



ENDING THE NEED FOR FOOD BANKS IN THE MAY 2021 ELECTIONS

BRIEFING FOR CANDIDATES

SUMMARY

These elections offer a hugely important opportunity to work towards a hunger free future in communities across the UK.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic hit, more people than ever have experienced destitution, unable to afford the basic essentials such as food and shelter that we all need to survive. This has led to unprecedented numbers of people needing emergency food.

Food banks in the UK-wide Trussell Trust network saw a 47% increase in emergency food parcels provided between April and September 2020, compared to the same period in 2019.¹ This isn't right.

However, these problems are not new. Food bank use has been rising every year, with a 71% increase in need across the UK between 2015/16 and 2019/20. The Covid-19 pandemic has shone a spotlight on and accelerated many of the issues that communities were already facing.

At the Trussell Trust, our vision is for a UK without the need for food banks, and we have developed an organisational strategy in partnership with food banks in our network to achieve this goal. As we come out of lockdown, now is the time to build a better future for our communities, one where people are not forced to seek emergency food to get by.

We're calling on candidates from all parties to commit to working to end the need for food banks, and for local authorities to develop a plan to do this which:

- **Ensures everyone can afford the basics**
- **Helps local services work together to ensure people get the right support at the right time**
- **Involves people with direct experience of poverty and local food banks**

¹ Mid-year stats, The Trussell Trust, 2020, [Mid-year-stats-2020-data-briefing.pdf \(trusselltrust.org\)](https://www.trusselltrust.org/mid-year-stats-2020-data-briefing.pdf)

WHY WE ARE CALLING FOR A PLAN TO END THE NEED FOR FOOD BANKS

Even before the pandemic hit, many communities were struggling. In particular, more people were being pushed into destitution. This means that they are unable to afford the essentials that we all need to eat, stay warm and dry, and keep clean.²

- In 2019, 2.4 million people in the UK experienced destitution, nearly double since 2015.³
- Of these 2.4 million people, over half a million were children (a 77% increase since 2015).⁴

This increase accelerated at the start of the Covid-19 crisis. It's not right that more people than ever have been pushed into needing to use a food bank as a result of this.

"We've seen a huge increase in demand through the pandemic... We changed to delivery only and during the busiest times we saw a 100% increase, at least... We are concerned the effects of this will go on for months – even years."

Food bank, 2019⁵

Throughout the Covid-19 crisis, we have seen communities rise to this unprecedented challenge with compassion and care for everyone in their community. The array of support that has arisen to meet need shows the strength of communities coming together. But none of us should be forced to a charity because there isn't enough money for the essentials. When one person goes hungry, our whole society is weaker.

It is vital that ahead of the elections in May, all candidates pledge that emergency food cannot become part of the fabric of our communities. As we recover from the crisis, we have a once in a lifetime opportunity to build back a stronger and more dignified safety net that can empower our communities and protect people most in need. It's time to make a clear commitment to build a better, hunger free future together where everyone can afford the essentials.

We are calling on all levels of government across the UK to commit to developing a plan to end the need for food banks in their community.

TO END THE NEED FOR FOOD BANKS, WE CALL ON ALL CANDIDATES TO:

ENSURE EVERYONE IS ABLE TO AFFORD THE BASICS

It is not right that anyone is unable to afford to heat their homes or put food on the table. People are forced to charities for emergency food when there isn't enough money for the essentials. The vast majority (95%) of people that need support from a food bank in the Trussell Trust network are destitute, meaning that they cannot afford at least two of these basic essentials that we all need to eat, stay warm and dry, and keep clean.⁶ Provision of food will only help someone to meet one of these

² For the full definition of destitution see 'Destitution in the UK 2020', (2020), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2020>

³ 'Destitution in the UK', (2016), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk> and 'Destitution in the UK 2020', (2020), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2020>

⁴ 'Destitution in the UK', (2016), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk> and 'Destitution in the UK 2020', (2020), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2020>

⁵ 'Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: The impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network', (2020), The Trussell Trust

⁶ 'The State of Hunger', (2019), The Trussell Trust, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/state-of-hunger/>

immediate needs, but not all of them.

It will not address the underlying issue that the person in hardship still does not have sufficient income to afford the essentials. It is important that local leaders recognise that effective solutions to poverty should be focused on money, not food.

Local leaders can play an important role in supporting people to meet their essential needs by promoting the right systems which are focused on providing people with sufficient income, not focused on providing food. Solutions which are focused on incomes rather than food ensure dignity by allowing people to make their own choices. Cash based approaches to support have been found to be preferred by low-income families because of their flexibility, dignity, safety and convenience.⁷

“Cash payments takes the embarrassing factor out of it, we don't need to queue for food bags or receive vouchers, we don't feel ashamed for needing help this way.”

Lone parent of two children, Child Poverty Action Group research⁸

In England, some local authorities are providing cash-based support to people in financial crisis through their Local Welfare Assistance Schemes. Research has highlighted the experiences of families who, when they experienced a financial crisis, appreciated the convenience of receiving an emergency payment in cash rather than in-kind.⁹ Local leaders should prioritise investment in their Local Welfare Assistance schemes, promote cash-based approaches through them, and ensure that they are delivered following best practice, as recommended by the Local Government Association.¹⁰

Candidates should commit to developing a cash-first approach wherever possible, and using their powers to improve the sufficiency, accessibility and responsiveness of cash-based crisis grants available in their area.

HELP LOCAL SERVICES WORK TOGETHER TO ENSURE PEOPLE GET THE RIGHT SUPPORT AT THE RIGHT TIME.

We know that people who need to use food banks have extremely low incomes. On average people referred to food banks are managing on £50 a week after housing costs.¹¹ Living on an extremely low income is compounded by many other hardships including insecure employment, high levels and multiple kinds of debt, inadequate housing and poor mental and physical health.¹² Not only are households facing multiple hardships, but some people are more likely to fall through the gaps of support and face destitution. The pandemic exposed some of these fault lines, as we saw more people from ethnic minorities and people who may have no recourse to public funds over-represented at food

⁸The Cost of Learning in Lockdown: Family Experiences of School Closures' (2020), Child Poverty Action Group,

¹⁰ 'Good practice guide: Delivering financial hardship support schemes', (2020), Local Government Association, <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Good%20Practice%20Guide%20-%20Delivering%20Financial%20Hardship%20Schemes.pdf>

¹¹'The State of Hunger', (2019), The Trussell Trust

¹²ibid

banks during the summer 2020.¹³ The complexity and multiple hardships faced requires intervention from a range of services.

Ensuring effective and integrated support services is particularly vital given that we know low-income households can face significant barriers to accessing existing informal and formal local support. Before the pandemic, our research found that nearly nine in ten people referred to a food bank across the UK were unable to draw on support from friends and family.¹⁴ This has continued since the pandemic hit, with over four in ten (45%) people referred to a food bank in the summer of 2020 saying that a lack of support from family, friends or local organisations was directly related to their need to use a food bank.¹⁵

“There are not enough people working in help agencies to effectively support people in need - staff shortages/cutbacks mean that people in need are pushed from one adviser to the next or just left in limbo”

Food bank, 2019¹⁶

Local leaders have a vital role to play in providing people with the right support at the right time. They should ensure that there is a robust network of local support that prevents a short-term crisis becoming long-term hardship by addressing the root causes of crises. There are a multitude of local services, provided across sectors, including family services, housing support, debt and financial advice, which help to maximise incomes and address underlying needs. Local leaders should ensure that adequate levels of investment are available so that these services can support people effectively. It is also important that people are aware of the different services available and how to access them. Local leaders should work to ensure that local support is offered in a consistent and co-ordinated way, where income is maximised to prevent people from falling through the gaps and where a food bank is a last resort.

Whilst the pandemic brought many challenges to how local services were able to continue to operate and support people, it also raised new opportunities for working together more effectively. For example, food banks in the Trussell Trust network have been able to strengthen relationships with referral partners in their local area and provide more joined-up interventions.¹⁷ Local leaders should build on this work and help to ensure that whichever channel someone seeks support through, they are connected to all the relevant local services.

¹³ During June-July 2020, people identifying as Black or Black British were significantly overrepresented in those that needed to use a Trussell Trust food bank (9% vs. 3% of the UK population). Whereas, just seven in 10 (71%) identify as White British, with a further 5% identifying as White Other. In the UK population these groups make up three in four (79%) and one in 12 (8%) respectively. There was also significant increase in people born outside of Europe being referred to Trussell Trust food banks (from 7% in early 2020 vs. 18% during the pandemic). This can be seen as a proxy for people who have no recourse to public funds.

‘Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: The impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network’, (2020), The Trussell Trust

¹⁴‘The State of Hunger’, (2019), The Trussell Trust

¹⁵‘Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: The impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network’, (2020), The Trussell Trust

¹⁶‘The State of Hunger’, (2019), The Trussell Trust

¹⁷‘Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: The impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network’, (2020), The Trussell Trust

Candidates should commit to investing in the local support services that help to address the underlying needs in their communities. Candidates should also commit to helping local services work together, to provide support which maximises incomes and ensures people do not fall through the gaps.

INVOLVING PEOPLE WITH DIRECT EXPERIENCE OF POVERTY AND PEOPLE INVOLVED WITH LOCAL FOOD BANKS IN SHAPING ANY PLAN TO END THE NEED FOR FOOD BANKS

In order to tackle complex issues of poverty and destitution, all local leaders should be working directly with people affected by poverty to learn from their experiences and co-design better policy solutions. This builds on best practice from a range of different disciplines, where it is understood that to improve service delivery, services must be designed from a user-led perspective.

There are examples of parts of the UK already involving people with lived experience in policy design. For example, through its Social Security Experience Panels, the Scottish Government seeks feedback on the different benefits which it has responsibility for from people with experience of accessing these benefits, and this feedback is then used to adapt the system accordingly.¹⁸ This approach can be replicated in local government across England.

It is important that local leaders also work with food bank staff and volunteers to end the need for food banks. Food banks serve their communities, often for years, and they know their services best. Food banks are well placed to support transformation and address the underlying drivers of food bank use. They can drive initiatives such as income maximisation projects, or work with existing services, that can help end the need for their services.

Candidates should commit to working in their community with people with direct experience of poverty and with food banks on how to deliver an ‘exit plan’ for ending the need for emergency food.

If you have any questions about this briefing, please contact Public.Affairs@trusselltrust.org

¹⁸ Social Security Experience Panels: publications <https://www.gov.scot/collections/social-security-experience-panels-publications/>