Ending the need for food banks: consultation on a draft national plan

 Scottish Government consultation

Summary Paper

The Scottish Government are consulting on a draft national plan to end the need for food banks in Scotland. The draft national plan sets out what is already being done by the Scottish Government and others to combat poverty, and proposes some further measures to work towards ending the need for food banks as the first response to food insecurity in Scotland. Many churches are actively involved in providing emergency food to people experiencing hardship and destitution and are uniquely placed to share their experience, knowledge and insights in the consultation process.

This paper is intended to help churches in their responses by providing a short summary of the contents of the draft national plan and some useful links alongside the six consultation questions. The full text of the draft plan can be found [here](https://www.gov.scot/publications/ending-need-food-banks-consultation-draft-national-plan/pages/1/).

The easiest way to respond is [online](https://consult.gov.scot/housing-and-social-justice/ending-the-need-for-food-banks/) via Citizen Space. The consultation ends onthe **25 January 2022.**

**Background**

The Scottish Government have set out their vision for Scotland to reduce poverty and end the need for foodbanks. In this vision everyone has a sufficient and reliable income to access the food they need, and which meets their personal preferences and cultural requirements. Emergency food, when it is needed, is provided with dignity, and in a way that reduces the risk of future need. Dignity in this context means people with direct experience are involved in decision making, the social value of food is recognised, people are provided opportunities to contribute and are left with the power to choose [[1]](#footnote-1). This is part of a human rights approach and contributes to the Government's commitment to fulfil the right to food as part of the right to an adequate standard of living. The Government acknowledges that delivering this vision requires leadership and action at all levels across Scotland. The approach that the Government is consulting on is weighted towards preventing crisis situations, with joined-up emergency ‘cash-first’ support available locally, if required. However, it is also recognised that 85% of benefits spending, including state pensions, are reserved to Westminster.

Food is the most awarded Crisis Grant item by the Scottish Welfare Fund with almost 160,000 awards made in the last year. At present, often the easiest way to support someone experiencing financial hardship and food insecurity is a referral to a food bank, although this does not address the root causes of poverty. Furthermore, there are certain groups who are at higher risk of experiencing financial hardship, including people living in the most deprived areas, lone parents, disabled people, minority ethnic households and people with no recourse to public funds. The need to end food insecurity aligns with existing Scottish Government policy to eradicate poverty, and for all people to have pride in and to benefit from their food by 2025[[2]](#footnote-2). Additionally, in June 2021 the Scottish Government wrote to the UK Government to ask for a full transfer of employment powers to the Scottish Parliament.[[3]](#footnote-3)

As a result of a national plan to end the need for food banks[[4]](#footnote-4) the Scottish Government hope to have:

* Designed out the need for food banks as primary response to food insecurity
* Increased access to income-boosting services and holistic support
* Improved household financial resilience
* Improved household wellbeing

**Associated Question**:

*Q1. 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? [Y/N/Don't Know] [Open comment]*

**Action already underway**

In 2020-21 the Scottish Government invested £2.5 billion into support for low income households, including nearly £1 billion to support children. Other preventative actions have been through support for **Fair Work** and **Reducing the Cost of Living**, including, but not limited to, the Citizen’s Advice Network Money Talk Team advice service, building more affordable homes, investment in energy efficiency, funding for the Affordable Credit Fund, and measures aimed at supporting women in work and tackling the root causes of the gender pay gap. Scottish Government support for families has been through a variety of measures such as the Parental Employability Support Fund, free school meals, school clothing grants and 1140 hours of Early Learning and Childcare for three, four and eligible two-year olds. For Young Scots and students support includes the National Entitlement Card, summer activity programmes and bursaries for fees and living costs whilst studying in higher education in Scotland.

There are also a range of preventative **Social Security** measures and responsive **Discretionary Support** currently available. Around 700,000 existing disability and carer benefit clients are being moved from the Department of Work and Pensions to Social Security Scotland, including the Child Disability payment which became available in November 2021. The Scottish Welfare Fund exists to provide emergency cash grants to people on low incomes and the Scottish Government has committed to a review of the Fund’s purpose and operation. Additionally, Best Start Grants and Best Starts Food Payments are available to families who receive certain benefits. Discretionary housing payments are also available to some people who are struggling with rent, most often those affected by the Bedroom tax, and funding has been provided to the British Red Cross for a network of partners to provide advocacy, advice and emergency cash support for those facing destitution and to those who have no recourse to public funds. There are many **Welfare and Debt advice** services available and the Scottish Governmentprovide support for the free welfare advice sector and for front line workers within the sector providing advice on complex money issues. Holistic support services, which support the whole of a person’s life alongside their financial situation, are being promoted, including those embedded in non-traditional settings such as schools and GP surgeries. There is also funding for the Improvement Service for local government to explore a future advice funding model based on national/local partnerships.

