



Community &
Voluntary Services
Cheshire East

How many people are accessing food-aid across Cheshire East?

Findings from Cheshire East food-aid
count (undertaken 11 - 17 May 2026).

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Image source: Trussell Trust

Acknowledgements and thanks

Thank you to those groups who took part:



With thanks to:

- 29 groups who participated by contributing their data, insight and allowing for it to be shared. There is a selection of the logos opposite of those who took part.
 - We've not used the organisation name, contact name, or any geographical indicators, which may identify the organisation / project
- CVSCE operations team for setting up and creating the survey, and for a sample of Cheshire East based food-aid providers who tested and fed back pre-launch
- Birmingham City Council for their support and encouragement.



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1 | headline findings

	5,014 The number of interactions with a community food project over the count period
	8,577 The minimum number of people who accessed food as a result of the interaction (based on average household size)
	160% increase Potential increase in the number of interactions with a community food project (compared with 2023)
	29 organisations, 41 projects Both the highest number of projects (11) and people supported were in Crewe (1776 (interactions) / 2,666 (number of people). Some form of food-aid is available in all care communities.
	Confidence in, and frequency of, referring is high 23 out of 24 organisations are confident in referring those who need support, with 9 making referrals weekly (some as high as 20 per week)

Source: Based on data from Cheshire East Food Aid count (May 2026).

2 | research methods / key terms

Methodology:

- Groups and organisations providing food aid across Cheshire East were asked to count the number of visits to their projects across one week: **11-17 May 2026**
- The purpose was to provide a 'benchmark' which could then be used to measure progress and inform decision-makers and influence policy:
 - To ensure appropriate support for those needing help and those providing help
- The Food Aid count was promoted at the April Food Alliance meeting, via email and social media
- Personalised self-completion questionnaires were sent to 36 community food groups across Cheshire East inviting them to participate (participative sampling)
- **80% participation rate** (29 out of 36 organisations responded).

Key terms:

Cheshire East Food Alliance - a cross-sector group of organisations including VCFSE, local government (CEC + Town Councils), NHS, housing trusts, advice agencies, retailers, and other food providers, working together to reduce food insecurity.

People are **food insecure** if they consistently are unable to access sufficient food that is: affordable & physically accessible, nutritionally adequate, meets personal, cultural & religious preferences and is available to access in a socially acceptable way (e.g. not stigmatised). (New Philanthropy Capital, n/d)

Food aid refers to various forms of support aimed at helping individuals and families in need of food (Zaidi, K., 2025) (e.g. foodbanks, social supermarkets, community pantries, meal delivery services, community cafés / meals etc).

3 | background - framing food insecurity (why should we care)

- Described as a public health issue, with negative impacts on physical and mental health (Yan, et al 2020, Baillie et al, 2024). The high cost of, and availability of healthy food, can result in lower consumption of vegetables and wholegrains, and higher consumption of SSBs¹ and UPFs² (Fallaize et al, 2020), contributing to obesity in both adults and children, low diet quality and increased risk of nutrient deficiency (Yan, et al 2020)
- Those experiencing high deprivation levels are most at risk including those living with children, disabled people, those on benefits (Gouldie, 2025) and those with insecure migration status (Trussell Trust, 2025)
- Complex interplay of social and environmental factors that influence the systems surrounding the ability to afford enough good quality food that may lead to food insecurity (FI) e.g. *low incomes, high cost of living, debt, and insecure employment* (IFAN, 2025; Lopez et al, 2025) **vs** *food supply, physical access, nutrition and health, cultural preferences, food literacy* (New Philanthropy Capital, n/d)
- Community based organisations are at the forefront of supporting those facing FI. Many operate on a knife-edge (Gouldie, 2025) and are constrained by a 'lack of infrastructure and funding' (Barone et al, 2020, Hamilton et al, 2024)
 - Across the UK - 6,900 food banks, 700+ community fridges, over 500 AFCs (Gouldie, 2025, University of Bristol, 2025, Hubbub, 2025; Feeding Britain, 2025, Your Local Pantry, 2025).

¹ <https://foodactive.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Sugar-Sweetened-Beverages-updated-PS.pdf>

² <https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/ultra-processed-foods>

3.1 | background - national context (inconsistency of reporting)

1. 10.9% of households facing food insecurity (rises to 15.3% if the household contains children) (The Food Foundation (TFF, 2026)
2. 13.5% (or 55,687 Cheshire East residents) face a higher risk of FI (TFF, 2025)
3. 9% of people in the UK were in food insecure households (Department of Work and Pensions, 2025)
4. 20% of respondents were classified as food insecure (10% low, 10% very low) (Across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland) (Food Standards Agency (FSA), 2025)
5. 12% fall in Trussell (formerly the Trussell Trust) emergency food parcels (2.6 million) (3.5% in CE) ([See Appendix 1](#)), but a 51% increase in demand in from Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) food banks (September 2024 to February 2025 compared to 2023-24) (Francis-Devine, B., 2026)
6. Two successive years, a higher proportion of people have accessed Affordable Food Clubs than used food banks (FSA, 2025).

3.2 | Cheshire East context (part 1)

In Cheshire East

- 2022 - All Together Fairer Commission launched as a sub-group of Health and Wellbeing Board
- July 2022 - Right to Food Spotlight Review event held and report published
- May 2023 – ‘Living Well in Crewe’ report published following a ‘deep dive’ into inequalities in the town
- 2023 - JSNAs published on Crewe and on Poverty
- 2025 – Mapping of poverty interventions undertaken to inform thinking about next steps to alleviate poverty

Enabling prosperity
and wellbeing for all

OFFICIAL

Drive | Integrity | Respect | Collaboration



Source: Cheshire East Council (2026). Child poverty - the Cheshire East Public Health Perspective.

