

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

SOCIAL WORK SCOTLAND RESPONSE

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Social Work Scotland is the professional body for social work leaders, working closely with our partners to shape policy and practice, and improve the quality and experience of social services. We welcome this opportunity to comment on Scottish Government's draft plan to end the need for foodbanks. We recognise its importance in the delivery of services that are human rights-based, and person-centred, and the critical understanding of the impact of, and correlation between poverty and social inequalities.

As a result of poverty – not a shortage of food – too many people don't have enough food in Scotland. People in communities across the country have responded incredibly to the growing need, whether by volunteering at a food bank or donating cash and food. Yet there is widespread agreement that food banks should not need to exist – everyone should have enough money to buy food and other essentials¹. As noted within the consultation document "The primary driver of food insecurity and the need for food banks is insufficient and insecure incomes".

As social workers, we see poverty within the wider framework of human rights, equality of opportunity and of social, economic and environmental justice; poverty restricts people's choices and their ability to take part in society.

Social Work Scotland supports the basis of compassion, kindness, respect and the upholding of human rights that has been used by Scottish Government in the development of the plan to end the need for foodbanks as a primary response to food poverty. It is also heartening to see that Scottish Government recognises the

¹ <https://www.povertyalliance.org/campaigns/menu-for-change/>

innovation, commitment to fairness, partnership approaches, and integrity that has been and continues to be, demonstrated by Social Workers and other public services at the height of the COVID19 pandemic response, and that the learning from this period is the foundation to this response. We are entirely supportive of the Scottish Government's vision that;

“Everyone has a sufficient and secure income to be able to access food that meets their needs and preferences. Where financial hardship does occur, coordinated local responses prioritise access to emergency financial assistance and money advice alongside access to holistic support services. Where help to access food is needed, this is provided in a way that maximises dignity and reduces future need. Delivering this in practice will take leadership and action at all levels across Scotland”².

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

1. 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?

Yes

The equal focus on prevention and response is much needed and demonstrates an understanding of the requirement to have a multi-tiered approach to address this complex issue. It is important that whilst prevention of food insecurity is the aim, there remains support available to people who require practical support, and that this support is rooted in the values of dignity and respect. The approach also demonstrates the interconnectedness of income, employment opportunities and the cost of living, and their impact on individuals and families.

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/ending-need-food-banks-consultation-draft-national-plan/documents/>

2. Do you think that the actions underway will help to reduce the need for food banks as a primary response to food insecurity?

Don't know.

Whilst there is undoubtedly a huge amount of initiatives both in place and planned, the complexity of associated and contributory factors that have led to the increased use of, and need for, foodbanks over the last five years, make it impossible to say whether these will result in a reduction in their use. That said Social Work Scotland broadly supports most of these initiatives. In particular, the commitments made in the Fair Work Plan, and the work being undertaken via Social Security Scotland to maximise income from social security. These, alongside preventative measure such as those introduced to address the cost of living; the increase in free childcare hours, the introduction of national money advice services, and the commitment to the expansion of eligibility to free school meals for all primary school age children, will undoubtedly have a positive impact.

We would however, urge caution over the use of shopping vouchers in place of food bank referrals as there is the potential that these would further stigmatise individuals and families who are experiencing food insecurity. Their use may be a very good alternative for some; however, this would require careful thought, planning and consultation before being introduced as a policy. Related to this, a further exploration of the concept of prepaid cards such as those used in the “Best Start”³ scheme, which includes consideration of unintended consequences – such as stigma, would be helpful. A Menu For Change has also done helpful research on the effects of shame on accessing support services around food inequality.⁴

3. 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?

³ <https://www.mygov.scot/using-your-best-start-foods-card>

⁴ <https://amenuforchange.wordpress.com/policy-and-research/>

Don't know.

As above, whilst the commitments outlined within the consultation paper are positive, due to the complexity of the issue it is impossible to say what impact they will have on the need for food banks as a primary response to food insecurity.

4. 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]

The commitments outlined demonstrate a, much-needed, broad lens with which to view and address the issue of food insecurity. As noted above, food insecurity sits alongside wider poverty issues and particularly for children, areas such as school uniforms, attainment gap and access to leisure. Therefore, effective tackling of food poverty needs to sit alongside the wider poverty agenda.

5. 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]

The impact measures outlined within the consultation document are robust. It would be helpful, as part of the collation of information from funded activities, as outlined in point 21, if qualitative data was collected, so that lived experience guides any future developments.

6. Is there anything else that you think should be considered in the development of this plan?

(will add text from our introduction here) plus the below

It is important to note that there will likely be an increase in need for food banks in coming months given the current fuel crisis, coupled with the ongoing impact of the UK's exit from the EU, and the COVID19 pandemic. Social Work Scotland would also like to take this opportunity to note that social work services and charities have

always provided food and fuel emergency provision in response to crises, and that crisis need is likely to remain, despite the laudable and right aim to reduce/end use of foodbanks.