



FOOD BANK WARS

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Welcome

We are going to talk about an unusual complaint that we received last year, which involved two people impersonating Environmental Health Officers.

We will explain the set up involving food banks and their charitable organisations and how people can apply to become volunteers.

This case was unusual and resource intensive

April 2022

We received a phone call in early April 2022 from Complainant A...

I want to report a couple working at the emergency food bank in Ashfield because they are handing out food that is past its use-by date. I know that they also leave this food in the car overnight and it has given me food poisoning.

During the phone call it was established that:

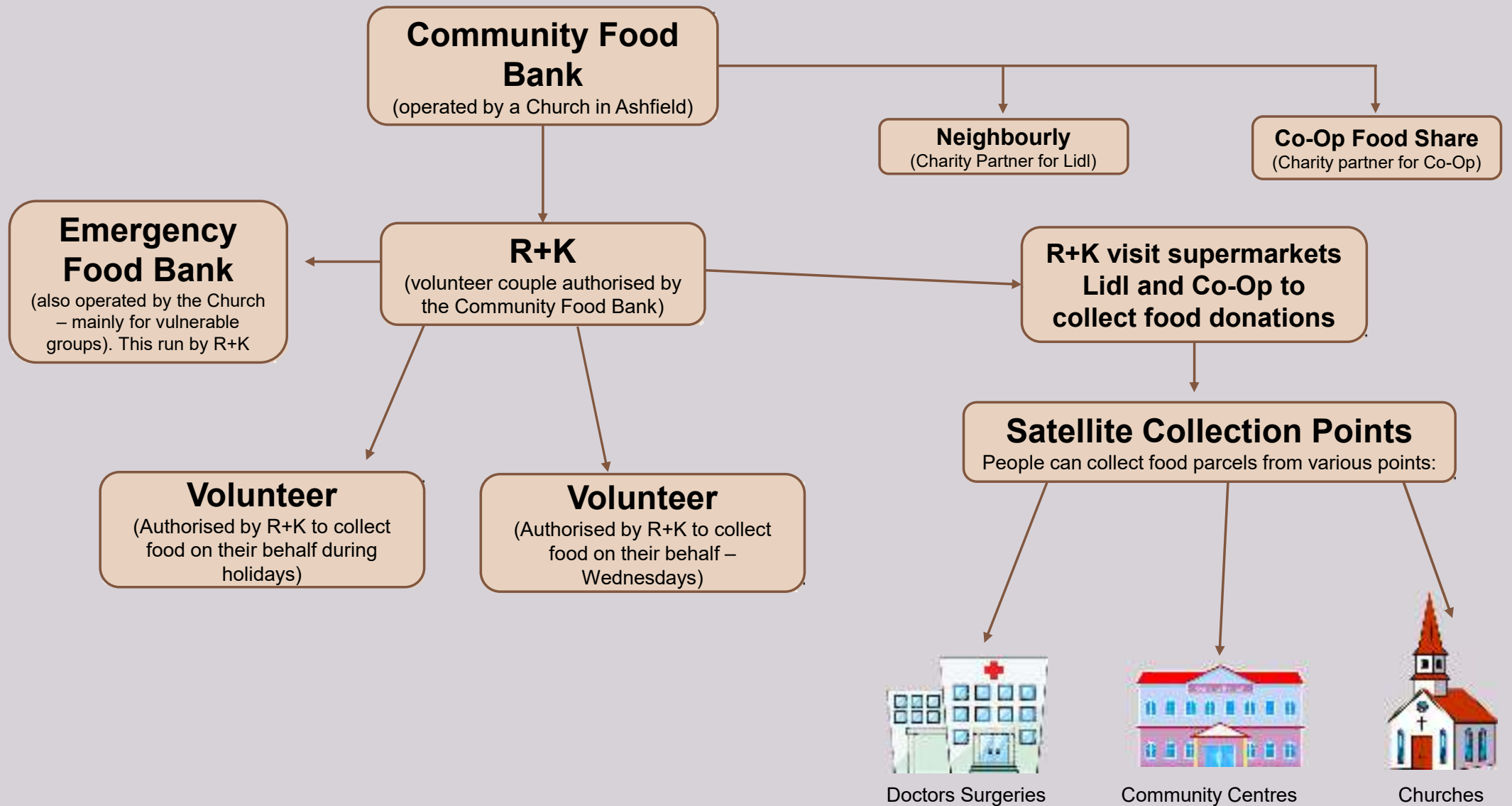
- The emergency food bank was not a registered food business on our database.
- Ironically, Complainant A informed us that a member of her family, 'Complainant B' also ran their own food bank business - which was not registered either.
- Complainant B was contacted via email to register their food business.
- Complainant A also emailed a picture of the food in the car.