3.2 | Cheshire East context (part 2)

Across Cheshire East (CE):

- Household support fund 2025: £871k on food supporting 7,449 awards (CEC, 2026)
- Six (2.5%) of Cheshire East's 244 LSOAs rank in the top (most deprived) 10% of the 2025 IMD (2019 - 4 (1.7%)) (Crewe = 5 / Macclesfield = 1) (CEC, 2025)
- 21 (8.6%) LSOAs rank in the top 20% of the 2025 IMD (2019 - 18 (7.7%)) (Crewe = 14 / Macclesfield = 2 / Alsager, Congleton, Knutsford, Middlewich and Wilmslow = 1 each) (CEC, 2025)
- Semi-rural with dispersed population centres
- Growth in migrant communities which brings with it the challenges of providing culturally appropriate foods within community food settings
- [CEC faces a significant forecasted funding gap.](#)

Opportunities:

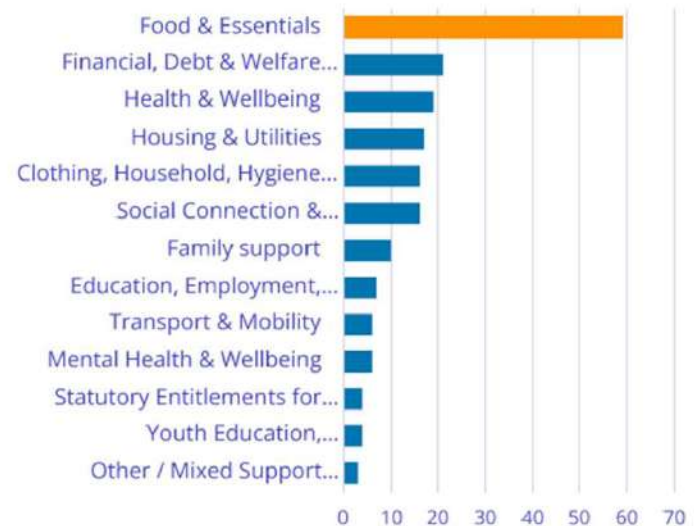
- [Cheshire East Plan 2025 - 2029](#) and the overarching commitments to:
 - (1) unlock prosperity for all,
 - (2) improve health and wellbeing, and
 - (3) be an effective and enabling council
- 3 years of funding for the CRF, totaling over £12m of funding (**2,133 crisis applications since launch in April**) (CEC, 2026)
- Citizens Advice project funded by Feeding Britain
- CE Poverty Commission
- Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority.

3.2 | Cheshire East context (part 3)

Care community: Most interventions are **Cheshire East-wide** or **Crewe-based**

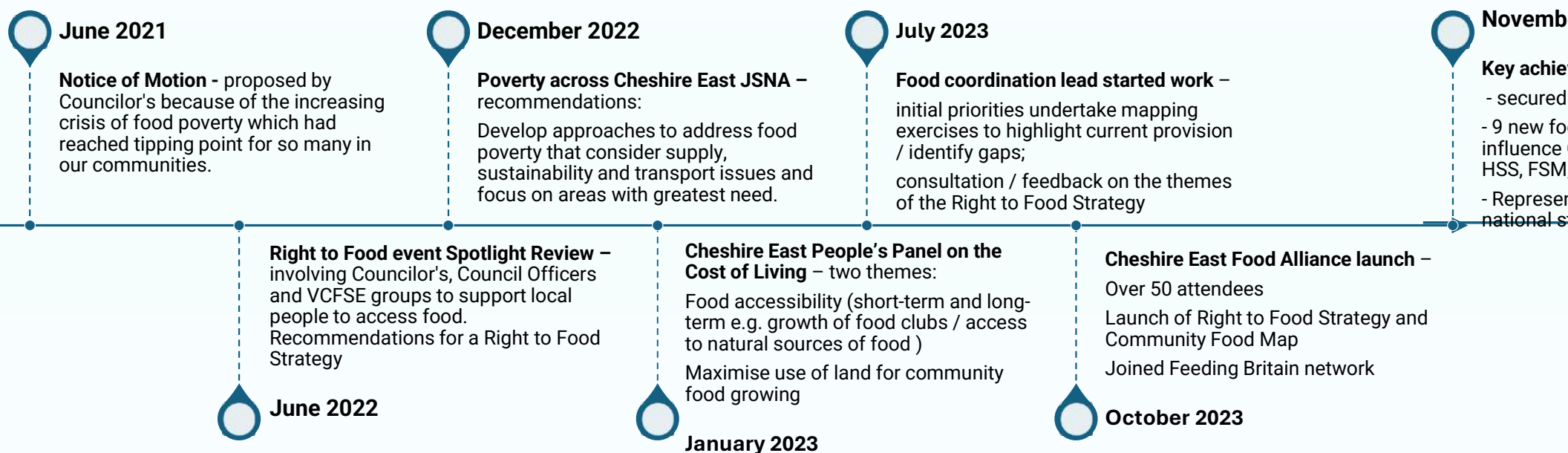


Primary theme: **Food & Essentials** appears most often



Source: Cheshire East Council. Poverty Commission - Initial mapping of poverty related interventions: key findings (2026)

3.2 | Cheshire East context (part 4)



3.2 | Cheshire East context (part 5)



4 | how many people are accessing food support

Methodology:

- 2023 data (collected August / Sept (avg per week))
- 2026 data (collected 11 – 17 May (actual))
- Both counted households (individual total calculated by multiplying the number households by average household size (2.3³))

³ Office for National Statistics – Census 2021.

Caveats:

1. Not comparing like for like
2. Double counting e.g. individuals accessing more than one type of support
3. Not everyone will be facing food insecurity

It provides a useful benchmark

Support type	2023*		2026**	
	Households	Individuals	Households	Individuals
Emergency food	465	1,046	666	1,532
Affordable food	1,068	2,915	872	2,006
Community fridge			1,156	2,659
Cafes / community meals	190		1,047	1,047
Delivery service	200		995	995
Other			278	278
Total:	1,923	3,961	5,014	8,577

