



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

With record levels of need for food banks during the Covid-19 pandemic and a growing cost of living crisis, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Ending the Need for Food banks wants to look at the best ways to deliver support to people facing destitution, unable to afford the essentials we all need to get by.

This inquiry will compare different community responses to support people experiencing a financial crisis - including low-cost food provision (e.g. pantries), other in-kind help (e.g. vouchers), and cash-based support - and their role in ending the need for food banks.

The APPG wants to hear from a wide range of individuals and organisations, as well as different levels of government. **The questions below are designed for submissions from individuals.** If you're responding on behalf of an organisation or a government department, please see our [call for evidence for organisations](#) instead.

After the call for evidence deadline, responses will be reviewed. Findings will be brought together with evidence from visits across the UK and oral evidence sessions to produce a 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. 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. This is only one part of the picture of need. 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.

Overall, there is a consistent picture of need reaching record levels during the pandemic and escalating in recent months, as the cost of living crisis unfolds. Unfortunately, this upward trend 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. Worryingly, emergency food is now often seen as a 'mainstream' or 'normal' 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 its network in early 2020 were destitute, meaning they could not afford the essentials needed to stay warm, dry, clean and to feed themselves.

Recent trends and responses to people struggling to manage on extremely low incomes make this an important time to look more closely at how best to provide support to help people through a financial crisis:

1. The social security system has a vital role to play in protecting people from destitution and needing to turn to food banks. While helpful steps were taken to boost social security during the pandemic, most of this support has ended. Benefits are now at a historically low level and do not reflect the true cost of living.
2. Local crisis support can play an important role in helping people to deal with a short-term financial shock. However, in England, this support can take many different forms – local crisis support has turned into a postcode lottery. Extra funding for this ‘local welfare’ support (as part of the UK government’s pandemic and cost of living responses) is often not spent effectively. As the APPG recommends, much [more action is needed](#) to get local welfare support to work well.
3. There has been a big growth in alternative emergency and low cost food providers across the UK. However, overall levels of destitution have increased in recent years. This suggests that food-based solutions alone cannot be the solution to extreme low incomes.
4. The high level of need for food banks has started conversations about other ways to get support to people who need it most. In Scotland, for example, there is more discussion about ‘cash-first’ approaches, where direct, easily accessible cash payments are made to people experiencing a financial crisis. There have also been calls for a right to food to encourage protection from destitution and the inability to afford to put food on the table.

A proper assessment of the lessons from these trends is needed if we are to stem the tide of food bank provision in our communities, and make the best use of public spending intended to reduce food bank need.

Terms of Reference

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

- The advantages and disadvantages of food banks and the provision of emergency food, including alternative food-based provision (e.g. low cost retailers like pantries)
- The advantages and disadvantages of alternatives to food-based provision, including other ‘in kind’ support, and cash-based support/grants
- The lessons and potential opportunities from wider approaches, including international examples and rights-based approaches.

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 submission 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 would be willing to be to give evidence at the inquiry’s evidence sessions in September and October, with support from the APPG.
- Unless we receive a specific request not to, 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

You do not need to answer all of these questions, only those which feel relevant to you. You can share as much or as little information about your experiences as you feel comfortable with.

The role of food banks

- Have you ever used a food bank? If so:
 - What led you to need this support?
 - How easy was it to access support from your local food bank?
 - Apart from an emergency food parcel(s), did you receive any other support?
 - How did it feel to receive support from a food bank?
 - Did the support you received help to resolve the reason you needed the food bank? If so, how?
- What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of providing emergency food parcels to people who cannot afford essentials? You might want to consider how much choice, flexibility or dignity this type of support provides.
- In a future society where food banks are no longer needed to provide emergency food, what are the values and attributes that you've seen at food banks that you would want to see held onto by communities?

The effectiveness of alternatives to providing emergency food

- Have you ever received help from a charity or your local authority to deal with a short-term financial shock? This might include a cash grant, a voucher to spend on the high street, in a supermarket or to go towards your energy bills or phone credit, or support with furniture or white goods, such as a fridge. If so:
 - What was the reason which led you to ask for support?
 - What support was provided? How easy was it to get this support? For instance, did you need to fill in forms and provide evidence?
 - How did it feel to access this support?
 - Did the support you received help to resolve the financial shock you were experiencing? If so, how?

- What do you think are the advantages and/or disadvantages of giving people cash grants compared to free or low-cost food or in-kind support, such as vouchers?
- Did you receive any help from your local authority or the UK government (e.g. the DWP or HMRC) to boost your income during the pandemic? If so, what difference did this make?

Learning from best practice and new ideas

- What lessons can we learn from what other countries are doing to support people who are unable to afford essentials, such as food?
- How could a rights-based approach, such as a right to food or a right to social security, support people who cannot afford essentials, such as food?
- How can setting income levels, such as a Minimum Income Guarantee within the social security system or a Universal Basic Income, support people who cannot afford essentials?
- From your experience and/or observation, what is the one policy change you would prioritise to make sure no one needed a food bank because they cannot afford essentials?