Complainant A



Complainant B



May 2022 – Our investigation

The Community Food Bank contacted us to complain about two women visiting supermarkets and impersonating themselves as EHO's. They had also given the managers at the supermarket's letters.

Community Food Bank also inform us they allege Complainant A is operating a donation food business from their home address



Lidl contacted us to then allege that two women visited their store claiming to be EHO's.

They claimed that K+R were being investigated for food hygiene offences and that they should stop providing foods for their charity.



Neighbourly reported to us that they also received a similar letter. They wanted to know if this letter was legit and from an EHO working at Ashfield District Council.

We explained to the Community Food Bank, Lidl and Neighbourly that the letter was not from our department. We requested copies of the letters. Lidl also kindly provided us with CCTV footage.

The Letters

environmental health
Out of date frozen meat
food and other products.

This is a letter for the manager
at the coop no. Huthwaite

[redacted] they came to your
shop to collect food.

Themselves and the organisation are
being investigated by the environmental
health, because they have been
collecting and storing the food
in their car, garage, for days and weeks
and instead of giving it away straight
away.

They have made several people poorly
and they have gave people food poisoning.

I suggest that you find someone
else to pick up from now on
while I do this investigation.

Kind regards
environmental health officer

Letter sent to the Co-Op

environmental health
Out of date frozen meat food
and other products.

This letter is for the manager
at Lidl, no. Bakers in Redfield

[redacted] could you please
help to collect food from your
shop, organisation are willing
to help you, the environmental
health because they have been
collecting and storing the food
in their car, garage for days,
weeks instead of giving it away straight
away, they have made several
people poorly and they have gave
people food poisoning.

I suggest you find someone else
to pick up from now on, while
this is ongoing.

Kind regards
environmental health officer

Letter sent to Lidl

May 2022 – Our investigation

- We received redacted copies of the letters from Lidl and Neighbourly.
- Neighbourly received an application form. They commented that the writing on the application form and letter were suspiciously very similar. Neighbourly also confirmed that a different address had been used and that the applicant had provided a charity registration number.
- We still had not received a food registration form from Complainant B's food bank business.
- We decided it was time to visit each of the known food banks in our district including the community centre known as Premises X which was stated on the application form to Neighbourly from Complainant B. It was also necessary to visit other supermarkets and retailers such as Greggs, Morrisons, Subway etc to see if they had received any false letters or visitors impersonating as EHO's.
- In the meantime, an inspection was then carried out at K+R's emergency food business which they operated from their domestic premises. At this visit the complaint of food being stored overnight in the vehicle was investigated as well as handing out foods past their use-by dates.

End of May 2022 – Premises X – Community Centre

Information obtained from the Manager at this centre included:

- They had accepted some foods even though they no longer operated as a food bank.
- They knew Complainant A and B because the husband of Complainant A used to volunteer at the centre.
- They stopped operating as a food bank simply because they do not have the space to store the food.
- They confirmed that they had not applied to Neighbourly to start back up as a food bank.
- They also confirmed that they had no knowledge that Complainant B had used their charity web page or their registered charity number.