* Based on 31 responses / ** Based on 29 responses

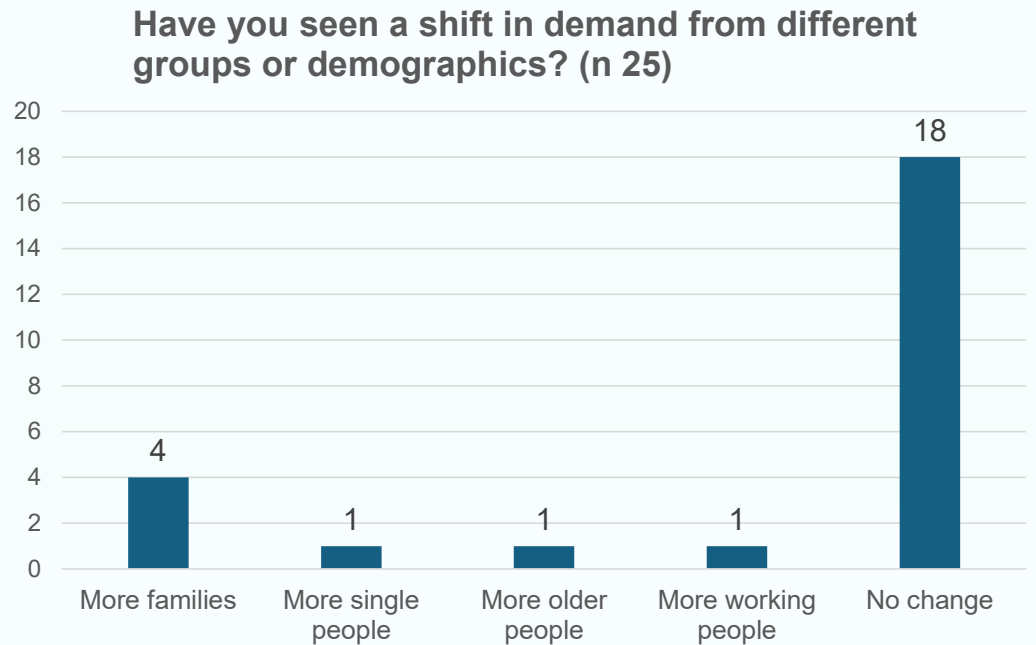
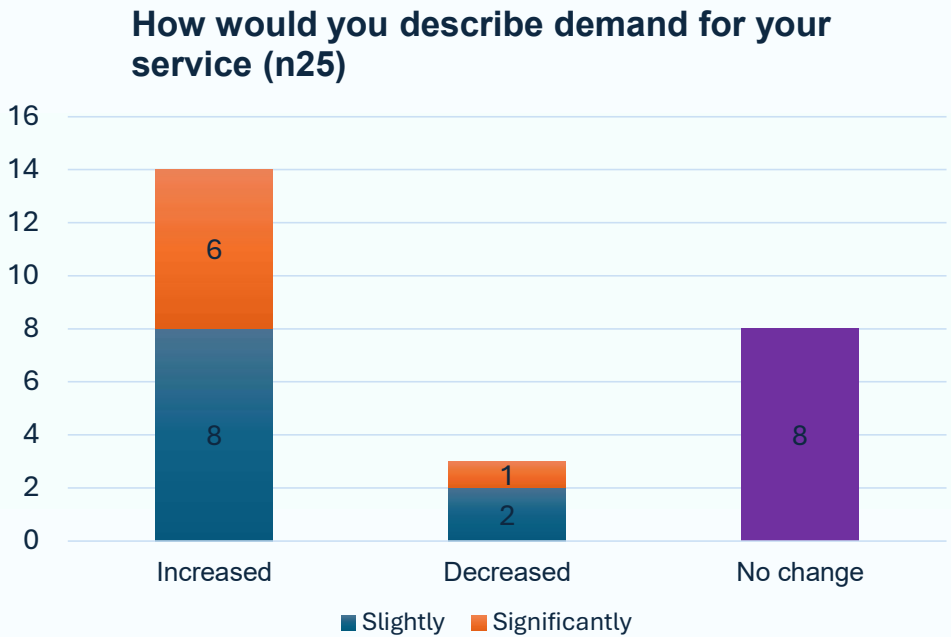
Data from Cheshire East Food Aid count (2026) / Cheshire East Community food support across Cheshire East survey (2023).



4 | how many people are accessing food support

- The number of organisations taking part was lower than in 2023
- Despite consulting on which week to undertake the survey numbers were reported down on the normal weekly figures by a few groups
- Compared to 2023: the numbers accessing food banks is up / accessing affordable food projects down. Overall, the number of people accessing affordable food projects is higher, than those accessing food banks
- Community fridges / shops is the largest intervention type – almost $\frac{1}{4}$ of all interventions (there were none in 2023)
- Delivery services account for almost $\frac{1}{5}$ of interventions
- 56% of groups who responded identified an increase in demand (families (n4) are the biggest increase by demographic group)
- Over a third of groups stated demand was the same and over 70% (n18) indicated they had seen no change in user demographics.

4.1 | changes in demand



Source: Based on data from Cheshire East Food Aid count (2026)



4.2 | respondent feedback (1)

We have reduced the amount of food we provide each month (n=2)

More Polish people are accessing food at our refugee cafe

We're seeing more families and more people in employment

We provide a cooked meal (main and pudding) using fresh ingredients two days per week. People are either housebound and / or with disabilities (most are elderly)

this is a quiet time of year so we couldn't give a true reflection of the number of people needing support. People don't need to heat their homes, children are in school being fed, so we are not seeing the number of families we see at the times of year that those things put pressure on households.

This was a quiet week for the project. Unsure why. Typical numbers are closer to 100 households per week, although this is also down.

We've seen an increase on ethnic minority families

Some months we're supporting less people (n = 4)

Source: Based on data from Cheshire East Food Aid count (2026).

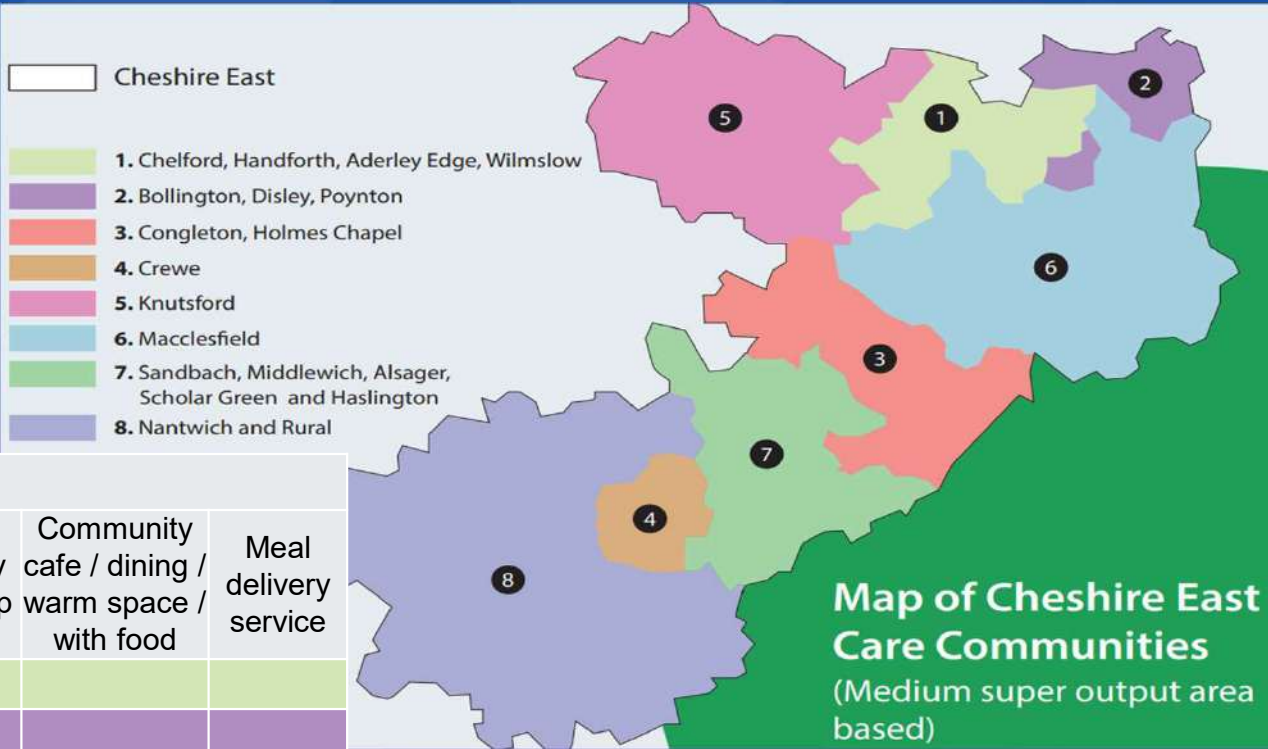


5 | community food support by care community

Care communities: local partnerships based around clusters of GP surgeries, working to meet the needs of residents in their areas. Foundation of the integrated health and care system in Cheshire East.

Source: Definition and image from: <https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/council-and-democracy/health-and-wellbeing-board/joint-health-wellbeing.pdf>

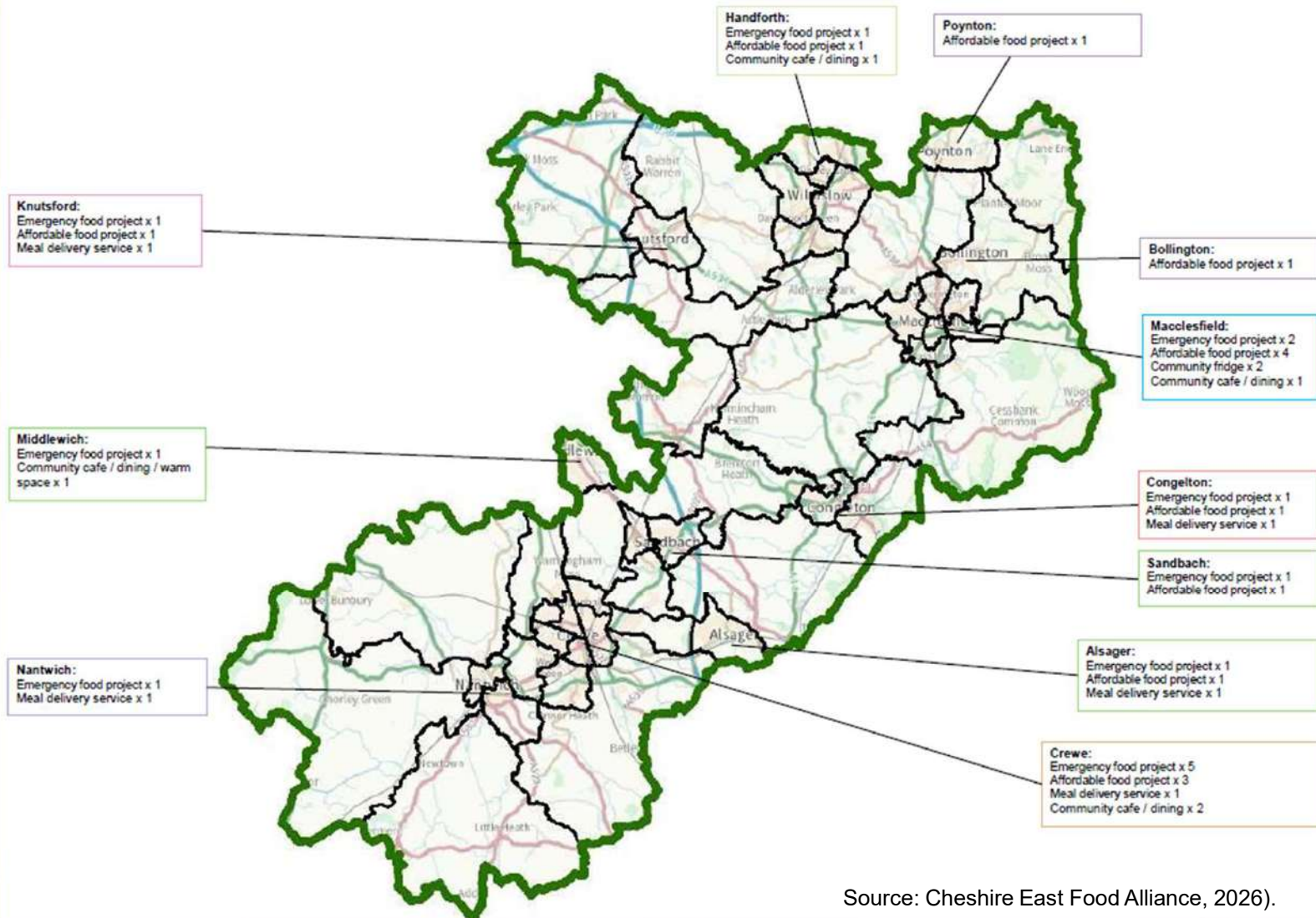
Care community	Total projects	Project type				
		Emergency food	Affordable food	Community fridge / shop	Community cafe / dining / warm space / with food	Meal delivery service
CHAW	2	1	1			
BDP	2		2			
CHOC	2	1				1
Crewe	11	5	3		2	1
Knutsford	3	1	1			1
Macclesfield	9	2	4	2	1	
SMASH	6	2	2		1	1
Nantwich	2	1				1



Source: Table based on data from Cheshire East Food Aid count (2026).

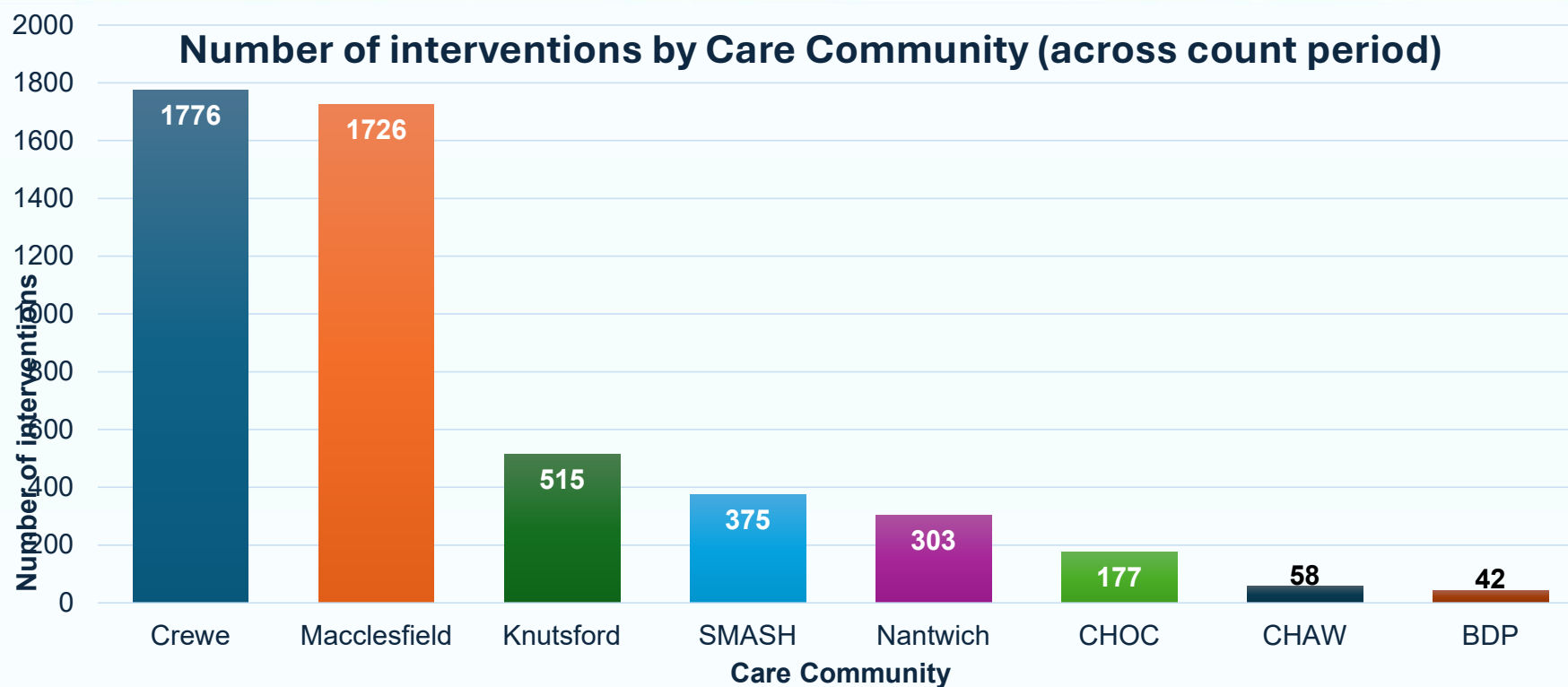


Community food aid support across Cheshire East



Source: Cheshire East Food Alliance, (2026).

5.1 | intervention by care community



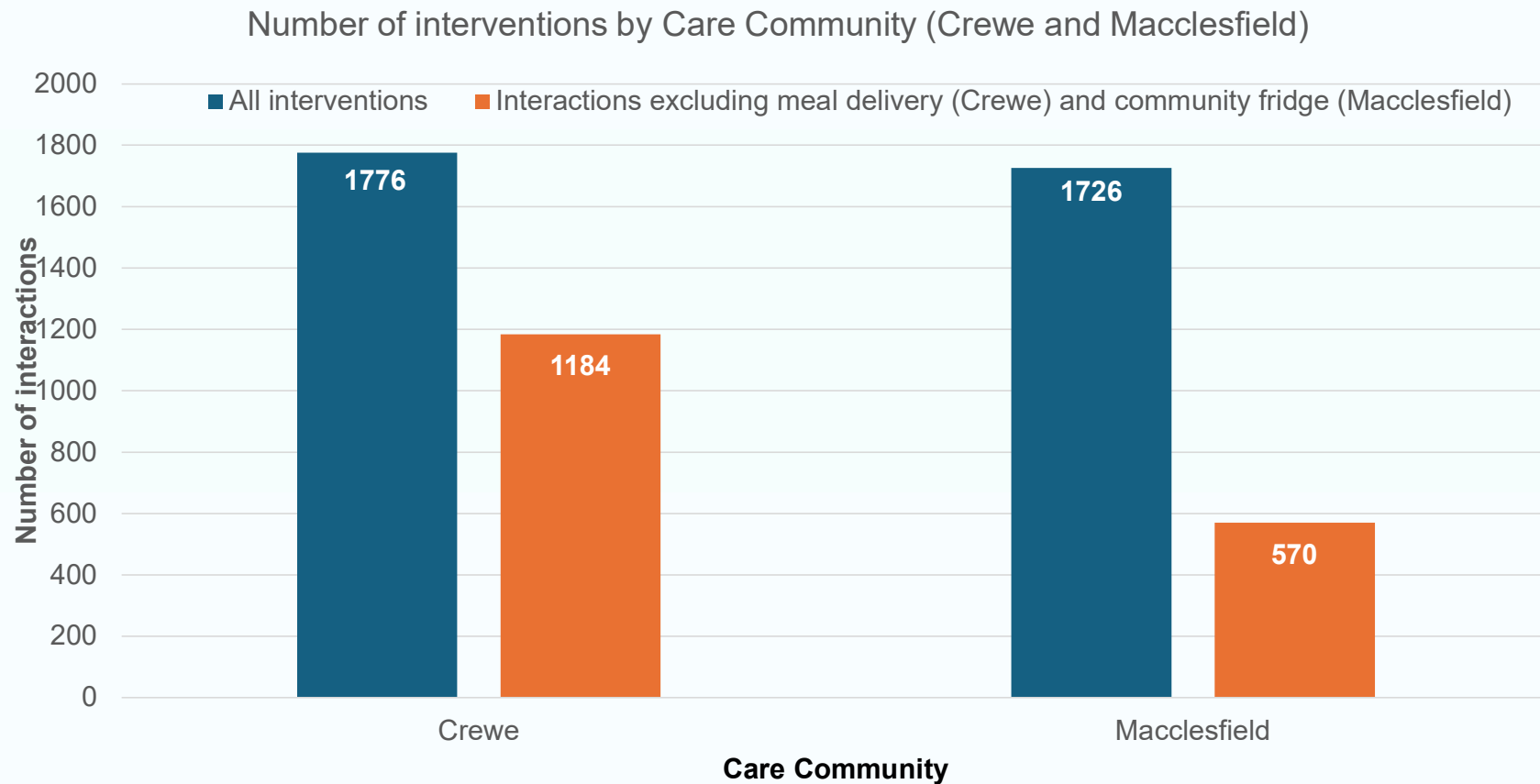
Notes:

