groups in Bristol created their own food distribution programmes - such as Caring in Bristol's 'Cheers Drive' - to feed people who had been housed under 'Everyone In' as well as those still rough sleeping. As of December 2020, there were a total of 15 active groups working to distribute food to people experiencing homelessness.

Within the homelessness sector in our city, there is currently sufficient food available for people experiencing homelessness (although culturally-appropriate food remains an issue). There is not a food supply crisis that needs immediate attention, hence the focus is on longer-term improvements.

Overall, organisations operating within food support and homelessness should be aiming to:

- Make sure people experiencing different circumstances can access the right type of food support
- Get to a position where the sector and the City can develop a citywide food strategy.

Issues facing the sector

1

Clarity of impact:

There is an unclear understanding of the impact that each group is having on the wider issue of homelessness. One group may work to feed people in immediate crisis, whilst another might alleviate financial strains on someone struggling with money by providing a hot meal. We need to understand the impact each group has.

2

Collaboration:

Engagement between groups providing food support can be improved. We need to work together to create an impact that is bigger than the sum of each group's parts.

3

Engagement with the food sector:

The food charity sector does not actively engage with the homeless sector, and vice-versa. This can lead to misunderstandings, such as thinking that homelessness refers to rough sleeping only. By getting to know one another better, food charities and homelessness charities can learn from one another and improve the work that they do together.

Picturing homelessness in Bristol

The following chart shows the approximate number of people in different homelessness situations in Bristol, and how this relates to their food needs (the Food pathway)

| Rough Sleeping | Vehicle Dwelling | Sofa Surfers | Night Shelters | Supported Housing (info) | Temporary Accommodation (info) | Final offer housing (info) |
|----------------|------------------|--------------|----------------|--|--|--|
|----------------|------------------|--------------|----------------|--|--|--|

A person is legally considered homeless when they have no suitable accommodation that is theirs to occupy by right. See [shelter.org](https://www.shelter.org)

Definition*

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|--|--|--|
| Street homeless includes anyone spending their first night on the street. | As per the title. | Often considered 'hidden homeless'. While not rough sleeping, they do not have their own accommodation. | Dormitory style beds for someone needing a place to sleep that night. This is a daily turnover. | Council providing a room in a house while they search for another home. Also includes some care and support. | Council has accepted the duty to house them, but does not yet have a final housing offer. Rent is subsidised in either a private flat/house or council/housing association. This may last months or years. | Council has accepted the duty to house them. Offered a tenancy in either a private flat/house or council/housing association. This may last from 12 months up to lifetime. |
| 82 (3%) | 80 (3%) | Unknown | 91 (3%) | 1093 (38%) | 1550 (53%) | N/A [no longer homeless] |
| Bristol City Council official count | Avon and Somerset Police reported figures, as per 'Bristol's vehicle dwelling and homeless encampment policy' | Usually based on estimates from crisis and academic calculations. No Bristol specific assumptions. | Shared reporting of occupancy figures from the four night shelters involved in the 'rough sleeping partnership' | Bristol's Accommodation Services Team | Bristol's Accommodation Services Team | Bristol's Accommodation Services Team |
| 1, 2 | 1, 2 | 1, 2 | 1 | 3, 4, 5 | 3, 4, 5 | 3, 4, 5, 6 |

2018 figures

[Source: CiB GtK Homelessness]

How the figures are derived

Food pathway

see the next slide ↓

Picturing food security and the Food Pathway

A person's level of 'food security' refers to both the availability of food and their ability to access it.

Within the context of homelessness, a person's level of food security will be mostly driven by their housing and income circumstances, but also by their access to a kitchen and simple cooking facilities like microwaves.

This diagram shows the different stages of food security on the 'Food Pathway' and the resources that best correspond to each one:

Crisis

1

Free meals and snacks to eat on site

2

Free meals and snacks to take away (or taken direct to those in need)

Insecurity

3

Free ready meals (limited kitchen in housing)

4

Free groceries (food parcels)

5

Low cost - groceries or ready meals (depending on kitchen space in housing)

6

Independent to source food

Food insecurity in Bristol

When going through a tough time, food is not the only type of support someone may need.

Food can be a gateway for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness to access other forms of support they may need, such as housing advice and mental health support.

By understanding this, different homelessness food support services can help connect their clients with the right support and help them move towards independence, simultaneously reducing anxiety about being able to access good food and giving them more space to focus on other issues they might be experiencing.



Summary

Key takeaways from this report:



Improving the current food system

There is no need to change the services providing food within homelessness in Bristol. They do a fantastic job of feeding the people they support.

However, in order to meet the main aims of homelessness organisations - reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness in Bristol and those needing crisis support - through food support we must look at improving how food support is provided as a city.

Understanding what objectives each organisation is achieving

Using the 'Food Pathways' we can identify what needs each organisation providing food are meeting. In doing so, we can clearly recognise where the gaps are in support and improve communication and cooperation.

Consistent communication will lead to more collaboration

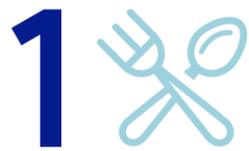
Food support is not the primary objective of homelessness organisations. However, as they are providing food support, it is necessary that this be aligned to a city-wide plan, and such a plan requires a consistent way of communicating about food.

Incremental step-change

The path towards a city-wide strategy consists of incremental changes as more organisations recognise the value they provide and that of other organisations working around them. This report and the Food Pathway laid out within it will support this process.



Next steps



Set up a food focused steering group, specifically for the homeless sector.



Increase awareness and collaboration between organisations working in food support within homelessness and organisations working to solve food insecurity.



Build up the Caring in Bristol database of organisations providing food support.



Develop a food support service guidebook. This will provide a foundation for anyone setting up a new food support service to build on, to understand where their service fits within the existing framework, and to articulate how different types of food support impact the people they support and their long-term goals.



Stay connected with the homeless sector and with wider collaboration efforts within the food and food insecurity sectors.

What you can do to help:

Share

this report and its findings - you can do so using this link or you can download images for your social media [here](#).

Donate

to any of the organisations involved in the Steering Group to help them continue to provide food support for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness

Get in touch

if you would like to support in some other way, such as contributing resources.
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