



# **A New Home for the Foodbank - Q&A**

## **1. Why is the Foodbank moving?**

Sadly, since starting in 2013, Stratford Foodbank has faced significant increases in demand. In the first six months of 2019, we provided 1,559 emergency food parcels against 1,143 for the corresponding period in 2018, an increase of 36%. At one level our Foodbank represents a sticking plaster approach to this increased demand. Our limited space means, as we have become busier, we cannot always engage fully with our clients to understand how we might relieve their situation more effectively. There are examples of foodbanks nationally that have developed into 'Community Hubs', providing additional services and targeted signposting advice, through partnership work with other agencies. Our Trustees have been looking to see how this might be achieved in Stratford. The achievement of this vision is what our Trustees hope will ultimately lead to the elimination of the need for emergency food altogether. Reflecting on this vision it became clear that our existing accommodation, with its lack of space, lack of running water and temporary nature, is not equipped to support this vision – it became clear that Stratford Foodbank had outgrown its current location.

## **2. How has the Foodbank grown since 2013?**

Our Foodbank was started by necessity when the Salvation Army's soup kitchen left Stratford and the town's churches realised there would be a gap in services for those in a crisis situation. Since then the Foodbank has become an integral part of local welfare support, working in partnership with significant organisations such as Citizens Advice, Stratford District Council and The Job Centre. Our direct links into the local community through schools, businesses, churches and community groups have placed us at the centre of a local network that helps those that are most in need.

### Average Monthly Parcels distributed by Stratford upon Avon Foodbank

2013 – 86 parcels, 19 to children

2014 – 112 parcels, 20 to children

2015 – 111 parcels, 24 to children

2016 – 115 parcels, 30 to children – the year Foodbank distribution moved to Tesco

2017 – 186 parcels, 56 to children – the year Universal Credit rolled out in Stratford

2018 – 212 parcels, 68 to children

2019 – 255 parcels, 84 to children

### **3. Can we trust these figures?**

#### **I've heard that some clients make multiple visits to the Foodbank?**

The Foodbank works with a wide variety of referral agency partners, all of which are able to assess when Foodbank support is appropriate. Clients do not self-refer to the Foodbank. There is a 'guideline' in place which we ask Referral Agencies to adhere to where possible. Our food parcels are designed for short term 'emergency' use, so we ask agencies to let us know in advance if they need to refer a client to us more than three times in six months. Occasionally, a client may be referred to us by different agencies and the individual agencies may not necessarily know that, this can mean a client is referred to us unknowingly more than three times in six months.

However, we study our data very closely and twice a year run a report which reveals all those clients who have come to us four times or more in a six month period. We then discuss these clients with the various agencies involved so we can be sure clients are getting the necessary support to help them out of their crisis, and to add an additional level of 'verification'.

Unfortunately, there are some individuals who, for various reasons including illness, need longer term support. Also, with the changes in the benefits systems, some clients are waiting six weeks or more to receive their benefits and may need food parcels during that time.

So, in summary, we can be sure that our data is robust and these year on year increases in parcels reflect a situation of real increasing demand. It is unfortunately a pattern that is being seen across the country.

Having said that it is interesting to know that 86% of clients visiting our Foodbank in the last six months came three times or less. Only 14% came more than three times, and only 7% came six times or more. These are extremely positive figures and show that those clients that need to go beyond the 'three times in six month guideline' are a very small minority. In most cases these individuals are known to the Manager and Volunteer Referral Agency coordinator and their other reasons for continued support verified by our referral agency partners.

### **4. Where is the Foodbank moving to?**

The Foodbank will take a space in what was previously the Fred Winters retail store as part of the Housing Plus project. The centre will be accessed from Guild Street. The Foodbank will have a ground floor self-contained unit within this building which will house both our warehousing and distribution. We will also have access to the first floor area which will have meeting room space and a community café.

### **5. Why couldn't the Foodbank find additional space at Tesco's?**

The Fred Winter building was one of a variety of venue options the Trustees considered. Tesco have always been extremely accommodating and generous in their support of the Foodbank. They do not charge us rent and we benefit from electricity which they provide free of charge. However, there are some fundamental difficulties with the site, even if an additional portacabin had been bought in.