1. CHAW and Knutsford are under recorded

Source: Based on data from Cheshire East Food Aid count (2026).



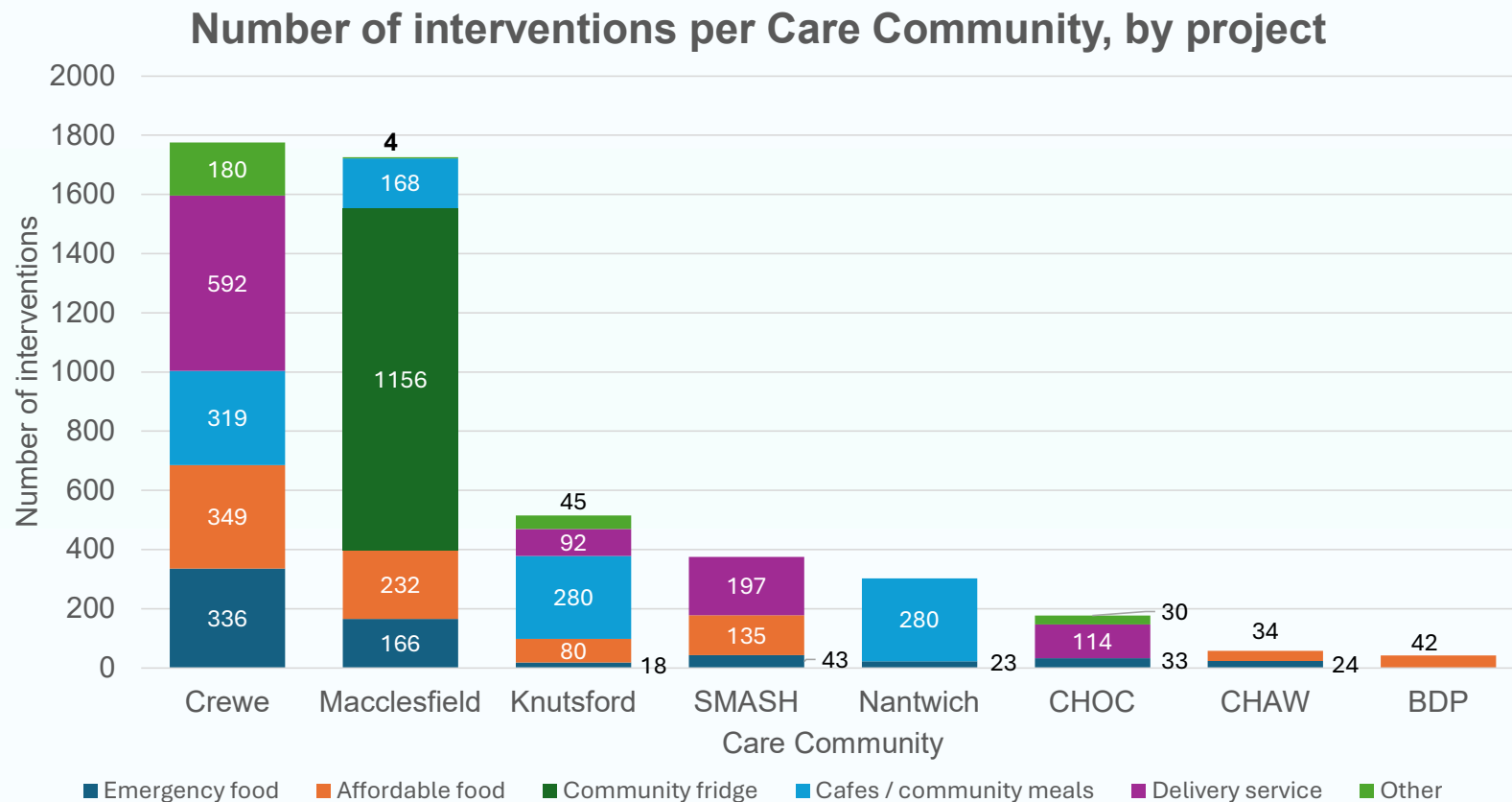
5.1 | interventions by Crewe and Macclesfield



Source: Based on data from Cheshire East Food Aid count (2026).



5.1 | interventions by care community by project category



Source: Based on data from Cheshire East Food Aid count (2026).

5.1 | intervention by care community (summary)

- Both the highest number of projects (11) and people supported were in Crewe (1776) interactions
- Crewe and Macclesfield combined account for nearly 70% of all interventions
- Community fridges account for the biggest intervention – 1156 (23% of all interventions)
- Some form of community food support is available in each care community
 - But no care community offers all categories of community food support (emergency, affordable, community fridge, cafes or community meals, and meal delivery services).
- Both emergency food support e.g. food parcels and affordable food support e.g. social supermarkets, community pantries or food clubs are available in 7 out of 8 care communities
 - The gaps are no emergency food support in BDP and no affordable food support in Nantwich
 - More people accessed affordable food support than emergency food support over the count period (*authors note: one of the Food Alliance objectives is to reduce foodbank use*)
- Cafes or community meals and meal delivery services are each available in 4 care communities
 - No community based meal delivery service exists in BDP, CHAW, Nantwich or Macclesfield.
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Notes:

