

## Ending the need for food banks: consultation on a draft national plan – Turn2us response

### 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

No

Comment:

At Turn2us, we welcome the preventative measures outlined in the approach. The frontline evidence and research we have carried out as an organisation has strongly indicated that food poverty is a symptom of poverty and financial insecurity, rather than an isolated issue.

We strongly support the plans to strengthen social security and mitigate the impacts of the UK Government cuts as a preventative measure in ending the need for foodbanks. Ahead of the £20 cut to Universal Credit, we carried out research on what impact this would have on people across the UK and found that four in ten (42%) people (2.5 million individuals) on Universal Credit would be unable to afford food following the cut. Even prior to this cut, benefit levels had failed to meet the costs of living after being eroded over the previous decade. In light of the current cost of living crisis, strengthening social security and providing a real safety net should be paramount in reaching the vision to end poverty.

From our research, we know that:

- 15 million people (28%) in the UK have experienced at least one life event in the past two years that has left them struggling to cope financially.
- There is a positive correlation between the number of life events a person has experienced and their ability to afford food.
- For example, among people who have experienced at least one life event in the past two years, 42% are not always able to afford food, compared to 20% of those who have not experienced any life events. This number increases to 70% for those who had experienced five or more life events in the past two years.
- