



luton  
**foodbank**



**IMPACT REPORT** *2025*



**LUTON**

#STEP FORWARD LUTON



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## A Message from the *Chief Executive*

### A Year That Changed How We Work

In 2025, Luton Foodbank supported more people than at any point in our history. We reached **7,352 households**, distributed **over 260,000 food items**, and responded to urgent need across every part of the town. But the most important story of this year is not simply one of scale. It is a story of change – in who is struggling, why they are struggling, and what meaningful support now needs to look like.

Throughout the year, our volunteers and staff spoke with parents who were in work yet unable to cover food costs. With older residents asking for help for the first time in their lives. With young people quietly carrying anxiety about household finances long before adulthood. These conversations revealed a pattern that cannot be ignored: food insecurity in Luton is no longer confined to moments of short-term crisis. It is increasingly shaped by ongoing financial pressure, insecure incomes, rising living costs, and gaps in the systems people rely on for stability.

This matters, because it changes the role of a foodbank.

Emergency food remains essential. When people are hungry, the priority is immediate, practical support. But 2025 made clear that food parcels alone cannot resolve the underlying conditions bringing people back through our doors. Without additional routes into advice, skills, confidence, and dignity-led support, many households are forced to navigate repeated crisis with little room to recover.

As a result, this year challenged us to look harder at our own practice. We asked ourselves not only how quickly we could respond, but what difference our response made beyond the immediate moment. That reflection has reshaped how we work. Alongside emergency provision, we strengthened early intervention, expanded Food Clubs, invested

in essential life skills, deepened outreach, and continued to develop work with young people that builds resilience within families and communities.

This report reflects that shift. It sets out what we delivered in 2025, but also what the year taught us about dignity, prevention, and the limits of crisis-only responses. It is honest about the pressures we face – rising demand, repeat referrals, and the reality that food poverty is becoming more entrenched – while also demonstrating what is possible when support is designed around respect, choice, and long-term stability.

None of this work happens in isolation. Our volunteers, referrers, partners, schools, faith groups, donors, and funders are the backbone of Luton Foodbank. Their commitment makes it possible not only to respond to need, but to keep learning and adapting as that need evolves.

2025 was a turning point. It clarified that our responsibility is not just to help people through today, but to help reduce the chances that today becomes tomorrow, again and again. This report is both a reflection of that learning and a statement of intent for the years ahead.

*"Our responsibility is not just to help people through today, but to help reduce the chances that today becomes tomorrow, again and again."*

Salma Khan

– **Chief Executive, Luton Foodbank**

# Executive Summary

## 2025 at a Glance — and What It Changed

In 2025, Luton Foodbank remained a critical lifeline for individuals and families facing food insecurity across the borough. Over the course of the year, we supported 7,352 households, distributing 260,625 food items through a network of six distribution centres, with most households receiving support within 24–48 hours of referral.

These figures represent a sustained level of demand rather than a short-term spike. They reflect a year in which food insecurity became more entrenched, complex, and widespread, driven by rising living costs, insecure or low-paid work, benefit delays, debt, illness, and housing pressure. For many households, food poverty was not a single crisis moment, but part of an ongoing struggle to make ends meet.

### What the data shows us

Our operational data shows that food insecurity in Luton affects households of all sizes, with the majority of support provided to households of two to four people, indicating the scale of pressure on families with children. Referral reasons highlight a combination of low income, benefit-related issues, and debt, often layered together rather than occurring in isolation.

A significant proportion of households accessing support are in receipt of Universal Credit, underlining the reality that social security is not always sufficient to prevent hunger, particularly when payments are delayed, reduced, or disrupted. This reflects wider national trends and reinforces the fact that foodbanks are increasingly absorbing pressures created elsewhere in the system, rather than responding only to exceptional circumstances.

Geographically, demand spans all wards in Luton,

with higher concentrations in areas already experiencing long-standing socio-economic disadvantage. Mapping food distribution by ward allows us to identify where need is most entrenched and to target outreach, partnerships, and preventative support accordingly.

## Beyond emergency food: what changed in 2025

While emergency food provision remained essential throughout 2025, the scale and nature of demand made one thing clear: food parcels alone cannot resolve recurring hardship. Without additional support, many households return to crisis repeatedly, often with diminishing resilience.

In response, Luton Foodbank strengthened a dual approach:

- **Immediate crisis response**, ensuring people do not go hungry and receive support quickly, respectfully, and without judgement.
- **Preventative and dignity-led support**, designed to reduce repeat reliance on emergency food by addressing underlying pressures and building confidence, skills, and stability.

Alongside food provision, 791 individuals received advisory support and signposting to specialist services, including debt advice, housing support, and mental health provision. These conversations are a critical bridge between emergency relief and longer-term solutions, helping people navigate complex systems and identify next steps.

We also expanded initiatives focused on choice, agency, and prevention, including Food Clubs, outreach sessions, Essential Skills workshops, and youth programmes. These approaches recognise that dignity and autonomy are not secondary to impact — they are central to it.

## What we learned

2025 reinforced several key lessons:

- **Emergency food is necessary but insufficient:** it prevents immediate harm, but without wider support it does not break cycles of poverty.
- **In-work poverty is a growing reality:** a rising number of people seeking help are employed, challenging assumptions about who needs food support.
- **Early intervention matters:** people supported earlier through outreach, advice, and skills are less likely to reach acute crisis.
- **Dignity increases engagement:** when people are offered choice, respect, and clear routes forward, they are more likely to seek help before situations worsen.

## Why our direction for 2026 matters

Looking ahead, demand remains high and pressures on households show no sign of easing. Without investment in preventative, dignity-led approaches, emergency food provision risks becoming a permanent substitute for adequate income and secure systems.

In 2026, Luton Foodbank will continue to provide emergency food wherever it is needed. At the same time, we will scale the approaches that reduce repeat crisis: expanding Food Clubs, strengthening outreach and advice, deepening Essential Skills provision, and investing in young people as part of long-term community resilience.

This impact report documents not just what we delivered in 2025, but how our learning is shaping a more effective, humane, and sustainable response to food insecurity in Luton.





## Understanding *the Need*

### Food Insecurity in Luton: Scale, Pattern and Pressure

Food insecurity is rarely a single issue. It is the point at which multiple pressures collide: low or insecure income, rising living costs, benefit delays, debt, illness, housing instability, and reduced resilience after repeated shocks. In 2025, these pressures intensified across Luton, pushing more households into crisis and keeping others there for longer.

Luton Foodbank's experience mirrors national trends identified by The Trussell Trust, which reports emergency food provision remaining at near-record levels across the UK in 2024–25, reflecting systemic pressures rather than isolated local failure (Trussell Trust, 2025).