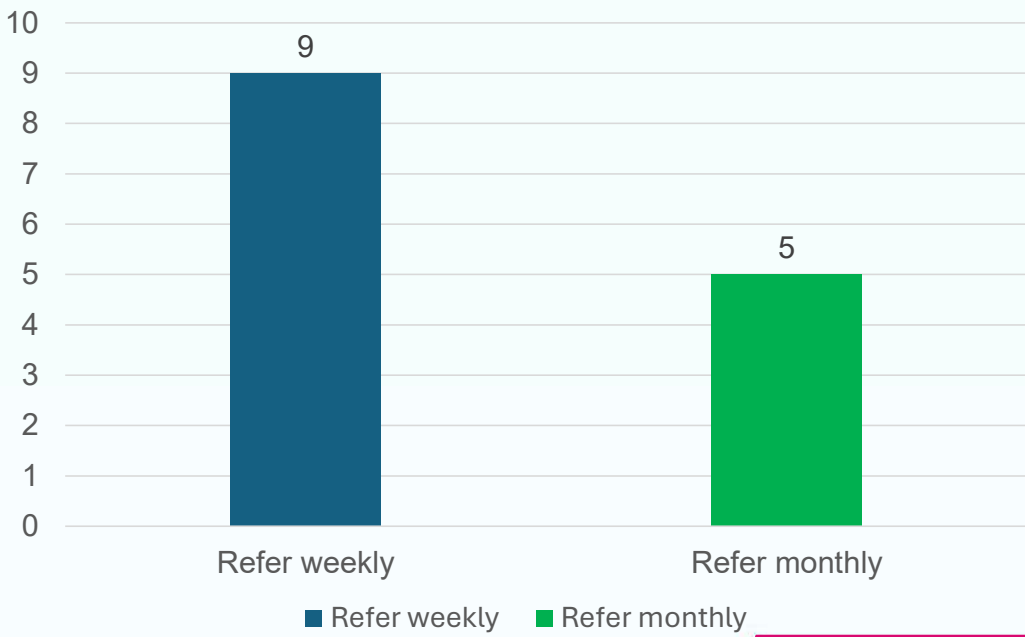
- There is an affordable food project in CHOC care community, but they didn't participate in the food-aid count
- Community fridges exist in Crewe but didn't participate in the food aid count.

6 | referring to other support (both food and non food)

If you can't provide the support that an individual or family needs how confident are you in signposting or referring them to another organisation that can help?
(n 24)



How many times per month do you signpost or refer to another organisation? (n14)



Source: Based on data from Cheshire East Food Aid count (2026).



6.1 | respondent feedback (2)

Several times per week
- to Citizens Advice,
Just Drop In, Baby Bank
and others

Every week: we signpost to all local support
(other charities, debt support, drug and
alcohol support, CEC, St Pauls, Hope
Church, Leighton Hospital, Salvation Army,
Healthy Start, local food banks, Lighthouse,
Crewcial Café (mental health support) and
Veterans' charities)

10 per week – including
St Pauls, Chance Changing
Lives, Changing Lives
Together, Hope Church

20 per week - debt
advice, benefit support,
counselling, Citizens
Advice, local social
supermarket, family
hubs, social prescribers

15-20 per week: Citizens
Advice, DIB, other food
projects, Peaks & Plains,
Samaritans, social
prescribers,

Each time we open -
Citizens Advice, social
prescribers, local
medical centre

Source: Based on data from Cheshire East Food Aid count (2026).

7 | other forms of food aid and support

	NHS Healthy Start scheme Financial support for expectant Mothers who are more than 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under 4, and who are in receipt of Universal Credit or another qualifying benefit, in the form of a pre-paid card to purchase fruit and vegetables, pulses, milk and milk powder. Get help to buy food and milk (Healthy Start)
	Free school meals All infant school pupils (reception, year 1, and year 2) in state funded schools in England are eligible for Universal Infant free school meals (UIFSM). Income related free school meals (IRFSM) are a statutory entitlement available to pupils that meet the eligibility criteria and whose parents or carers make an application. Free School Meals
	Holiday and Food (HAF) programme Provides free holiday clubs with healthy meals and enriching activities for children eligible for benefits-related free school meals in England. Holiday activities and food programme HAF
	School breakfast clubs Range of different options including Government free breakfast school scheme, National school breakfast club programme, Magic Breakfast, Kellogg's and Greggs.
	Crisis and Resilience fund (CRF) CRF is a UK government-funded initiative designed to help individuals and families in Cheshire East who are struggling with housing costs or other essential household needs including food. Crisis and Resilience Fund

8 | conclusions (*key actions*)

1. FI is recognised as a public health issue that disproportionally affects some of the most vulnerable residents
2. Nationally there are inconsistencies in terms of how and what is reported
3. Data highlights there is still demand (higher levels) and it should inform local decision making (*provides a benchmark for measurement going forward – repeat in 2027 – 2029*)
4. There is support in place across all of CECC – higher levels in areas where deprivation is highest. VCFSCE groups are key to this provision (*need to continue to support community groups / projects*)
5. Additional support via CEC interventions e.g. CRF 3 years of funding totaling over £12m (**2,133 crisis applications since launch in April**) ((2025: HSF - £871k on food supporting 7449 awards) (*encourage referrals*))
6. Range of different food-aid choices e.g. foodbank, social supermarket, community pantry, meal delivery service. Community café / meal (*are there gaps, other models of support*)
7. Lower levels of demand reported and projects operating below capacity e.g. TBBT ([see Appendix 2](#)) (*Need to understand why*)
8. Limited evidence of changing demographic demand e.g. families, those in work, minority backgrounds (monitor trends)
9. There is confidence in referring those who need support: high volume, frequent, complex (how are they getting referred without these needs being identified (conversation for the CRF work)
10. Food-aid count can influence both Poverty Commission and CRF work (*draw programmes of work together*)
11. Wider programme of food aid including UFSM, IRFSM, SFVS, HAF, NSBP, plus - Healthy Start (*systems wide approach needed to improve uptake*).

