



Cash or food? Exploring effective responses to destitution – Call for Evidence for organisations

Against a backdrop of record levels of need for food banks during the Covid-19 pandemic, and a growing cost of living crisis, this is a critical time to assess effective ways to deliver support to people facing destitution and challenge the growing normalisation of emergency food as a response.

That is why the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Ending the Need for Food Banks is undertaking this inquiry to explore and consider the respective merits of different types of community responses to support people experiencing a short-term crisis, including food, in-kind (such as vouchers) and cash-based support, and their role in ending the need for food banks.

The inquiry will also examine what lessons can be learned from the varying responses of different levels of government to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The APPG is keen to gain insights from a wide range of individuals and organisations, including charities, frontline service providers and community-based organisations. The inquiry will also seek evidence from all levels of government – local, national and the UK government. The questions below are designed for submissions from organisations and all levels of government. If you're an individual, or responding on behalf of an individual, please see our [call for evidence for individuals](#) instead.

Once the call for evidence deadline closes, all responses will be reviewed. These will be brought together with evidence from the inquiry's visits across the UK and oral evidence sessions to inform the final report, with recommendations on the most effective ways to deliver support to people facing destitution.

Background

Across the UK, food banks have been on the frontline providing support to people experiencing financial hardship. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the need for support from food banks reached record levels. The cost of living crisis, combined with the social and economic upheaval caused by the pandemic, is pushing more and more people to the doors of food banks. The latest figures from the Trussell Trust, which supports a network of more than 1,300 food bank centres across the UK, show that food banks in its network provided more than 2.1 million emergency food parcels in 2021–22 – the first time outside of the first year of the pandemic. This is only one part of the picture of need as there is a wide range of alternative emergency food provision across the UK, which includes, but is not limited to, food banks that are part of the Independent Food Bank Network (IFAN), pantries, larders, community food hubs and social supermarkets. Many of these providers are reporting similar patterns of escalating need in recent months.

Unfortunately this is not new. Food banks in the Trussell Trust network alone have reported an 81% increase in need compared to five years ago in 2016–17. This has led to a growing normalisation of emergency food as a response to destitution.

The need for food banks is a symptom of extremely low incomes. Research by the Trussell Trust showed 95% of people referred to food banks in their network in early 2020 were destitute, meaning they could not afford the essentials needed to stay warm, dry, clean and to feed themselves. The average household income for people referred to food banks at this time was just 13% of the national average.

The social security system, delivered by both the UK government and national governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, has a vital role to play in protecting people from destitution and needing to turn to food banks. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the UK government took unprecedented steps to protect people's jobs and incomes, but much of this support has since been withdrawn. There is now widespread concern that benefits are now at a historically low level and do not reflect the true cost of living.

Beyond social security, however, local support can also play a vital role in ending the need for food banks, and the local landscape has changed significantly in recent years. Local crisis support, funded by the UK Government and delivered by local authorities in England and also devolved national schemes in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is one important tool, supporting people experiencing a short-term financial shock and complementing a strong social security system. There are several ways in which local crisis support can be delivered. These include, but are not limited to, cash grants, high street vouchers, food bank parcels, by providing certain goods, such as a fridge or furniture, and wraparound support, such as debt advice.

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, the UK Government has provided millions for crisis support – with £1 billion invested in the Household Support Fund alone. Although welcome, there are concerns that this funding is not spent as effectively as it could be. Without a clear mechanism to deliver support to people in financial crisis through local authorities in England, this funding is often offered to local food banks to provide emergency food aid. In Scotland, the Scottish Government has invested this funding in the Scottish Welfare Fund. Although a welcome and important measure, there are concerns [this support risks becoming a postcode lottery](#) - both in the amounts it provides, and how quickly it gets support to those who need it. The APPG's exploration of the role of local crisis support to date has [highlighted a number of improvements](#) which are urgently needed in England to deliver an improved settlement for people facing financial crisis.

In addition to this shift in local crisis support funding, in recent years, there has been a significant expansion in the number and type of alternative food providers across the UK, including independent food banks, pantries, larders, community food hubs and social supermarkets. However, there are concerns that even this significant increase in provision is not sufficient to meet escalating levels of need in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and worsening cost of living crisis. Food banks in the Trussell Trust's network in Scotland have reported the recent falls in provision which were seen compared with pre-pandemic levels, as the significant numbers of food aid providers in Scotland had been meeting increased need, are being wiped out. This suggests that food can only ever be part of the answer.