We concluded that:

- The letter, application form and impersonation of an EHO was in fact being orchestrated by Complainant A and B
- Complainant B had set up their own food bank business falsely using Premises X's website and charity registration number to apply to the Co-Op Food Share and Neighbourly (Lidl).
- We asked the Manager of Premises X to put this information in writing to us.



Manager of Premises X

What legislation covers the impersonation of an EHO?

We contacted the Food Standards Agency National Food Crime Unit, and they confirmed that the Police may have the remit to investigate this offence.

Environmental Health do not have the powers to act against anyone who impersonates an EHO.

They suggested that the Police may have the powers to investigate this offence.

June 2022 – Conducting our investigation



We submit a Data Protection Act request to Neighbourly for access to an unredacted copy of the application form that Complainant B submitted to Neighbourly on behalf of Premises X

We now have a distribution address which is Complainant A and B's private domestic address.



After conducting visits to various supermarkets and smaller retailers within our district we gather intelligence that most of these premises were familiar with Complainant A and B.

Some of them had also received letters impersonating as EHO's however they were disregarded by these retailers, and they were unsuccessful at obtaining food donations for their charity.

June 2022 continued...



- Confirmation from Manager that an application form had been received
- Advised not to issue any food donations
- Regular visits by Complainant A
- Manager confirmed that Complainant A was the same person that had handed in the letter pretending to be EHO's.



We send a DPA request to Co-Op Food Share to obtain a copy of the application form.

On receipt of this it provided evidence that Complainant B falsified their charity status

In the meantime, we happened to pass the domestic address and noticed that there was a large mobile burger van parked at the rear of the address. We had no record of this business on our food premises database.

To summarise so far...

- Complainant A and Complainant B are impersonating EHO's from Ashfield District Council
- They are visiting many food outlets and supermarkets requesting food donations
- Complainant B has set up a food bank website which includes a registered charity number under false pretences (this was confirmed by Premises X).
- Complainant B had yet to register their charity food business
- Complainant A reported K+R's registered charity business as unhygienic, donating out of date foods and storing foods in their car overnight discrediting their reputation
- The mobile burger van stored at Complainant A and B's address was not a registered food business.

Considerations for thought included the following:

1. Were Complainant A and B vulnerable people and visiting many retailers and supermarkets to obtain food for themselves because of the Cost of Living Crisis
2. Could Complainant A and B be falsely obtaining foods to operate their mobile burger van
3. Is it possible that Complainant A and B had set up their own private enterprise of collecting food donations and selling them on to their friends and neighbours

August 2022 – Applying for a Warrant



- We are granted a warrant from Mansfield Magistrates Court to be able to enter the home of Complainant A and B
- We informed the magistrate that there was a child of school age living at the address, and therefore consideration was given to the best time to execute the warrant.
- We liaised with other internal partner agencies.

September 2022 – Executing the Warrant

We executed the warrant on the 11th September 2022.

- On arrival Complainant B answered the door
- The situation became heated very quickly and the Police stepped in
- Complainant A and B were interviewed under PACE
- We gathered evidence and took photographs.

At the domestic address we found...

- A room with two chest freezers full of frozen foods including pizzas, burgers, tinned products, pasta, soft drinks, cobs, ice cream, sausages and a big tray of avocados!
- The burger van was full of stock including supermarket baskets
- We could not find any evidence of cash, receipts or records to show that they were operating a business from their domestic address
- Complainant A and B claimed that they had been given all the food from a particular charitable organisation.

A week later

Complainant A and B came into the Council Offices demanding to meet with Environmental Health to explain that Complainant B's charity page had been hacked therefore they could not account for why there was a charity page in their name.

They said that they could prove this as one of their friends had access to their Facebook account. They left us with copies of this evidence.

What happens next?

- We have not received any further contact from any food banks
- There is nothing in legislation for anyone impersonating an EHO (unlike impersonating a Police Officer)
- Consideration of the Cost-of-Living Crisis and Police resources
- We have put barriers in place to hopefully prevent any similar recurrence
- The matter is still pending



Any Questions?

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