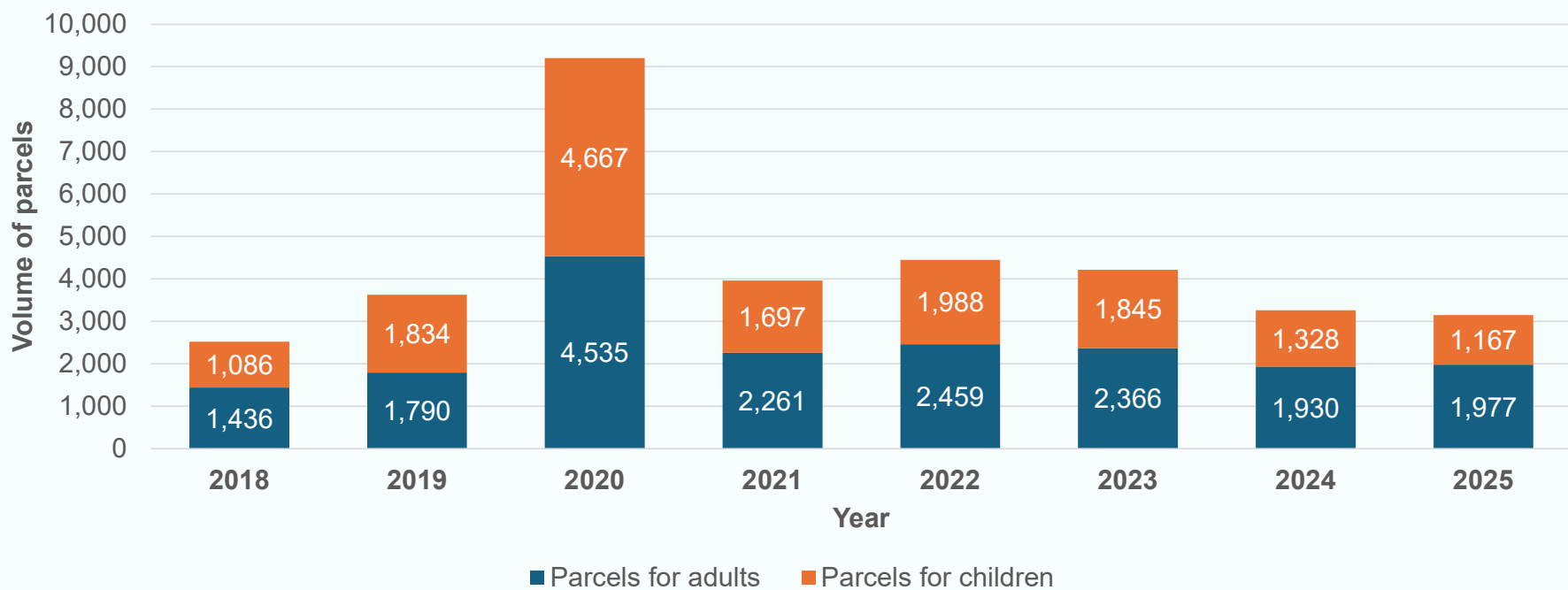
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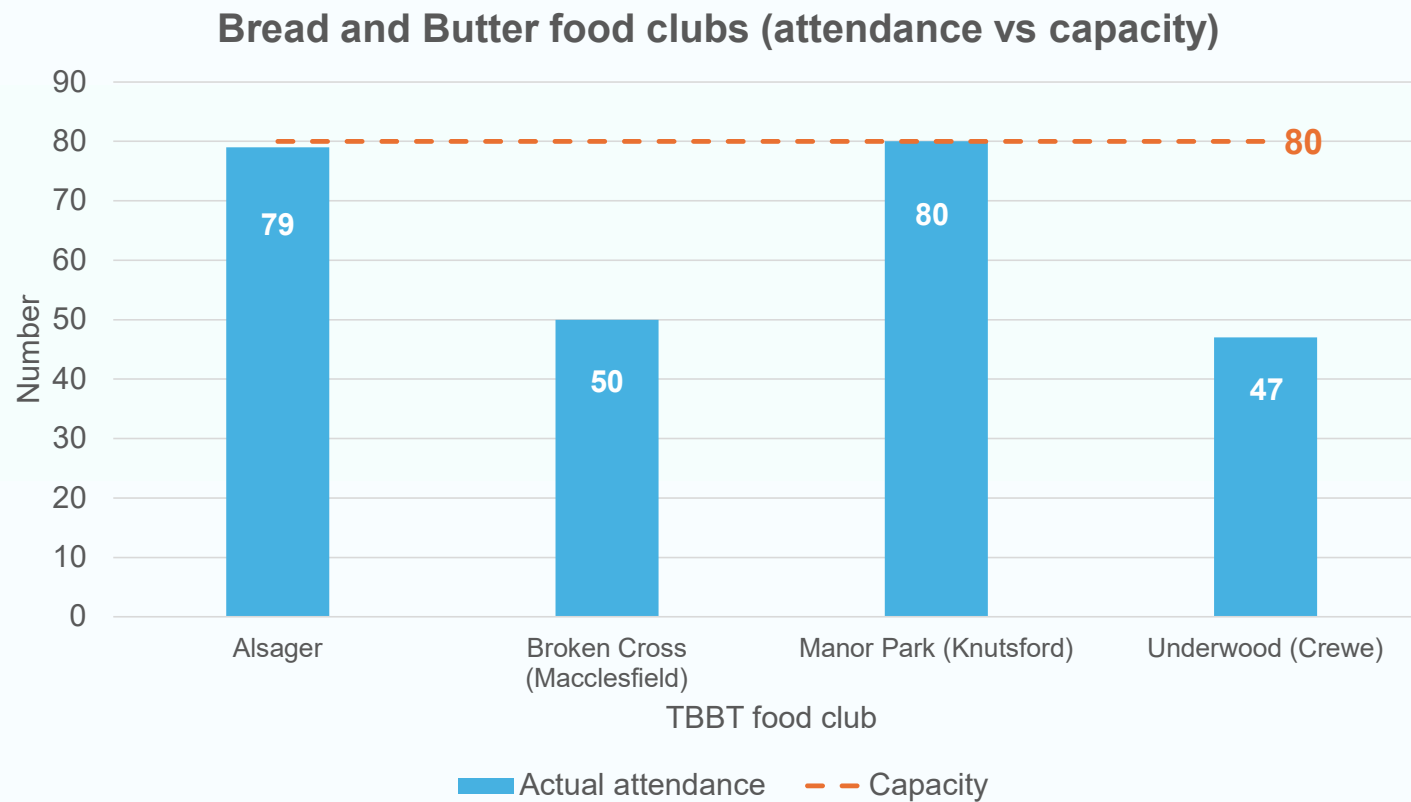


Appendix 1 | Volume of Trussell food parcels distributed

Volume of Trussell (formerly Trussell Trust) food parcels distributed (2018 - 2025)



Appendix 2 | Bread and Butter food clubs (attendance vs capacity)





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Cheshire East

Thank you

If you want to get in touch:

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