### The local picture: poverty and precarity in Luton

Luton faces some of the most persistent socio-economic challenges in the region. According to Luton Borough Council, nearly 10% of households in the borough are living in destitution, meaning they are unable to afford basic essentials such as food, heating, clothing, or toiletries. A further 11.8% of households struggle to meet essential costs, affecting an estimated 27,000 residents.

These figures pre-date the full impact of ongoing cost-of-living pressures and illustrate that food insecurity in Luton is not a marginal issue affecting a small minority. It is a widespread condition embedded in everyday life for many families.

Even before recent economic pressures intensified, food insecurity indicators were already high. Local authority data shows that over 13% of adults in Luton worried about having enough food, and almost 8% were already skipping meals. These behaviours are not choices; they are coping strategies adopted when household budgets no longer stretch.

### Entrenched inequality by place

Food insecurity in Luton is also unevenly distributed. Some wards experience deeply entrenched poverty that has persisted for years. In 2019, Saints, Biscot, and Dallow wards each recorded child poverty rates above 40%, highlighting concentrations of disadvantage that continue to shape demand for emergency food support today (Local Government Association, 2025).

### Entrenched inequality by place

Food insecurity in Luton is also unevenly distributed. Some wards experience deeply entrenched poverty that has persisted for years. In 2019, Saints, Biscot, and Dallow wards each recorded child poverty rates above 40%, highlighting concentrations of disadvantage that continue to shape demand for emergency food support today (Local Government Association, 2025).

Food insecurity in Luton is shaped not only by income and deprivation, but also by access and perception. Across the borough's diverse communities, cultural barriers and the stigma associated with seeking help vary significantly. Some families delay accessing support due to fear of judgement, concerns around cultural appropriateness, or uncertainty about whether services will respect their values and traditions.

Luton Foodbank recognises these barriers and is committed to ensuring that support is culturally sensitive, inclusive, and accessible to all residents. Addressing stigma and cultural exclusion is essential to reaching households earlier and preventing crisis from escalating.

Luton has been recognised by the Local Government Association as a Health Equity Town, highlighting the deep links between poverty, place, and health outcomes. The LGA notes that tackling food insecurity is central to reducing health inequalities, particularly in wards experiencing long-standing deprivation (Local Government Association, 2025). This context reinforces the importance of community-based, preventative responses that address both immediate need and longer-term wellbeing.

This matters because it shows that demand for food support is not random or temporary. It follows long-standing patterns of deprivation, housing pressure, and low income. For Luton Foodbank, this means responding borough-wide while also targeting outreach, partnerships, and preventative support in areas where need is most entrenched.



## The national context: a system under strain

Local pressures sit within a wider national picture of rising food insecurity. In early 2025, around 14% of UK households experienced food insecurity, with 4.5 million children living in poverty. Emergency food aid reached 2.9 million people, including over one million children, underscoring that reliance on foodbanks remains at historically high levels.

National research from The Food Foundation's Broken Plate 2025 report highlights that food insecurity in the UK is increasingly driven by the affordability of healthy diets, not simply calorie access. Households on the lowest incomes face significant barriers to accessing nutritious food, with children disproportionately affected. This reinforces the importance of Luton Foodbank's focus on nutritious provision, food skills, and dignity-led choice alongside emergency support (Food Foundation, 2025).

These figures reinforce an important point: foodbanks are increasingly responding to systemic gaps, not exceptional circumstances. Rising demand reflects pressures within the labour market, housing costs, and the social security system, rather than individual failure or poor decision-making.

## What Luton Foodbank's data tells us

Luton Foodbank's own operational data mirrors these wider trends. In 2025, we supported 7,352 households across the borough. The majority were households of two to four people, indicating the scale of pressure on families, particularly those with children.

Referral data shows that people are rarely referred for a single reason. While referral categories include low income, benefit delays, and debt, these often overlap with illness, relationship breakdown, caring responsibilities, and rising living costs. Food insecurity is therefore best understood not as a single event, but as the cumulative effect of multiple vulnerabilities.

A significant proportion of people accessing support are in receipt of Universal Credit. This does not suggest misuse of the system; rather, it highlights

the reality that Universal Credit is often insufficient to protect households from hunger, particularly when payments are delayed, reduced, or disrupted. For many families, even short interruptions can result in immediate crisis.

## Speed, urgency, and fragility

One of the clearest indicators of need is the speed at which support is required. Most households referred to Luton Foodbank receive food within 24–48 hours, reflecting how quickly financial pressure translates into hunger.

This speed underscores the fragility many households are living with. There is often little or no buffer between stability and crisis. A missed payment, reduced hours, or unexpected expense can push families into immediate food insecurity.

## Why this context matters

Luton Foodbank's work directly aligns with the priorities set out in Luton Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2023–28, which identifies poverty reduction, prevention, and tackling health inequalities as core strategic objectives for the town. The Plan recognises that households experiencing deprivation often face multiple, overlapping pressures, and that early intervention and community-based support are essential to preventing long-term harm (Luton Borough Council, 2023).

Understanding the nature of need in Luton is essential to understanding Luton Foodbank's approach. The data shows that:

- Food insecurity is widespread, not exceptional;
- It is entrenched, not short-term;
- And it is increasingly linked to structural pressures, not individual circumstances alone.

This context explains why emergency food remains essential – and why it is not enough on its own. It also explains why Luton Foodbank has increasingly invested in preventative, dignity-led, and skills-based approaches alongside crisis provision. Without these, emergency food risks becoming a permanent substitute for the income and security people need to live well.





## Our Mission

### From Emergency Response to Lasting Stability

Our mission is to provide emergency food and essential support to individuals and families in crisis, while working collaboratively to build long-term solutions that reduce food poverty in Luton.

This mission reflects both the immediate reality of hunger in our community and the learning we have gained through frontline experience. In 2025, it became increasingly clear that food insecurity in Luton is not only about moments of crisis, but about sustained financial pressure, limited resilience, and structural gaps that leave households vulnerable to repeated shocks. Our mission therefore holds two commitments at once: to respond when people are hungry, and to work toward a future where fewer people need that response.

### Emergency food as a foundation, not an endpoint

Emergency food remains at the heart of what we do. When people come to Luton Foodbank, they are often facing immediate and urgent need. Many have exhausted all other options. Our first responsibility is to ensure that no one leaves hungry.

In 2025, this meant supporting 7,352 households and distributing **over 260,000 food items** across six

distribution centres, with most households receiving food within 24–48 hours of referral. Speed, reliability, and consistency are critical. Hunger cannot wait.

But our experience also shows that emergency food alone does not resolve the underlying conditions that bring people to us. For many households, food support becomes part of how they survive repeated instability rather than a short-term bridge out of crisis. Our mission therefore extends beyond provision to prevention.

