

CONSULTATION RESPONSE: ENDING THE NEED FOR FOOD BANKS

This response was submitted as part of the government's 2021-22 consultation on the draft national plan for ending the need for food banks, [which you can read here](#).

1 Do you think that the approach outlined is consistent with the vision to end poverty and the need for food banks? Is there anything else you think should be included?

Yes. The outlined approach is overall consistent with the vision to end poverty and the need for foodbanks. We appreciate the dual focus on prevention and response, the recognition that insufficient and insecure incomes are what drive household food insecurity and the call for more holistic services to support households and individuals. We have some further considerations to be included in the National Plan.

Prevention:

It is vital that the Scottish Government continue improving household incomes by promoting the real Living Wage, reducing the cost of living and maximising income from social security. The reality is that many referrals to foodbanks come about as a result of the harsh sanctions on Universal Credit, and we appreciate the actions taken by the Scottish Government to mitigate this and look forward to following the continuous roll-out of Social Security Scotland. We also welcome the commitment of Scottish Government to begin work to deliver a Minimum Income Guarantee.

A 2018 study assessed the affordability of the UK Government's Eatwell Guide by income decile. The analysis showed that it would cost £41.93 per week to eat as per Eatwell Guide recommendations, and that 26.9% of UK households would need to spend more than a quarter of their disposable income after housing costs to meet the Eatwell Guide costs (https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/Affordability-of-the-Eatwell-Guide_Final_Web-Version.pdf). Since 2018, food prices have risen further so it is reasonable to assume that these calculations would be higher in 2022. In addition, food costs, travel costs and rising energy bills also present problems for those in unskilled work – current wages are not enough to run a household and travel to work.

In addition, we would like to add that everyone should be entitled to a real Living Wage regardless of age. Young people living independently have the same costs as adults and in some instances their costs can be higher – for instance, the UC housing element for private rented sector tenancies is lower for people under 35. Moreover, we would add our concern for precarious working conditions such as 0-hour contracts as acknowledged by the Scottish Government in the Fair Work First Implementation publication from September 2021 – and would appreciate initiatives to combat this working practice across Scotland.

Response:

While above mentioned prevention work is extremely important, we must acknowledge that these changes take time and in the meantime, households and individuals in crisis situations who rely on foodbanks should not be left without support.

Welfare and debt advice can be a helpful tool to maximise people's income and make sure they receive the money they are entitled to. However, it is important that any cash-first responses are easily accessible, flexible and efficient. We have some concerns that although the cash-first leaflet highlights assistance available to some, often people have already exhausted these avenues before accessing a foodbank and would be left without an important safety net if foodbanks are 'phased out' as the primary response to food insecurity. Advice agencies are already struggling to cope with the demand and we have some concerns that there will be time delays which will place people in more hardship.

Moreover, some people are over the threshold of the benefit cap so will not be entitled to additional benefits, but they might still be struggling with food insecurity. We understand the importance of referring to financial assistance when needing food support rather than merely a referral to a food bank, but most of the time people are not spending their money badly, and food insecurity is simply a fact of trying to live on very little funds in a world with ever increasing living costs.

Moreover, some people experiencing food poverty might not readily engage with services, perhaps if they are struggling with their mental health or have lost trust in services. In such cases, handing someone a leaflet might not be enough for them to show up to an appointment and they would need additional support to do this.

Following this, we want to highlight the importance of continuous support for dignified access to food. The need for foodbanks will not disappear overnight and communities must have other alternatives of food support in place. In our experience, food support is just a small part of something much bigger and we want to emphasise the importance of food eaten collectively as a real catalyst for community building and change. We have seen this time and time again through projects such as our community pantries and cook clubs, and we believe that such initiatives are vital responses to food insecurity.

Not only do they offer dignified access to food, but food provision with no "gatekeeping" (i.e. open to anyone who wants to attend) provides people with the opportunity to be part of a community, build new relationships and access new services. From surveys carried out we know that visitors find using our pantry service a positive experience and say that it helps them to better manage finances and makes it easier to access a wider variety of foods. Many visitors live alone so visiting the pantry gives them a chance to feel connected. For people who are hesitant to seek help with other services, the community pantry gives us an opportunity to connect, establish trust and provide more directed

support or signpost to other services. In this way, food provision can provide an entrance to other, holistic services for individuals and households as mentioned in the National Plan.

