**Notes from Feeding Liverpool Gathering**

**26th September 2017**

**----------------------------------------------------------------------------------**

1. From a ‘what drives foodbank use’ perspective we need to challenge the overall policy narrative that addiction, worklessness, family breakdown were causes of poverty, rather than consequences of it.
2. Benefit sanctions are over over-represented in pregnant women. This was reinforced by Annette because of the importance of ante-natal care.  There’s a broader issue here about care for children given the prevalence of women undertaking caring roles.
3. There are reverse consequences of welfare - people actually move further away from the labour market as a result of benefit change – caused by things like increased stress and anxiety, but also the practical inability to undertake training and volunteering as part of their job search requirements.
4. The system stifles people's free choice – people are put in a position where they feel under pressure to take any job rather than their aspiration. The question raised about work is even a desirable outcome for some – given childcare or illness.
5. Domestic violence and its impact seemed to be a recurring story from a number of women using foodbanks – and in a few of Ruth’s cases. People move from place to place and have to make a fresh start each time, away from support systems.
6. Process was demoralising. It constantly asks people to think about how they feel on their worse day. This is sometimes contrary to medical advice. People with illness or disabilities often play down the worst affects and are more positive than they actually are.
7. We talk about the cumulative impact in terms of changes to multiple benefits financially impacting on a person / group of people. There is a practical element to this - repeat reassessments are themselves cumulative impact. This is a lived experience. We need to hear the voices and include them in the policy discussions.
8. Legal aid support is being withdrawn at the same time as welfare reform. As part of the process, those in power believe the expert letter, but not the person themselves.
9. Those administering the process are themselves under pressure to meet targets or demands ‘from on high’