### Support that treats people as more than recipients

A core principle underpinning our mission is **dignity**. People do not come to Luton Foodbank because they lack effort, care, or responsibility. They come because systems have failed to protect them from poverty, insecurity, or sudden shock.

This understanding shapes how we deliver support. Every interaction is designed to be respectful, non-judgemental, and person-centred. Food provision is combined with conversation, listening, and practical guidance. In 2025, 791 individuals received advice and signposting alongside food support, helping them navigate debt, housing, benefits, mental health services, and other specialist provision.

This is not an add-on to our mission. It is central to it. Support that restores agency and confidence is more likely to prevent future crisis than support that addresses symptoms alone.

### Building resilience and reducing repeat crisis

Our mission recognises that ending food poverty requires more than crisis response. It requires investment in skills, confidence, and community capacity.

In response to what 2025 taught us, we have increasingly focused on:

- **Preventative support**, including outreach and early intervention
- **Dignity-led provision**, such as Food Clubs that offer choice and autonomy
- **Essential life skills**, supporting people to manage food, money, and wellbeing
- **Work with young people**, recognising their role in household and community resilience

These approaches reflect a belief that people are best supported when they are given tools, not just resources. While we cannot claim that these initiatives alone resolve poverty, they form a critical part of a wider response that helps households stabilise and reduces reliance on emergency food over time.

### Working with the system, not in isolation

Luton Foodbank does not work alone. Our mission is embedded in partnership – with referrers, schools, faith organisations, community groups, local authorities, health services, and national networks. In 2025, 550 referrers helped connect households to support, ensuring people reached us quickly and safely.

We also see advocacy as part of our mission. By documenting patterns of need and listening to lived experience, we contribute to a broader understanding of food insecurity and the policies required to address it. This is not about replacing statutory systems, but about ensuring that evidence from the frontline informs future solutions.

### A mission shaped by reality

Our mission is intentionally grounded. It does not promise quick fixes or simple outcomes. Instead, it reflects the reality of working in a town where poverty is persistent, complex, and deeply connected to wider structural pressures.

In 2025, that reality sharpened our focus. It reinforced the importance of emergency food while making clear that dignity, prevention, and resilience must sit alongside it. This mission now guides how we plan, how we partner, and how we measure success – not only by how many people we reach, but by whether our support helps people move forward with greater stability and confidence.





## Our Values

Our values guide how we work, how we treat people, and how we make decisions in moments of pressure. They are not abstract principles; they shape everyday practice across Luton Foodbank.

### Compassion

We treat every person with dignity, kindness, and respect. People are met without judgement and supported at moments of vulnerability.

### Community

Food insecurity is a shared challenge. We work alongside volunteers, referrers, schools, faith groups, partners, and residents to strengthen collective response.

### Fairness

Everyone deserves access to food and essential support. Poverty is not a personal failure, and support should be accessible, inclusive, and equitable.

### Integrity

We act with transparency, accountability, and care. Decisions are evidence-led and grounded in lived experience from the frontline.

### Hope

We believe that with the right support, people can move forward. Our work is driven by the belief that change is possible, even in difficult circumstances. Our commitment: No one should be hungry.



## Our Impact *in Numbers*

### What the Data Tells Us About Need, Response, and Pressure in 2025

Numbers alone do not tell the full story of food insecurity, but they do reveal important patterns about who is affected, how quickly crisis escalates, and how effectively support is delivered. In 2025, Luton Foodbank's operational data shows both the scale of demand and the intensity of pressure facing households across the borough.

#### Scale of support

- **7,352 households supported**
- **260,625 food items distributed**
- **Six distribution centres operating across Luton**
- **Most households supported within 24–48 hours of referral**

These figures represent sustained, year-long demand rather than short-term emergency spikes. They reflect a context in which many households are living with little financial buffer, where disruption quickly translates into food insecurity.

### Who we are supporting

#### Household size

The majority of households supported in 2025 were made up of two to four people, indicating that food insecurity in Luton disproportionately affects families rather than only single adults. This has direct implications for children's wellbeing, educational stability, and household stress levels.

Smaller households and single adults were also supported, highlighting that food insecurity spans different life stages, including older residents and people living alone. The diversity of household size reinforces that hunger is not confined to one demographic group.

### Why people needed support

#### Reasons for referral

Referral data shows that people are rarely referred for a single, isolated reason. The most common recorded drivers include:

- **Low income**
- **Benefit-related issues**, including delays or changes
- **Debt**

These factors frequently overlap with illness, relationship breakdown, caring responsibilities, rising living costs, and unexpected expenses. The data points to food insecurity as a cumulative outcome of pressure, rather than the result of one-off events.

### Universal Credit

A significant proportion of households accessing Luton Foodbank are in receipt of Universal Credit. This does not indicate misuse or dependency; rather, it highlights that the social security system is often insufficient to prevent hunger, particularly during payment delays, sanctions, deductions, or transitions between employment and benefits.

The presence of Universal Credit among referrals reflects a wider national pattern in which emergency food provision is increasingly compensating for gaps elsewhere in the system.

### Speed and urgency of need

#### Time from referral to food provision

Most households supported in 2025 received food within 24–48 hours of referral. This speed of response is critical and reveals two important realities:

1. Hunger escalates quickly once household finances are disrupted.
2. Many households have little or no buffer to absorb sudden costs or delays.

Rapid response remains one of Luton Foodbank's core strengths, ensuring immediate harm is reduced at moments of acute vulnerability.

### Where demand is concentrated

#### Distribution by ward

Food support was delivered across all wards in Luton, with higher concentrations in areas experiencing long-standing socio-economic deprivation. Mapping demand by ward enables us to:

- identify areas of entrenched need,
- focus outreach and preventative work,

- and strengthen partnerships where pressure is most acute.

This data confirms that food insecurity is a borough-wide issue, while also revealing clear geographical patterns linked to poverty and inequality.

### What the numbers do – and do not – show

The data demonstrates that:

- food insecurity in Luton is widespread and persistent,
- families with children are heavily affected,
- benefit reliance does not equate to food security,
- and crisis often emerges rapidly following financial disruption.

However, these figures also have limits. They do not capture:

- unmet need among people who do not seek help,
- the emotional toll of repeated crisis,
- or the long-term effects on children, health, and wellbeing.

This is why Luton Foodbank does not rely on numbers alone to guide its work. Instead, quantitative data is used alongside lived experience, volunteer insight, and partner intelligence to shape a response that is both immediate and preventative.

### Why this matters for our approach

The patterns visible in our 2025 data explain why emergency food remains essential – and why it cannot be the only response. High demand, repeat referrals, and fast escalation point to the need for:

- early intervention,
- dignity-led support,
- advice and signposting,
- and pathways that reduce reliance on crisis provision over time.

These priorities are reflected in the programmes and partnerships outlined in the sections that follow.