Perhaps such community food projects could be included in the Independent Food Aid Network's hierarchy of responses (Diagram 1, p. 7 of the National Plan) as a step before emergency food parcels, to recognise that not all food assistance need to be one-directional but that it can be about mutual aid and foster relationships – something that food vouchers to supermarket chains will not be able to achieve.

When issuing shopping vouchers, consideration should be given to people experiencing domestic abuse or who are otherwise financially impacted by another household member (for example due to gambling issues). They may be impacted if food banks close and shopping vouchers are handed out instead since such vouchers can be sold. Issuing vouchers may also decrease access to food for families where one or both parents have addiction issues. This is not to say that vouchers are out of the question in these situations, but it does highlight the need for more specialised support, in addition to welfare and money advice, for some households.

2 Do you think that the actions underway will help to reduce the need for food banks as a primary response to food insecurity?

Don't know

3 Do you think that the suggestions for what more we plan to do will help to reduce the need for food banks as a primary response to food insecurity?

Don't know

4 Is there anything else that you think should be done with the powers we have at a national or local level to reduce the need for food banks as a primary response to food insecurity?

We welcome national guidelines and a shared vision across Scotland, but it is important to allow for flexibility in local responses. As mentioned, we want to highlight the role that food support can play in bringing people together and argue that alternative community responses revolving around dignified food access should be available in place of foodbanks. We are keen to see that any changes suggested within the proposal draws from the evidenced success of the community pantry and community cook club approaches.

In community pantries, measures are put in place to reduce the 'free' aspect of food provision, for example, people give a £2 donation for a bag of food containing 12 items. This often equates to people donating more than £2 thus helping others in their local

community. FareShare items such as fresh produce are free which gives people access to items that require cooking and planning, giving people working in the larder an opportunity to talk about recipes and eating healthy and balanced meals. The 12 items have had a positive impact on people's choice and control as they will ask for what they need rather than just taking whatever is being offered. Importantly, pets are also taken care of through this approach – many people will ask for food for their animals before themselves, and we always keep in mind that it is not just people needing food.

On a local level, access to growing spaces could be extended to include people in low income households, perhaps as part of a community pantry project. This could include access to allotments and crofts, which are currently not affordable on a low income, and involve gardening training and cooking classes. When considering shopping vouchers as an alternative to foodbanks (as proposed in the National Plan), it could be considered to issue vouchers to local larders, food shops or growing spaces to support the local economy rather than merely issuing vouchers to supermarket chains.

On a national level, education on food, including cooking classes, understanding labels, balanced meals and budget cooking, could be provided. For example, young people have little knowledge or understanding of cooking skills and budgeting and this could be reintroduced into national curriculum.

5 Do you have any views on how we intend to measure impact, and what would give you confidence that we are moving in the right direction?

The greatest measure of success would be if foodbanks closed because they were redundant and people no longer sought them out or because other alternatives, such as community pantries, had been put in place instead.

We appreciate that the draft National Plan has been developed with foodbank networks and people accessing foodbanks – continuous involvement of people with lived experience is key to understand progress on the intended outcomes. We would also welcome further involvement of a wider range of third sector organisations who work with people using foodbanks and can help understand and mitigate barriers to accessing other services.

An option could be to deliver the National Plan through an interface such as the third sector interfaces (CVS) across Scotland. Feedback could be collated from the third sector and inform Scottish Government of progress and developments – in this way, local organisations are on the same page, they are able to report together and talk over local concerns and obstacles. This would strengthen partnership work and support a cohesive, local approach to ending the need for foodbanks, ensuring that initiatives are reviewed and impact is monitored.

6 Is there anything else that you think should be considered in the development of this plan?

We would encourage conversations with providers of dignified food access to gather evidence of best practice and discuss the potential to convert existing foodbanks into more dignified responses. Moreover, adequate funding and resources should be in place to sustain dignified access to food in the longer-term.

When designing out foodbanks as primary response, it is worth acknowledging the impact on frontline workers. If there is reduced provision to support those in need, the impact of this will ultimately fall on those workers who deal directly with clients needing support. If food provision is reduced, it could make client work more intense and frustrating, with clients feeling less supported. This again highlights the need for other alternatives to food banks being in place.

As part of the Scottish Government's ambition to create a trauma informed workforce and across Scotland, staff involved in the National Plan (such as food providers and money and welfare advisors) could benefit from training on stigmatisation and trauma informed practice.

Moreover, the plan could also include creating more employment opportunities and increasing the skills needed to be able to apply for jobs, and the support needed to achieve this.