The record levels of need for food banks has prompted a debate on the most effective ways communities and different levels of government can deliver support to people facing destitution. In Scotland, there is a growing emphasis on a cash-first approach, which promotes providing direct, easily accessible cash payments to people experiencing a financial crisis, as well as wider approaches, such as calls for a right to food at a national, UK and international level.

Without reflection on alternatives to emergency food provision during the pandemic, and emerging across the UK, there is a risk that we do not stem the tide of food bank provision in the UK in our communities, and do not see value for money in public spending intended to mitigate food bank need.

Terms of Reference

We are particularly interested in responses to **questions listed on the following page**. These focus on three key aspects:

- The respective merits and challenges of food banks and the provision of emergency food, including alternative food-based provision and low cost community food retail
- The respective merits and challenges of alternatives to food-based provision, including in kind support, and cash-based support/grants
- The lessons and potential opportunities from wider approaches, including international examples, rights-based approaches, and minimum income thresholds

How to respond

- The deadline for submitting your written evidence to the APPG is **Friday 8 July 2022**.
- Please include your name and contact details in your submission.
- We advise you to keep your submissions to under 5,000 words. If possible, this should be sent as a single document, with a short opening summary, and should be a Word document rather than a PDF.
- **You do not need to provide answers to all questions, only those which are most relevant.**
- Please indicate in your submission if you or a representative of your organisation would be willing to be to give evidence at the inquiry’s evidence sessions in September and October.
- Unless we receive a specific request not to, submissions by organisations may be published in full, and submissions by individuals may be published anonymously.
- Please email your written evidence to public.affairs@trusselltrust.org
- If you will find it difficult to submit your evidence by email, please get in touch with us at public.affairs@trusselltrust.org

Inquiry Timeline

Inquiry Stage	Key Dates
Launch of the inquiry and call for evidence	Thursday 12 May 2022
Visits to food banks and other support providers	May – June 2022
Written submissions deadline	Friday 8 July 2022
Oral evidence sessions	September/October 2022
Launch of the final report	December 2022

Questions you may wish to consider

Effective Crisis Support

- Drawing on expertise across the UK, the APPG has highlighted the importance of choice, dignity and flexibility in delivering crisis support. Are there any other best practice principles that effective crisis support should uphold?
- What is the most effective, appropriate, and dignified form of crisis support and why?
- What forms of crisis support do people facing destitution prefer to access and why?
- In what ways should crisis support be tailored to meet the needs of people from different demographics? For instance, families with children, disabled people, people with no recourse to public funds, different ethnic groups and religious backgrounds

The role of food banks

- What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of the provision and supply of emergency food parcels by food banks?
- In a future society where food banks are no longer needed to provide emergency food, what are the values and attributes of food banks that you would want to see held onto by communities, and why?

The effectiveness of alternatives to providing emergency food

- What are the comparative advantages and/or disadvantages of providing other forms of crisis support to food banks, namely: low cost community food support (e.g. social supermarkets, food pantries), other in kind support, and cash grants?
- What lessons can be learnt from the pandemic about the role of cash-based support?
- How do experiences of alternatives to emergency food (low cost community support, other in kind support, cash grants) differ for different demographic groups? For instance, families with children, disabled people, people with no recourse to public funds, and different ethnic and religious backgrounds.
- How do experiences of alternatives to emergency food (other food-based support, other in kind support, cash grants) vary across different geographic areas? For instance rural and urban areas, areas at high risk of destitution (e.g. coastal communities, post-industrial towns).

Learning from best practice and new ideas

- What can we learn from international examples of best practice in terms of effective emergency provision in supporting people facing destitution – and what has the impact been?
- How can rights-based approaches be used to support people facing destitution (for example, a statutory right to food, right to social security)? What role could these approaches play in tackling short-term crises and ending the need for food banks?
- How can setting income levels, such as Minimum Income Guarantee or a Universal Basic Income, be used to support people facing destitution? What role could these measures play in tackling short-term crisis and ending the need for food banks?
- From your experience and/or observation, what is the one policy change you would prioritise to end the need for food banks?