## Core Support & *Direct Impact*

### Meeting Immediate Need While Creating Routes Forward

At the heart of Luton Foodbank's work is a commitment to ensure that no one in our community goes hungry. In 2025, this meant responding quickly and consistently to households facing acute financial pressure, while also strengthening the quality of support offered at the point of crisis.

#### What we delivered in 2025

- **7,352 households supported** through emergency food provision
- **260,625 food items distributed**, tailored to household size and need
- **Six distribution centres** operating across Luton to ensure accessibility
- **Most households supported within 24–48 hours of referral**
- **791 individuals supported through advice and signposting** to specialist services including debt advice, housing support, and mental health provision

These figures reflect a year of sustained, high demand rather than short-term emergency spikes. They also reflect a delivery model designed for speed, dignity, and reliability at moments when households have few alternatives.

#### What happens at the point of support

Emergency food provision at Luton Foodbank is not a transactional exchange. Households are welcomed into safe, calm, and respectful spaces where volunteers take time to listen, explain, and support without judgement.

Food parcels are:

- **Tailored to household size**, ensuring families receive adequate and appropriate provision
- **Designed to be nutritious and practical**, supporting health and dignity
- **Provided alongside conversation**, not in isolation

This approach recognises that crisis is often accompanied by stress, shame, and isolation. Being treated with respect at this moment can shape whether people feel able to seek help again – or earlier – in the future.

### Advisory support: bridging crisis and stability

In 2025, 791 people received advice and signposting alongside food support. These conversations play a crucial role in moving support beyond immediate relief.

Advisory support typically includes:

- identifying wider pressures such as debt, housing instability, benefit issues, or wellbeing concerns,
- providing clear information about local services and entitlements,
- and referring or signposting to trusted specialist partners.

While we cannot claim that advice alone resolves poverty, frontline experience shows that people who leave with information and connections are better equipped to take next steps. For many, this is the first time they have been guided through complex systems that can otherwise feel inaccessible or overwhelming.

### Speed of response: why it matters

Most households referred to Luton Foodbank in 2025 received food within 24–48 hours. This speed is not incidental. It reflects both operational efficiency and the reality of the need we are responding to.

Households seeking food support are often living with little or no financial buffer. A delayed benefit payment, reduced working hours, illness, or an unexpected bill can lead to immediate food insecurity. Rapid response reduces the short-term harms of hunger and prevents crisis from escalating further.

### What difference this made

While emergency food provision cannot address all underlying causes of poverty, the core support delivered in 2025 achieved several critical outcomes:

- **Immediate harm was reduced:** families and

individuals had food at moments of acute vulnerability.

- **Stability was supported:** advice and signposting helped people navigate next steps rather than facing crisis alone.

- **Trust was built:** dignity-led delivery increased willingness to engage with support earlier and more openly.

- **Pressure was absorbed:** Luton Foodbank acted as a buffer during periods when statutory systems were delayed, overstretched, or inaccessible.

These outcomes are not easily captured in charts, but they are consistently reflected in volunteer observations, client feedback, and repeat engagement patterns.

### Limits and learning

2025 also reinforced important limits. High demand and repeat referrals show that emergency food provision, even when delivered well, cannot resolve entrenched poverty on its own. Without preventative support, households are often pulled back into crisis repeatedly.

This learning underpins Luton Foodbank's continued investment in:

- advice and early intervention,
- dignity-led models such as Food Clubs,
- skills-based and youth-focused programmes,
- and partnership working across the borough.

Core support remains essential. But its greatest impact is achieved when it forms part of a wider system of care that helps people move forward, not just get through the week.



## Community Initiatives & Campaigns

### Strengthening Dignity, Inclusion, and Community Resilience

Luton Foodbank's community initiatives and campaigns are a vital extension of our core work. They respond to predictable pressure points in the year — school holidays, religious festivals, winter costs — while also strengthening community connection, reducing stigma, and protecting children from the social and emotional effects of poverty.

In 2025, these initiatives reached thousands of residents across Luton, combining practical support with dignity, inclusion, and opportunities for community participation.

### Supporting families when pressure is highest

#### Holiday Camps

During school holidays, families face increased food costs alongside reduced access to free school meals. In partnership with Active Luton's Energise Camps, Luton Foodbank distributed 2,000 food packs to families during holiday periods.

### What this achieved:

- Reduced food insecurity at a predictable high-risk time
- Supported children's health and wellbeing while they remained active and engaged
- Helped families manage household budgets during school breaks

This intervention reflects a preventative approach: addressing pressure before it escalates into acute crisis.

Holiday hunger is a well-evidenced pressure point for families. The Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme, evaluated by Luton Borough Council, highlights increased food insecurity during school holidays and the importance of combining food provision with wellbeing and activity (Luton Borough Council, 2024).

Luton Foodbank's holiday food packs, delivered in partnership with Active Luton's Energise Camps, respond directly to this need by reducing household pressure at predictable high-risk times.

## Every Child Smiles (Eid)

Through the **Every Child Smiles** initiative, Luton Foodbank provided 1,000 ride tokens and gifts to children during Eid celebrations.

What this achieved:

- Enabled children to participate fully in cultural celebrations
- Reduced the emotional impact of poverty-related exclusion
- Supported parents to maintain dignity during financially challenging periods

While small in cost, initiatives like this have a significant impact on children’s sense of belonging and normality.

*"I couldn't afford to take my kids out or buy gifts this year; these toys eased the pressure and made the day special for them."*





## Cultural dignity and *inclusion*

We are committed to providing food that meets diverse cultural and dietary needs. By collaborating with all local communities, we try to ensure that our services remain inclusive, accessible, and welcoming to all. We are always open to creating new food opportunities to better serve our clients.

### Ramadan & Iftar Support

In 2025, Luton Foodbank provided 200 culturally appropriate Ramadan food packs and supported 14 schools and community organisations to host Iftar meals.

#### What this achieved:

- Enabled families to observe religious traditions with dignity
- Strengthened partnerships with schools and community organisations
- Reinforced inclusion and respect as core principles of our work

This support recognises that food insecurity affects not only physical wellbeing, but also cultural participation and identity.

Significant religious and cultural observances can place additional financial and emotional pressure on families already experiencing hardship. For children in particular, being unable to participate in

sacred traditions can deepen feelings of exclusion and stigma.

Luton Foodbank aims to mitigate this by providing culturally appropriate food, gifts, and items that allow children to participate in religious celebrations with dignity, regardless of household income. This work recognises that food insecurity affects not only physical wellbeing, but identity, belonging, and emotional health.

### Winter support and festive inclusion

#### Luton Smiles (Christmas)

Through the Luton Smiles campaign, Luton Foodbank delivered 1,000 Christmas meals and 2,000 gifts to families across the borough.