In practical responsive terms, the Independent Food Aid Network have produced “*Worrying about Money*” **Cash-First Referral leaflets** which were championed in Scotland by the A Menu for Change Partnership project[[5]](#footnote-5). These referral leaflets provide straightforward, easy to understand pathways to access advice and emergency funds and are currently available in 20 local authority areas[[6]](#footnote-6). Scottish Government funding is also available to support some front-line services to provide **Dignified Food Access**. Finally,a Dignity Peer Network[[7]](#footnote-7) facilitated by Nourish Scotland and Poverty Truth Community deliver and develop tools and resources to engage with Dignity Principals (as above).

**Associated Question**:

*Q2. Do you think that the actions underway will help to reduce the need for food banks as a primary response to food insecurity? [Y/N/Don't Know]*

**Further Action**

A further six measures are being proposed. These measures are informed by insights from projects such as the A Menu for Change partnership project, the Trussell Trust’s pathfinders project, and from the response to the Covid 19 pandemic.

Cross-party and expert representatives have been invited to form a Steering Group to work towards the delivery of **Minimum Income Guarantee and Universal Basic Services**. There is also a view to bring forward a Human Rights Bill to give effect to a wide range of internationally recognised rights in Scots Law (as far as possible within the powers of Scottish Ministers) to **strengthen the protection of human rights, including the right to food as contained within the right to an adequate standard of living**.

A steering group on Ending the Need for Food Banks has been convened to guide **investment in cash-first partnerships** tostrengthen partnership working between sectors and services to improve existing local responses. In practice, this means food banks, money advice services, local authority officers and public health teams coming together to identify the best response for their local area. Similarly, work is planned to **develop shared values between national food insecurity funders on access to emergency financial assistance and holistic support services.**

A planned **pilot for the use of shopping vouchers in place of food bank referrals** in a crisis situation builds on initial research by the Independent Food Aid Network and the next steps will be informed by people with direct experience. The Government intend for the initial focus for the pilot to be within the Citizens Advice Scotland network, as a single location which provides both voucher support and money advice. The Scottish Government is also proposing to work with the two largest food bank networks in Scotland **the Trussell Trust and Independent Food Aid Network to support their food bank transition and exit strategies[[8]](#footnote-8).**

**Associated Questions**:

*Q3. 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? [Y/N/Don't Know]*

*Q4. 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? [Open comment]*

**Measuring Impact**

The Scottish Government have stated[[9]](#footnote-9) they intend to measure change by:

* Continuing to undertake a national measurement of food insecurity through the Scottish Health Survey and the Family Resources Survey
* Partnering with national food banks to monitor impact on number of food banks and parcel demand, and with community food networks to understand wider impact on other types of charitable food aid provision.
* Commissioning independent evaluation of funded activities that seek to improve local referral pathways, both from the perspective of frontline practitioners and people seeking support, and disseminating local good practice examples.
* Exploring the integration of food insecurity measurement in the evaluation of income-boosting measures like the Scottish Child Payment and through exploration of a Minimum Income Guarantee.

**Associated Question:**

*Q5. 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? [Open comment]*

*Q6. Is there anything else that you think should be considered in the development of this plan? [Open comment]*

1. [Nourish\_Dignity\_in\_Practice\_report\_2018\_short.pdf (nourishscotland.org)](http://www.nourishscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Nourish_Dignity_in_Practice_report_2018_short.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill: fairer Scotland duty assessment - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/good-food-nation-scotland-bill-fairer-scotland-duty-assessment/#:~:text=The%20national%20good%20food%20nation%20plan%20required%20by,order%20to%20secure%20the%20achievement%20of%20the%20outcomes.) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [Fairer Scotland Devolution of employment powers to tackle poverty - Fairer Scotland (blogs.gov.scot)](https://blogs.gov.scot/fairer-scotland/2021/06/06/devolution-of-employment-powers-to-tackle-poverty/) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [Ending the need for food banks: consultation on a draft national plan - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/ending-need-food-banks-consultation-draft-national-plan/pages/13/) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.nourishscotland.org/a-menu-for-change/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [Cash First Leaflets - Independent Food Aid Network UK](https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/cash-first-leaflets) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. [Dignity in Practice Toolkit for Volunteers - Nourish Scotland](https://www.nourishscotland.org/dignity-in-practice-toolkit-for-volunteers/#:~:text=Dignity%20Peer%20Network%20members%20have%20participated%20in%20the,Plus%2C%20St%20Paul%E2%80%99s%20Youth%20Forum%2C%20Woodlands%20Community%20Caf%C3%A9.) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.trusselltrust.org/about/our-strategic-plan/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. [Ending the need for food banks: consultation on a draft national plan - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/ending-need-food-banks-consultation-draft-national-plan/pages/13/) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)