There is no running water, so clients and volunteers can only access toilets by visiting the store. Water for hot drinks and cleaning has to be bought in which can be burdensome and not always as hygienic as we would wish. The dimensions of our portacabins are, by definition, narrow. This means that the tables are close together making it difficult to have discreet conversations with clients without everyone else in the cabin hearing. We have outgrown our space in terms of warehousing too. Adding an extra portacabin would have only given us a small amount of additional storage, and we would still be constrained by the narrowness of the space limiting the numbers of volunteers we can have on site at our warehousing and distribution sessions. Also portacabins are not designed to take the weight of food we now need our warehouse to hold.

In the Fred Winters building we will benefit from around 2,000 square feet (about 186 square meters). We will also benefit from being within the community hub which means access to a community café, free meeting room space, and of course running water and toilets. Plus we will also have a concrete floor designed to take the weight of our food.

## **6. Will we still keep the storage at SITEL?**

The hope is that in time we can have all our food in one location. However in the short to medium time we would hope to continue our relationship with SITEL, to whom we are very grateful for all that they do to support us.

## **7. What about parking?**

This was an issue debated by Trustees. Currently we are in a unique situation regarding parking – being situated within a large carpark. However, Trustees decided that a reduction in available parking should not be a reason to not make the move into the Fred Winters Centre. The opportunity to be involved in the Housing Plus project, and benefit from the closer working relationships with referral agencies as a result, only comes once, and the decision was made that we should capitalise on this opportunity and move our operation to this location. There will be a number of organisations working out of the building and parking will be an issue for them all.

There are however, some very important caveats around parking that our Trustees will insist on as the project moves forward. They will ensure that there are at least one or two spaces for clients with mobility issues which are very close to our Foodbank entrance. We will also ensure that it is possible for our collections team, and all food donors, to pull up close to the Foodbank to drop off food donations.

Trustees do appreciate that generally, volunteers will not be able to park alongside the Foodbank. The reduced availability of parking will mean volunteering will take a little longer as volunteers will need to build in walking time to the new centre, and also that parking fees may be incurred. It's the Trustees desire that parking costs should not be a barrier to any volunteer and there will be the opportunity to claim back parking fees through expense claims should volunteers wish to do that. The extra time to walk from the parking area to the Foodbank cannot be mitigated. However, for those longer standing volunteers, memories of distributing from the URC Church and Holy Trinity posed similar parking considerations and we managed then. Trustees are aware

however, that for warehouse volunteers, this will be a complete change as the warehouse has been at the Tesco's carpark since 2014.

We will be issuing more advice on parking and some options to consider. Currently it has been suggested that parking at the Maybird offers three hours free parking and that the walk from there to the Fred Winters centre is only a few minutes. We also understand that it is possible to park for one hour free at the Bridgefoot car park – although that won't help when attending a distribution or warehousing session. We will check on the parking situation and come back with options as they become clear to us.

## **8. What about client anonymity?**

### **Won't clients feel exposed leaving the Guild Street building carrying bags of food?**

As with parking this is an issue that Trustees have discussed. It is interesting to remember that when the Foodbank moved distribution up to the Tesco carpark similar concerns were raised, i.e. that clients might feel exposed walking to the corner of the carpark where our cabin was located as they would be in full sight of shoppers and Tesco staff. In practise, we found that this was not an issue.

There are things about operating from a community Hub which may help with maintaining anonymity. Firstly, the Foodbank will be self-contained and if they wish, clients will be able to access the Foodbank through a side door from the within the carpark area directly into our part of the building. This would involve no interaction with any other part of the building. However, clients will also be able to enter the Foodbank through the community café, which will be positioned with an entrance directly off Guild Street. Many different people will be coming and going from the Hub so it will not necessarily be obvious that someone is entering for the reason of accessing Foodbank support. Clients will of course be leaving with bags, but so will other people leaving the Hub who may have been shopping in town (we will be backing onto Henley Street).

Trustees do not under estimate the need to ensure clients feel comfortable and that confidentiality is maintained in this new location. We know that even in our current location entering our Foodbank can be hugely daunting prospect for some clients. This issue of anonymity and confidentiality will be kept front of mind as plans develop for the specification of the Foodbank's section of the Fred Winters centre.

## **9. When will the Foodbank move?**

The Foodbank do not envisage moving our distribution before July 2020, and this date may slip based on planning application dates. This will give us plenty of time to create a properly thought through project plan to help us make the transition to our new home .