#### What this achieved:

- Ensured children did not go without during a highly visible period of inequality
- Reduced financial strain on parents already facing winter costs
- Strengthened community solidarity at a time when isolation and stress are often heightened

For many families, this support provided their first opportunity in years to celebrate Christmas without fear or embarrassment.

## Mobilising the wider community

### Reverse Advent Calendar

The Reverse Advent Calendar invited residents to donate one food item each day in December. In 2025, this campaign generated 19,242 donated food items.

#### What this achieved:

- Increased local food supply during peak winter demand
- Engaged families and schools in meaningful acts of giving
- Embedded conversations about food poverty within households and classrooms

This campaign is as much about education and awareness as it is about donations.



### Harvest Collections

Through partnerships with 43 schools and 18 churches, Harvest collections generated 25,000 donated items for families in need.

#### What this achieved:

- Strengthened long-term relationships with schools and faith communities
- Built reliable, community-led food supply channels
- Reinforced collective responsibility for tackling hunger locally

## Why these initiatives matter

Community initiatives and campaigns play a distinct role within Luton Foodbank's overall model.

They:

- respond to **predictable pressure points** before crisis escalates,
- reduce the **social and emotional harms** of poverty, especially for children,
- strengthen **community participation and awareness**,
- complement emergency provision by supporting dignity and inclusion.

In 2025, these initiatives helped ensure that support was not only available, but visible, accessible, and rooted in the life of the town.

While this commitment to cultural inclusion deepens our impact, it also increases our operational requirements. Unlike some existing projects that are supported through targeted fundraising or specific charity partnerships, culturally inclusive provision often requires additional, dedicated resources to ensure it is delivered consistently and with integrity.

Sustaining this work will depend on developing new funding streams and partnerships that recognise inclusion as a core part of effective food support, not an optional enhancement.





## Beyond Food: *Building Resilience*

### Supporting Stability, Skills, and Confidence

Food insecurity is rarely resolved by food alone. In 2025, Luton Foodbank continued to develop support that recognises hunger as a symptom of wider instability – financial, emotional, and social. Building resilience means helping people strengthen their ability to cope with shocks, navigate systems, and regain a sense of control over everyday life.

This work sits alongside emergency provision, not in place of it. It reflects learning from repeated frontline experience: without preventative and skills-based support, households are more likely to cycle back into crisis.

### Outreach: reaching people earlier

In 2025, Luton Foodbank delivered 45 community outreach sessions, connecting residents with information and support before situations escalated into acute crisis.

These sessions took place in community venues, schools, and partner spaces, and focused on:

- raising awareness of available support,
- reducing stigma around seeking help,
- and helping people understand how and when to access services.

### Why this matters:

Many households delay seeking support until they reach breaking point. Outreach helps shift engagement earlier, when problems are still manageable and the range of options is wider. While we cannot quantify prevention outcomes directly, partner feedback and engagement patterns suggest that outreach reduces isolation and improves confidence in navigating support.

### Essential Skills: practical tools for everyday stability

In 2025, Luton Foodbank delivered **Essential Skills workshops** across **17 schools and community organisations**. These sessions focused on practical, everyday skills that directly affect household resilience, including:

- budgeting and managing income,
- shopping and cooking on a budget,
- food planning and waste reduction,
- growing food at home,
- energy efficiency and reducing bills,
- and maintaining wellbeing under pressure.

### What this achieved:

These workshops provided preventative support by equipping participants with tools they can apply immediately. While skills alone cannot overcome poverty, they can:

- reduce stress and uncertainty around food and money,
- increase confidence in decision-making,
- and help households stretch limited resources further.

This approach reflects a shift away from crisis-only responses toward practical empowerment.

### Food Club: choice, dignity, and independence

Luton Foodbank's Food Club offers a dignity-led alternative for people experiencing in-work poverty, older residents who prefer not to access traditional foodbanks, and households transitioning away from emergency provision.

Food Club members:

- choose the items they want,
- contribute a small weekly donation,
- and access peer support and practical guidance.

The Food Club also links to skills-based sessions, helping members apply budgeting, cooking, and wellbeing strategies in real time.

### Why this matters:

Choice and agency are central to dignity. Evidence from Feeding Britain highlights that Food Clubs can help households stretch budgets, improve wellbeing, and reduce reliance on emergency food provision. While we cannot yet quantify long-term outcomes locally, engagement patterns indicate that Food Clubs provide a viable pathway for people seeking stability rather than repeated crisis support.

### Young Ambassador Programme: investing in future resilience

In 2025, Luton Foodbank's Young Ambassador Programme engaged 1,021 young people, supporting them to build skills, confidence, and leadership capacity. Participants completed awards at three levels:

- **680 Bronze**
- **280 Silver**
- **60 Gold**

The programme focuses on:

- leadership and decision-making,
- problem-solving and initiative,
- resilience and emotional regulation,
- and community engagement.





### What this achieved:

Young people developed confidence, independence, and the ability to support others. For families experiencing hardship, young people often act as informal carers, translators, and advocates. Strengthening their resilience therefore has wider household and community benefits, even where these are not immediately measurable.

### Why resilience work is essential

The resilience-building work delivered in 2025 reflects a clear understanding of the limits of emergency food provision. High demand and repeat referrals show that without additional support, crisis becomes normalised.

By investing in outreach, skills, dignity-led provision, and young people, Luton Foodbank aims to:

- reduce the frequency and severity of future crises,
- support households to stabilise over time,
- and strengthen community capacity to respond collectively to hardship.

This work does not replace emergency food. It strengthens its impact.

### Learning and limits

We are clear about the limits of this work. Skills, confidence, and dignity do not eliminate poverty, nor can community organisations resolve structural inequality alone. However, without these interventions, households face greater risk of repeated crisis, deeper stress, and long-term harm.

In 2025, building resilience was not an optional extra. It was a necessary response to what food insecurity now looks like in Luton.

*"For many of our young people, these skills aren't just for their CVs - they are survival tools for households where they act as the primary bridge between crisis and support."*



## A Family's Journey

### From Crisis to Stability, Step by Step

When Sarah first came to Luton Foodbank, she did not describe herself as being “in crisis”. She described herself as “managing”. But managing had become fragile.

Her husband’s working hours had recently been reduced, and although the family was still technically in employment, their income no longer covered rising household costs. Rent, utilities, transport, and food were all competing for the same limited funds. Skipping meals had become routine. The family had begun cutting back on essentials quietly, hoping the situation would improve.

When it didn’t, Sarah felt embarrassed about asking for help. She had never used a foodbank before and worried about being judged.

At Luton Foodbank, that fear quickly eased. She was welcomed into a calm, respectful space and offered food tailored to her family’s needs. Just as importantly, she was given time. A volunteer listened as Sarah explained what had changed and what she was worried about. Alongside the food support, she was offered advice and signposting to help her understand what other support might be available.

