

## Official Response

**Subject:** Ending the need for foodbanks  
**Requested by:** The Scottish Government  
**Date:** 24 January 2022  
**Prepared on behalf of:** The Faith Impact Forum

### **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

We are broadly supportive of the holistic approach put forward in this draft national plan to end the need for food banks in Scotland, and thank the Scottish Government for their commitment to eradicate food insecurity and to address poverty at its root causes.

In recent years the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland has expressed growing concern about food insecurity. The Church has been on a journey, when in 2012 there was an encouragement to Presbyteries to act to establish food banks by 2014 this approached had shifted, recognising that the Church's response to food poverty and insecurity should go beyond charity; it is primarily a justice issue. We have expressed severe concern about the ongoing and growing reliance on foodbanks in response to food insecurity in Scotland. We continue to urge both the Scottish and UK Government to prioritise the eradication of food insecurity. We know that across the country there are many examples of dedicated work that goes into supporting local communities, and the immense generosity, given in time, money and donations, and these acts of kindness should be acknowledged and commended. But we agree that they should not be needed in a society as wealthy and affluent as ours and where food is abundant.

There is another important reason for ending the need for foodbanks that goes beyond making sure people don't have to go hungry; it is that for many people who have to use foodbanks the degree of embarrassment and shame they feel robs them of dignity and impacts on their self-worth. The 'Dignity: Ending Hunger Together in Scotland' report from the Independent Working Group on food poverty chaired by the Rev Dr Martin Johnstone at a time when he was Secretary for Church and Society for the Church of Scotland, emphasises this point 'How can society's response to food insecurity, and especially hunger, preserve people's dignity?'

We have called for the creation of community food projects that bring neighbours together for sharing, growing, cooking and eating together. As the pandemic took hold many churches that provided drop-in services, such as community cafés, had to shut their doors and shift their provision to distributing take-aways and food parcels in lieu of communal 'sit-down' meals. One example is Lochee Parish Church in Dundee, which is one of 5% of parishes with the highest concentration of deprivation (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) and is supported by the Church of Scotland Priority Areas team. The church is part of the Dundee Food Insecurity Network. For over 10 years the church has run a community café offering a free meal and important opportunities for socialising, one of the first places to do so in Dundee. The café also acts as a hub for other services, such as assistance with filling in benefit application forms and health and wellbeing support. During the strictest restrictions in the pandemic the café was still able to provide some take-away provision but they were

often not able to invite the community in their building. The church did obtain funding to open a community larder, and is currently the only larder in the city which is free and without a referral.

In a just and fair economy, these services would not need to exist. We agree that often the biggest problem people experiencing food insecurity face is not having enough money to meet all their daily needs. We are supportive of the Living Wage and, where people are still struggling to make ends meet, we support measures to increase benefit uptake and support payments. We note however that particularly vulnerable people, such as people seeking asylum and those with no recourse to public funds, are severely limited by what help is available to them and are often reliant on charitable organisations for support in many aspects of day-to-day life, including food; these people must not be forgotten: In diagram 1, the hierarchy of responses in each step in the journey (from emergency food parcels to statutory cash grants) involves increasing trust in people experiencing hardship to make good choices for themselves and their families. We welcome this, and believe this trust is well placed. We also recognise that the ongoing communication between, government, those who experience poverty, and the wider public is needed to ensure that trust is renewed and embedded with Scottish society.

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

Yes

**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?**

Yes

**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 know from those working in local churches that food insecurity doesn't exist in isolation from other important societal issues. Ending the need for food banks relies on joined up approaches that are designed with the input of people who have direct experience of struggling against poverty; people going through the asylum process, who are prohibited from working, or who have been designated No Recourse to Public Funds in particular are extremely vulnerable. We encourage the Scottish Government to continue to listen to the voices of those who have direct experience of poverty, and to take seriously any concerns that are raised as part of this consultation.

We all have a duty to consider where our food comes from, how it is produced, and how our consumption of food impacts on the planet. Tackling the broader injustices in Scotland's food supply system may go some way to ensure that good healthy food is accessible, and affordable, for all. It is an indignity that while many people are going hungry, plentiful supplies of good-quality food in Scotland are wasted each day in our food supply system, which is damaging to our society and to our planet.

The Barn Church Community Fridge, Culloden, which was set up during the pandemic provides support for those who need access to food and has also saved over 10 tonnes of food to date from landfill. The project works in partnership with local supermarkets to reduce food waste and passes on safe, good quality expired food to the community. As an environmental project, the Fridge helps to reduce stigma around food insecurity and enables volunteers to build relationships with fridge users and identify any additional needs. Alongside the Community Fridge, the church also runs the Food4Good programme which provides weekly shopping bags to households in need, as well as holistic support including debt and budgeting courses and cooking classes utilising ingredients from the fridge.

We acknowledge that there are many factors outwith the powers of the Scottish Government that contribute to food insecurity, the use of food banks, and poverty more widely, one issue being the recent soaring increase in unavoidable household debt due to loss of earnings during the covid restrictions. We continue to support the ‘Reset the Debt’ campaign to call on the UK Government to establish a Jubilee Fund to provide grants to pay off and cancel unavoidable debt accrued during the lockdown period, and note that the Social Renewal Advisory Board recommend that new debt write-off schemes should be developed in Scotland. (If not now, when?)

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/not-now-social-renewal-advisory-board-report-january-2021/pages/5/>

**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?**

We are supportive of measures that include working in partnership with organisations and people who have direct experience of poverty. We would also suggest consideration of measures of:

- Food waste
- Proportion of income needed for a healthy diet
- Proportion of income spent on food (as a measure of inequality)
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**6. Is there anything else that you think should be considered in the development of this plan?**

We believe in the importance of sharing food together and that food and community are interlinked. As the plan develops there should be explicit links with other Scottish Government strategies, including around mental health, child poverty, refugee integration, substance use and so on.

An example of how joined up provision can make a real difference to a community can be seen in the services offered at Holy Trinity Church, Wester Hailes in Edinburgh where a foodbank and café are run by the church alongside established debt advice and job club services, which are delivered in partnership with Christians Against Poverty (CAP). Wester Hailes is an urban area with longstanding high levels of deprivation and is supported by the Church of Scotland Priority Areas team. The support that is offered goes beyond providing food; vouchers for the café are offered alongside food parcels and foodbank users are empowered to select what items they take away with them when possible. The foodbank supports those referred or within the benefits system but also those who are simply without food, and the church endeavours to keep track of the individuals using the service in order to identify those who might need more long-term support. The strong partnership between Holy Trinity and CAP also allows for an integrated debt advice service and helps the church to build connections and relationships with people in the local community. The support offered through the debt centre is free and long-term depending on the level of support that is needed, and some clients may stay connected with the debt centre for upwards of 5 years or more. The partnership was also successful during 2020 in receiving Scottish Government funding to run a bus campaign advertising the work of the debt centre.

Just as it is imperative that emergency food should be provided with dignity, the principles of dignity, fairness and compassion should continue to apply to any cash-first response.

We remain interested in and supportive of work to explore how the introduction of a Minimum Income Guarantee and Universal Basic Services might help tackle the challenge of food insecurity.

We have our own ideas and experiences which we are happy to share with the Scottish Government. We also have a wide geographic reach and assets in terms of buildings, community halls, staff and volunteers all across the country. We believe there is potential for direct co-operation and continued working together and we would be keen to maintain a close dialogue with civil servants and ministers about how we can work together.