## **10. Is there a chance this move might not happen?**

A special Trustee meeting was convened last week to discuss whether the Foodbank should move to this new venue. All of the Trustees (with the exception of Caroline Sampson who had been on holiday) had visited the

proposed new venue. The meeting unanimously agreed, in principle, to proceed with the move. (Caroline had previously agreed by email). A commitment has now been given to the Housing Plus partnership that the Foodbank would like to proceed based on a signed agreement confirming the verbally agreed lease and costs. This means that the Trustees cannot not see any reason why would not continue with this plan.

## **11. What are the timescales for this new building?**

It is intended that the first business plan for the Centre, incorporating detailed costs, agreed funding provisions and projected income will be completed by the end of October. The conditional lease will then be signed while planning permission is sought. If consent is granted by the end of the year, Spring Housing will then progress the conversion of the building to create the housing accommodation and the Hub and all the meeting rooms and facilities. The partners' aim is that Stratford Housing First Centre will be open in the summer of 2020. In the period leading up to opening continuing contact will be made with potential clients through the focus groups led by providers to facilitate the design of the development and operation of the services of the Centre. The Foodbank would hope to be running their distribution sessions from the new site during the summer of 2020.

## **12. How much space will the new location provide?**

In the Fred Winters building we will benefit from around 2,000 square feet (about 186 square meters) of space. We will also benefit from being within the community hub which means access to a community café, free meeting room space, and of course running water and toilets. We will also benefit from a concrete floor designed to take the weight of our food.

## **13. What exactly is the Housing Plus project?**

The Housing Plus Project is a partnership of organisations formed to end rough sleeping and homelessness in Stratford upon Avon. To address this growing need, and to focus on preventative solutions, a partnership of public, private and voluntary sector agencies in Stratford has been established to create an innovative new approach to tackle the issues that often lead to rough sleeping and homelessness. The Housing Plus project will, for the first time, provide high quality affordable housing and short term accommodation with joined up wrap around services, for people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness. Although located in the town centre the Centre will support all homeless people or people at risk of homelessness from across the Stratford district. The project plans include the creation of 15+ residential units (of varying sizes/ facilities to meet individual requirements), private counselling rooms, training rooms, reception space, and the 'hub' office where the integrated management and service delivery team will be based.

## **14. What is the aim of the Housing Plus project?**

The focus of the new Stratford Housing Plus Centre will be the prevention of homelessness, and supporting people to gain accommodation and sustain their accommodation. Services will be offered to support these aims: including financial and debt management, access to health and social care services and support around life and vocational skills training and work experience, all within one building. The overall aim is to create positive new pathways to housing and independent living for some of the most vulnerable people in our local community. Through effective and joined up partnership working the Stratford Housing Plus Centre aims to help between 200 and 300 homeless and vulnerable people every year.

## **15. How do the aims of the Housing Plus project fit with the Foodbank?**

As well as looking at immediate housing issues the Housing Plus project will focus on preventative solutions. The clients that visit the Foodbank, referred to us by a wide variety of agencies in the area, often face a threat of becoming homeless, or are already homeless. By operating from within the new Fred Winters Centre, where specialist providers of housing support will also be based, we will be able to significantly improve our 'signposting advice'. Those front line volunteers who can recall the time when the P3's van parked along side our cabin during distribution sessions will have some idea of the benefit to our clients of this closer working with our referral agencies.

## **16. Who are the partners of Stratford's Housing Plus project?**

The Stratford Housing Plus Partnership comprises the following organisations-

- Stratford on Avon District Council.
- Warwickshire County Council.
- South Warwickshire CCG.
- Stratford Town Trust
- Stratford Town Council.
- Spring Housing Association.
- Orbit Housing Association.
- Stratford Foodbank.
- St Basils
- P3
- Springfield MIND
- Change Grow Live
- Citizens Advice South Warwickshire
- Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action.
- Job Centre Plus.

All of these organisations will work together within the Centre, and across the district, through outreach in the town centre and in local areas, to ensure the most effective and joined up approach to meeting the complex needs of homeless people and those facing homelessness.

## **17. Who is leading this partnership?**

Spring Housing will be the principle lease holder on the building. Spring Housing is a specialist housing association who work with homeless people, they will take a lease of the building and develop and manage the affordable housing accommodation.

