



ENDING THE NEED FOR FOOD BANKS IN SCOTLAND

ELECTION BRIEFING FOR THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 2021

SUMMARY

This election offers an important opportunity to work towards a hunger free future for the people of Scotland.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic hit, more people than ever have experienced destitution, unable to afford the essentials, such as food and shelter, that we all need to survive.

Food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Scotland distributed 111,000 emergency food parcels between April and September 2020, with increasing numbers of parcels being distributed to children.¹

This isn't right.

However, these problems are not new. Food bank use has been rising every year, with a 75% increase in need in Scotland over the last five years² - a greater increase than other parts of the UK. There are at least 294 independent and Trussell Trust food banks in Scotland³, with food banks in all 32 local authorities. 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 ending the need for food banks and for parties to develop an action plan in the first year of the new parliament to make this happen.

To end the need for food banks and build back stronger communities, we need a plan that:

- **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/news-and-blog/latest-stats/mid-year-stats/)

² End of year stats, *The Trussell Trust*, 2020, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/>

³ [Covid crisis sees three times more food banks than McDonald's on Scots high streets - Daily Record](#)

WE NEED AN ACTION PLAN TO END THE NEED FOR FOOD BANKS IN SCOTLAND WITHIN 12 MONTHS

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 clean⁴.

- In 2019, 2.4 million people in the UK experienced destitution, nearly double since 2015.⁵
- Of these 2.4 million people, over half a million were children (a 77% increase since 2015).⁶
- Scotland has a higher rate of destitution than many other parts of the UK.⁷

This isn't right.

This rise in destitution is also reflected in the rise in need for food banks. Food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Scotland have seen a 75% increase in need over the last five years (2015/16 - 2019/20).⁸ This increase accelerated at the start of the Covid-19 crisis, with a 62% increase in parcels distributed for children in April 2020⁹. It's not right that more people than ever have been pushed into needing to use a food bank.

"I'm having to choose that a meal that I have at lunchtime is a meal for one of my children at teatime."
Alison, Dundee¹⁰

Throughout the Covid-19 crisis, we have seen communities rise to this unprecedented challenge with compassion and care for those in their community. 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.

The Scottish Government has made some commitments to tackle the need for food banks, including its ambition for Scotland to be a Good Food Nation and in the 19 recommendations in Dignity: Ending Hunger Together, the report of the independent working group on food poverty.¹¹ The Child Poverty Delivery Plan and the Fair Work Action Plan include ambitious targets and plans to reduce poverty. However, with the distribution of emergency food on the rise, there is much more to be done to end the need for food banks.

It is vital that ahead of the elections in May, all parties and their 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 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 the next Scottish Government to commit to end the need for food banks in Scotland, and develop an action plan within 12 months to make this happen.

⁴ 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>

⁵ '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>

⁶ '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>

⁷ 'Destitution in the UK 2020', (2020), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2020>

⁸ Dignity or Destitution?: The case for keeping the Universal Credit lifeline, (2021), The Trussell Trust, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/02/dignity-or-destitution-UC-standard-allowance-report-final.pdf>

⁹ Summary findings on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on food banks, The Trussell Trust, (2020): https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/06/APRIL-Data-briefing_external.pdf

¹⁰ Found wanting, A Menu for Change (2019): <https://amenuforchange.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/found-wanting-a-menu-for-change-final.pdf>

¹¹ Dignity: ending hunger together, Independent working group on food poverty (2016):

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/dignity-ending-hunger-together-scotland-report-independent-working-group-food/>

TO END THE NEED FOR FOOD BANKS, WE CALL ON ALL PARTIES AND 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's UK wide 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.¹² Provision of food will only help someone to meet one of these 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. Effective solutions to poverty should be focused on money, not food.

This is why steps should be taken to invest in and improve the accessibility of the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF), which enables local authorities to provide cash grants for people in financial crisis who can't afford the essentials, including food. The SWF is most effective when grants are made quickly, it's easy to make applications and decision-making results in high-quality decisions.¹³ We want everyone to be able to access the SWF if they cannot afford the essentials.

It is also important that the challenges of insecure work are addressed as part of any action plan to end the need for food banks. While the latest data from the Covid-19 pandemic shows that the majority of households needing support from a food bank in our UK wide network did not have someone working before the pandemic, of those that did, almost half (43%) had been working on a temporary, zero-hour or no contract basis.¹⁴ Scotland will not meet its commitment to be a Fair Work Nation by 2025 if insecure work is driving people to food banks.

Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) 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 raising incomes and reducing costs are always preferable to solutions involving the provision of food, as they ensure dignity by allowing people to make their own choices. Cash-based approaches to support have been found to be preferred by families with low-incomes because of their flexibility, dignity, safety and convenience.

“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, Dundee, Child Poverty Action Group research¹⁵

Candidates should commit to using a cash-first approach to increase household incomes, and using their powers to improve the sufficiency, accessibility and responsiveness of benefits, in particular the Scottish Welfare Fund, as well as reduce the prevalence of insecure work.

¹²'The State of Hunger', (2019), The Trussell Trust, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/state-of-hunger/>

¹³ The Scottish Welfare Fund: strengthening the safety net, A Menu for Change (2019): <https://amenuforchange.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/a-menu-for-change-swf-report-updated.pdf>

¹⁴ 'Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: The impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network', (2020), The Trussell Trust

¹⁵'The Cost of Learning in Lockdown: Family Experiences of School Closures' (2020), Child Poverty Action Group,

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 across our UK wide network are managing on £50 a week after housing costs.¹⁶ Living on an extremely low income is compounded by many other hardships including insecure work, high levels and multiple kinds of debt, inadequate housing and poor mental and physical health.¹⁷ Not only are households facing multiple hardships, but some people are also 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 banks during the summer 2020.¹⁸ The complexity and multiple hardships people are facing 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 were unable to draw on support from friends and family.¹⁹ Since the pandemic hit this has continued, 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.²⁰

“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 manager, 2019²¹

MSPs have a vital role to play in ensuring people get the right support at the right time. Every part of Scotland needs a robust network of local support that prevents a short-term crisis becoming long-term hardship by addressing the root causes of crises – often called a referral pathway. 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. MSPs should ensure adequate levels of investment are available so these services can support people effectively. Between 2013-14 and 2021-22, the local government revenue budget, as a share of the Scottish Government equivalent, reduced by 1.9%, from 34.7% to 32.8%, undermining the ability of local authorities to deliver change in their communities.²²

It is also important that people are aware of the different services available and how to access them. MSPs should show leadership 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

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

¹⁷Ibid

¹⁸ 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

¹⁹‘The State of Hunger’, (2019), The Trussell Trust

²⁰‘Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: The impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network’, (2020), The Trussell Trust

²¹‘The State of Hunger’, (2019), The Trussell Trust

²² Local Government Finance: Budget 2021-22 and provisional allocations to local authorities, SPICe (2021): <https://sp-bpr-en-prod-cdnep.azureedge.net/published/2021/2/5/f3669358-b9b8-4f1e-b9d6-08d428cbacfc/SB%2021-07.pdf>

services in their local area and provide more joined-up interventions.²³ MSPs 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 and income is maximised.

Candidates should commit to ensuring that there is a robust network of local support that prevents a short-term crisis becoming long-term hardship, encouraging local services to work together to provide support which maximises incomes - where the food bank becomes the last resort.

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

In order to tackle complex issues of poverty and destitution, MSPs should be working directly with people affected by poverty to learn from their experiences and co-design better policy solutions. This builds on years of best practice in Scotland, led by the Poverty Truth Community and others, and built into Social Security Scotland and the Poverty and Inequality Commission.

It is important that MSPs also work with food bank staff and volunteers to end the need for food banks. Food banks serve their communities, often for a number of years, and can support transformation to address the underlying drivers of food bank use. Food banks 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.

WORKING TOGETHER

The Trussell Trust is an active member of the Scottish Food Coalition²⁴ and the End Child Poverty coalition in Scotland²⁵ and supports their manifestos for the Scottish parliamentary elections.

You can read their manifestos here to see how comprehensive action to reduce child poverty and become a Good Food Nation supports our vision to end the need for food banks in Scotland.

Scottish Food Coalition: <https://www.foodcoalition.scot/sfc-policy-asks-for-2021-election.html>

End Child Poverty: <https://cpag.org.uk/end-child-poverty-scotland>

²³'Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: The impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network', (2020), The Trussell Trust

²⁴ SFC Policy asks for the 2021 election, Scottish Food Coalition (2021): <https://www.foodcoalition.scot/sfc-policy-asks-for-2021-election.html>

²⁵ End Child poverty for the Scottish parliament elections 2021, End Child Poverty Coalition (2021): <https://cpag.org.uk/end-child-poverty-scotland>