That first visit met an immediate need – food in the home – but it also created something less tangible: reassurance that she was not facing the situation alone.

### Moving beyond emergency support

Over the following weeks, Sarah returned for support as the family continued to stabilise their finances. During this time, she was introduced to Luton Foodbank’s **Food Club** as a next step. The Food Club appealed to her because it offered choice and independence. Being able to select food items herself and contribute a small amount restored a sense of control and dignity that she felt she had lost.

Through Food Club sessions and community workshops, Sarah learned practical budgeting strategies and new ways to stretch meals without sacrificing nutrition. These were not abstract lessons; they were immediately applicable to her household. Small changes – planning food more carefully, understanding where costs could be reduced, and feeling confident asking for advice – helped ease daily pressure.

## Support for the whole family

The impact of support extended beyond Sarah alone. During school holidays, the family received food packs through holiday provision, reducing stress at a time when costs typically rise. During Eid, her younger children received gifts through the **Every Child Smiles** initiative, allowing them to celebrate alongside their peers without feeling excluded.

Her teenage daughter became involved in the **Young Ambassador Programme**, gaining confidence, leadership skills, and a sense of purpose. For Sarah, seeing her daughter supported and empowered was as important as the practical help. It reduced anxiety at home and helped her daughter feel hopeful about the future.

## What changed – and what didn't

Sarah's story does not end with a sudden escape from poverty. The family still faces financial pressure, and the margin for error remains small. But what has changed is their ability to cope.

They now have:

- food security during periods of instability,
- access to advice and trusted support,

- practical skills to manage limited resources,
- and confidence to seek help earlier, rather than waiting until crisis hits.

Reflecting on her experience, Sarah said:

"Without the foodbank, I honestly don't know how we would have managed this year. It wasn't just the food. It was knowing someone cared, explained things, and helped us find a way forward."

## Why this journey matters

Sarah's experience reflects the reality behind the data in this report. Many households supported by Luton Foodbank are not facing one-off emergencies, but ongoing pressure. Impact, therefore, is not always dramatic or immediate. It is cumulative.

This journey illustrates how emergency food, advice, dignity-led provision, community initiatives, and youth support work together. Individually, each element matters. Together, they create a pathway that helps families move from crisis management toward greater stability.





## Mobilising the Community

### People, Partnerships, and Collective Action

Luton Foodbank's work is powered by people. While food, funding, and facilities are essential, it is the strength of our community network that makes sustained impact possible. In 2025, this network enabled us to respond at scale, reach households quickly, and extend support beyond emergency food.

#### Volunteers: the backbone of delivery

In 2025, 150 active volunteers supported every aspect of Luton Foodbank's work. From sorting and packing food, to welcoming families, driving deliveries, supporting outreach, and running community events, volunteers made it possible to operate consistently across the borough.

Volunteers delivered 22 regular service sessions each week, ensuring that food and support were available when people needed them most. This level of commitment reflects not only generosity of time, but trust in the organisation and belief in its mission.

### What this achieved:

- reliable, borough-wide service delivery
- welcoming, dignified support at points of crisis
- resilience during periods of sustained high demand

Volunteers are often the first point of contact for people seeking help. Their ability to listen without judgement and respond with empathy plays a crucial role in building trust and encouraging earlier engagement.

#### Referrers: trusted pathways into support

Alongside volunteers, **550 referrers** across Luton acted as vital connectors between households and the foodbank. These include professionals and organisations working in health, education, housing, social care, and community settings.

#### Referrers help:

- identify households at risk of food insecurity,
- reduce barriers to accessing support,
- and ensure referrals are timely and appropriate.

This network allows Luton Foodbank to respond quickly and safely, particularly for people who may be reluctant to seek help independently.

### Community donations and access points

Luton Foodbank's supply chain is deeply rooted in the local community. In 2025, food donations were supported through:

- partnerships with local supermarkets,
- 13+ regular donation drop-off points across the borough,
- school and faith-based collections, and
- city-wide campaigns such as Harvest and Reverse Advent.

Volunteers play a key role in collecting, sorting, and redistributing these donations, transforming community generosity into practical support for families.

### What this achieved:

- a stable and responsive food supply
- increased community awareness of food poverty
- opportunities for residents to support neighbours directly

### Partnerships that strengthen impact

Luton Foodbank works closely with schools, faith groups, charities, and local organisations to extend reach and deepen impact. These partnerships allow us to:

- deliver culturally appropriate support,
- embed food security within wider wellbeing initiatives,
- and coordinate responses during periods of peak demand.

Partnership working also ensures that food support is linked to advice, skills, and preventative services rather than operating in isolation.

### Community as a protective factor

The scale of food insecurity in Luton means no single organisation can respond alone. What makes Luton Foodbank effective is not just what it provides, but how it mobilises collective action.

In 2025, volunteers, referrers, donors, schools, faith groups, and partners formed a living infrastructure of support. This network absorbed pressure, reduced isolation, and ensured that people facing hardship were not left to navigate crisis on their own.

### Why this matters

Community mobilisation is not simply about capacity; it is about sustainability. As demand remains high and pressures continue, the strength of this collective response determines how effectively Luton Foodbank can adapt, respond, and innovate.

This shared effort makes it possible to deliver emergency food, build resilience, and maintain dignity at scale – even in the face of rising need.





## Events & Participation

### Building Visibility, Wellbeing, and Collective Ownership

Events are a critical part of Luton Foodbank's work. They do more than raise funds. They create shared visibility around food insecurity, strengthen community connection, promote wellbeing, and give people tangible ways to take part in solutions rather than viewing hunger as a distant or abstract issue.

In 2025, our events programme brought together thousands of residents across Luton, spanning families, schools, faith communities, and local businesses.

### Luton Foodbank Colour Run

The Luton Foodbank Colour Run remains our flagship public event. In 2025, **600 participants** took part in this family-friendly run, raising funds and awareness while promoting physical activity and community pride.

#### What this achieved:

- Increased public awareness of food insecurity as a local issue

- Encouraged inclusive participation across ages and backgrounds
- Promoted health and wellbeing through accessible physical activity
- Generated unrestricted funds to support core services

The strong turnout demonstrated widespread community willingness to engage actively, not just donate passively.

### Primary School Colour Runs

**7 schools | 5,470 children engaged**

In 2025, the Colour Run expanded into 7 local primary schools, engaging 5,470 children in fundraising and physical activity.

Children used traditional sponsorship forms, learning that fundraising involves real effort, trust, and exchange. Small rewards were offered when targets were met, reinforcing positive reinforcement rather than competition.

