

PRESS RELEASE – 26th April 2019



2,754 emergency food parcels given to local people in last year, HARLOW FOODBANK reveals

Harlow Foodbank provided 2,754 three-day emergency food parcels to local people between April 2018 to March 2019. People fed during this period was 5,615 (3,611 adults & 2,004 children) compared to 4,102 (2,448 adults & 1,654 children) in the same period last year. 36% of all referrals in 2018/19 were for children.

The local food bank's figures feed into a larger national picture with a record increase in food bank use across the UK reported today by the Trussell Trust.

HARLOW FOODBANK is backing calls from the Trussell Trust to ensure the benefits system is able to protect people from poverty.

The figures from Harlow Foodbank are a 37% increase on the same period last year. The charity believes the local increase is due to people struggling with continued issues with benefit payments; issues with Universal Credit such as the five-week wait; insecure work; low income and closure of local charities offering crisis support.

Harlow Foodbank shares the concerns of other food banks in the Trussell Trust's network about Universal Credit – it is not the only benefit payment people referred to the food bank have experienced problems with, but the issues faced by local people moving onto the new system are significant. The food bank has needed to give emergency food and support to people who are waiting at least five-weeks for a first Universal Credit payment, not able to access support or receiving payments that don't cover the cost of essentials.

Michael Roberts Charitable Trust (MRCT) Chief Executive Officer Gary Knott said: *"This has been our busiest year to date since we opened the foodbank in Harlow mainly due to the government's implementation of Universal Credits and London Boroughs transferring low income and homeless tenants into renovated business units in Harlow. This increase in our workload has been a real challenge to our staff and volunteer teams to ensure we provided the emergency food needed to meet the ever increasing demand on our services. In line with this the charity has had to employ additional staff at our main Store House (warehouse) and foodbank satellite centre to support the high level of referrals we are receiving currently, and which is estimated to continue for the foreseeable future".*

“No one in Harlow and the surrounding area that we serve should need a food bank’s help and we want to see an end to local people needing emergency food at all. It doesn’t have to be this way - our benefits system is supposed to protect us all from being swept into poverty. Universal Credit should be part of the solution but currently the five week wait is leaving many without enough money to cover the basics. This isn’t right.

“Until we reach a future where food banks are no longer needed, we’ll continue to provide vital support when it matters most. We’re dedicated to ensuring that people in our community without enough money for food are able to access emergency support. Our vital work in the community has only been possible in the last year because of the incredible generosity shown by local people in donating food, time and funds. Thank you.”

The running costs for the food bank are raised locally to enable them to continue their work. Costs include warehouse space, to sort and stock donated food, distribution costs, equipment and other overheads like utilities and insurances. The food bank welcomes any new offers of help with funding – local businesses, organisations and individuals interested in supporting the food bank’s work can find out more by calling Gary Knott on 01279 724515 / 07734 128430 or donate online at www.mrct.org.uk with JUST GIVING and LOCAL GIVING.

ENDS

Contact:

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Notes to Editor

Harlow Foodbank:

- Harlow Foodbank has been providing three days emergency food and support to local people since April 2009 and has fed a total of 30,135 (19,531 adults & 10,604 children).
- 79.9 tonnes of food were donated by the local community between April 2018 – March 2019
- In addition to its range of non-perishable crisis food provided by our emergency food boxes the foodbank has also provided its foodbank satellite centre clients with an additional 25 tonnes of fresh food provided by the Bounty Club, also coordinated by Michael Roberts Charitable Trust (MRCT).
- Harlow Foodbank is part of the Trussell Trust network. For UK-wide Trussell Trust food bank statistics visit <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/> .

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