Dominic Bradley Chief Executive of Spring Housing Association,

*"Tackling homelessness is more than just offering a bed for the night. It's about supporting people, understanding their circumstances and providing help so they can turn their lives around. In the*

*Stratford Housing Plus Centre project we will be working in the Hub with our housing staff, and other services to ensure everyone in Stratford, whether they are already living on the streets or in danger of being made homeless, has access to professional guidance and help with everyday things such as food, clothing and washing. As well as focussing on creating social networks and employment, Spring has a proud history of investing to prevent homelessness and although we have a long way to go on this project, we are greatly encouraged by the wealth of talent and resource within the partnership”*

## **18. How will the design and management of this project be run and sustained?**

As discussed above, the principle lease holder will be Spring Housing. However a partnership board has been established to oversee the project. Foodbank Trustees and the Manager are represented on this board and will be fully involved in the project planning etc and specifically the fit out of our part of the building.

## **19. How will this building and project be funded?**

Town centre rents in Stratford are high and a long-term lease of this building together with the capital costs of its conversion, fit out, furnishing and equipping will require funding from a variety of sources. Spring Housing and Stratford on Avon District Council will look to meet a significant share of initial costs. Income will be derived from both residential and non-residential lettings, where for example partner agencies take space within the Centre.

The government has committed funding to support the capital development of projects like this and discussions have commenced with Homes England\* regarding potential grant and revenue funding. Homes England will require detailed designs and costings to be provided, together with evidence of matched funding from other sources. They are positive about the case for funding. A detailed bid to Homes England for consideration under their Move-On Fund will be submitted in September. If successful this will relieve some of the burden project partners.

*\*Homes England is the non-departmental public body that funds new affordable housing in England.*

## **20. Doesn't this mean that the Foodbank will now need to pay rent?**

Yes it does - there is no side stepping this issue. Moving into the Fred Winter Centre will incur paying costs that we do not currently bear. However, we cannot remain in our existing accommodation, and there are some distinct cost advantages to taking space in the Fred Winters centre as opposed to other venues we looked at.

The capital costs of providing us with a new bespoke facility, designed exactly as we wish (within the confines of the building and its location) will be borne by the Housing Plus Project – not the Foodbank. This is a huge benefit. We had been looking at other locations where the capital costs to change the site into one suitable for us would have been very large. The opportunity at the Fred Winter Centre also means we are relieved of the project management of the refurbishment and retrofit works – an important consideration for a volunteer run organisation with only one paid member of staff.

We will now be paying rent that we had not been paying before and this will change things for our charity. It is important to understand that the rent we are being charged is a long way from market rates, but it still does place a considerable financial burden on our organisations that we have not had to manage before.

## **21. How will the Foodbank afford these extra costs?**

For the past few months the Foodbank has been identifying grants and trusts to whom we can submit an application. Our total running costs for 2020 have been estimated at £66.5k, to include rental and salary costs amongst other items. We currently have grants secured and predicted community fund raising that will deliver us £30.9K. This means we currently have a forecasted shortfall of £33.5k in 2020.

However, grant applications are already being worked on, and this task becomes much easier now that we have a specific venue identified. Although we are new to fundraising on this scale we have taken professional advice and are confident that these monies can be secured through grant applications. Our project is good one, and grant givers look favourably on organisations who can demonstrate a collaborative approach – collaboration and partnership work is the foundation of the Hosing Plus partnership.

Trustees are aware that the securing of these funds seems burdensome but we are confident it can be done. However it will be important, as we move forwards in 2020 that everyone involved in the Foodbank considers fundraising and what ideas and initiatives they can offer. This might be arranging a speaking opportunity for our Foodbank Manager, buying some of our Prize Draw tickets (more on this soon) or helping a school or Brownie group to hold a bake sale. No idea or amount will be too small.

## **22. How can I make sure I know what is happening with the planned move?**

The trustees will keep volunteers informed through a number of briefings both written and verbal. The opportunity to discuss these plans with Trustees will be at the public exhibition of the draft plans for the centre which go on display at the Town Hall Friday September 6th from 2.30pm- 5.30pm. All are welcome to attend. Trustees and the Foodbank Manager will be on hand to answer any Foodbank specific questions.

## **23. Does the Winters family have any involvement in this project?**

The use of the former Fred Winter store building for these purposes is enthusiastically supported by the Winter family, who are the long-term leaseholders, and by the Stratford Town Trust, who own the freehold. The Winter family has kindly agreed to the Stratford Housing Plus Centre being called the Fred Winter Centre, in honour of Mr Winter whose family operated a retail business in the town for 160 years

For further information please contact the Foodbank Manager, Marion Homer on email [info@stratforduponavon.foodbank.org.uk](mailto:info@stratforduponavon.foodbank.org.uk) by calling 07736 611323.

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