#### What this achieved:

- Embedded early understanding of generosity and civic responsibility

- Supported physical activity and wellbeing
- Raised awareness of food poverty in an age-appropriate way

This work also aligned with local public health priorities. Luton continues to experience higher-than-average rates of childhood obesity, particularly among primary-age children. Encouraging enjoyable physical activity in familiar school settings supports broader wellbeing outcomes, even where foodbanks are not a health provider.

## 24-Hour Ramadan Challenge

The 24-Hour Ramadan Challenge invited participants to fast continuously for 24 hours in solidarity with those experiencing hardship, while raising funds for Luton Foodbank.

### What this achieved:

- Fostered empathy and understanding around hunger
- Strengthened cross-community engagement
- Linked fundraising with reflection and awareness rather than spectacle

This challenge resonated strongly with participants, particularly within faith communities, and reinforced the foodbank's commitment to culturally inclusive engagement.



## Community Garden Party (Thank-You Event)

In 2025, Luton Foodbank hosted a fully funded Garden Party to thank volunteers, partners, and supportive local businesses.

### What this achieved:

- Recognised and valued sustained contribution
- Strengthened relationships across sectors
- Reduced volunteer fatigue by prioritising appreciation and connection

Retention and morale are critical in high-pressure services. This event reinforced that volunteers and partners are not simply resources, but valued members of a shared mission.

### Why events matter to impact

While events are sometimes viewed as secondary to service delivery, in 2025 they played a strategic role by:

- increasing visibility of food insecurity without stigma,

- encouraging active participation rather than one-off giving,
- supporting physical and emotional wellbeing,
- strengthening long-term relationships with schools and families, and
- generating flexible funding to support core operations.

These outcomes are difficult to capture in numerical terms alone, but they are essential to sustaining a resilient, engaged community response.

### Limits and learning

We are careful not to overstate the impact of events. Participation does not replace policy change, nor does awareness alone reduce poverty. However, without sustained public engagement, long-term solutions become harder to build and harder to fund.

In 2025, our events programme demonstrated that when communities are invited to participate meaningfully, they respond – with energy, generosity, and commitment.







## Looking Ahead

### From Response to Resilience

The pressures that shaped 2025 have not eased. Demand for emergency food remains high, driven by rising living costs, insecure incomes, benefit disruption, and limited financial resilience among households across Luton. In 2025 alone, 7,352 households required food support, many at short notice and often more than once. This level of need makes one thing clear: while emergency food remains essential, it cannot be the only response.

Luton Foodbank's direction for 2026 sits within the wider ambition of Luton 2040, which frames poverty reduction as a shared, long-term responsibility requiring sustained community and system-level action (Luton Borough Council, 2025).

The year ahead will therefore focus on strengthening what works, scaling prevention, and protecting core provision in the face of continued pressure.

### What we will continue

In 2026, Luton Foodbank will continue to strengthen its approach to cultural inclusion by developing new partnerships with faith groups and community organisations. This will help ensure that food parcels,

holiday support, and crisis responses respect the traditions and needs of all residents, while also supporting sustainability and shared ownership of this work.

Emergency food provision will remain central to Luton Foodbank's work. Hunger requires an immediate response, and we will continue to:

- provide rapid support, with most households receiving food within 24–48 hours of referral,
- operate across six distribution centres to ensure borough-wide access,
- and deliver food with dignity, respect, and consistency.

We recognise that for many households, foodbanks continue to act as a critical buffer when other systems fail or are delayed. This role remains necessary.

### What we will strengthen and scale

Learning from 2025 has sharpened our focus on reducing repeat crisis and supporting longer-term stability. In 2026, we will prioritise:

## Preventative and early-intervention support

We will expand outreach and advice so that households can access support earlier, before financial pressure escalates into acute hunger.

## Dignity-led pathways

Food Clubs and choice-based provision will continue to grow, offering routes away from repeated emergency food use for people experiencing in-work poverty and ongoing financial strain.

## Skills and confidence building

Essential Skills workshops will be strengthened, focusing on practical tools that support everyday resilience around food, budgeting, energy use, and wellbeing.

## Investment in young people

Building on engagement with over 1,000 young people in 2025, we will continue to support youth leadership and resilience, recognising young people's role within families and communities facing hardship.

## What remains at risk

Despite these efforts, risks remain. If demand continues to rise without parallel investment in prevention and system-level change:

- emergency provision risks becoming overstretched,
- households may become increasingly reliant on crisis support,
- and the emotional and practical toll on volunteers and communities will grow.

Luton Foodbank cannot resolve structural poverty alone. Food insecurity reflects wider pressures in housing, employment, health, and social security. Community organisations absorb these pressures, but they cannot replace systemic solutions.

## What support is needed next

To sustain and deepen impact, Luton Foodbank will need:

- **continued funding** for core services and preventative programmes,
- **strong partnerships** across health, education, housing, and community sectors,
- **flexible funding** that allows us to adapt as needs change, and
- **policy engagement** informed by lived experience from the frontline.

Support from funders, partners, and decision-makers will be critical in ensuring that emergency food does not become the default response to long-term poverty.

## A shared responsibility

This report has shown what is possible when communities respond together: volunteers giving time, schools and faith groups mobilising, partners collaborating, and funders investing in dignity-led support. That collective effort reduced harm, protected children, and helped families navigate some of the most challenging conditions they have faced.

Looking ahead, our commitment is clear. We will continue to respond where there is hunger, and we will continue to push for a future where fewer people need to rely on that response.

**Because no one should be hungry.  
And no one should face crisis alone.**

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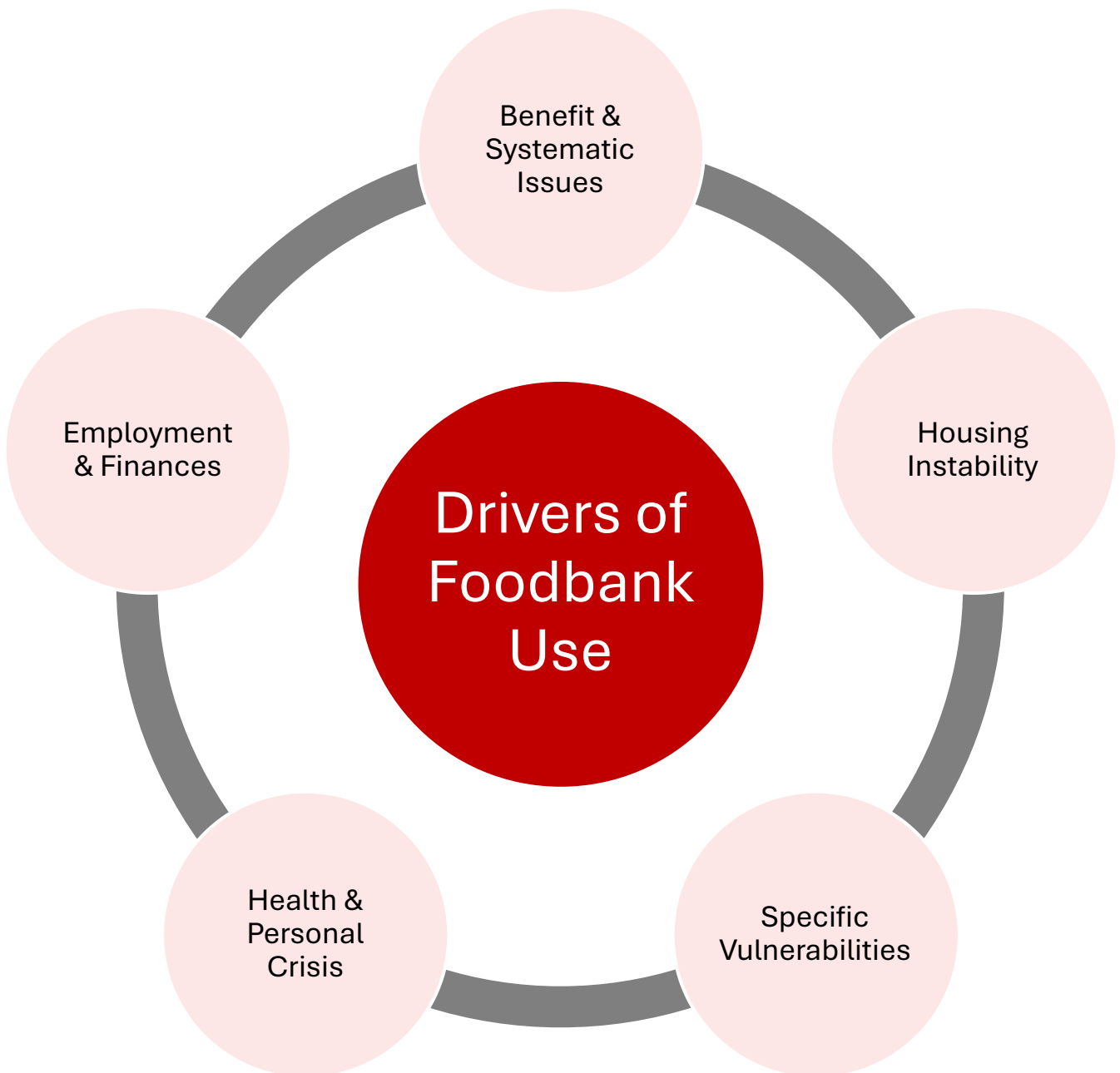
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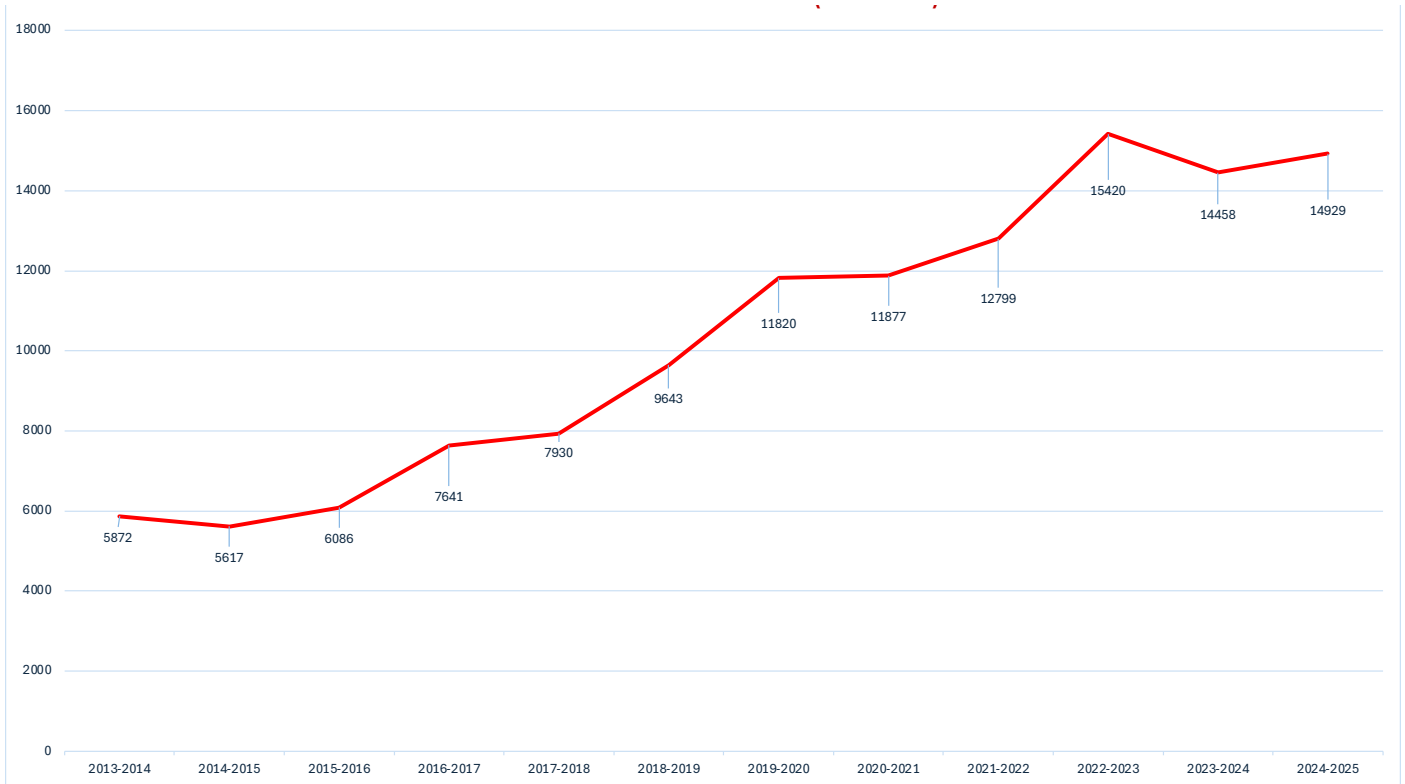
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## Appendix A

### Luton Foodbank Journey: Crisis to Confidence



## Appendix B



**Figure A1- Trend of Food Parcels Distributed (2013-2025)**

The number of parcels distributed has increased by approximately 154.2% over the 12-year period. After a slight dip in 2014–2015, the distribution has seen continuous year-on-year growth until 2023–2024. Following the peak in 2022–2023, the numbers have remained at high levels, suggesting a sustained increase in demand.

*Total of 124,092 food parcels were distributed over the last 12 years.*

NO CHILD  
SHOULD GO  
HUNGRY

no-one should

luton  
**Foodbank**  
luton  
**Foodbank**





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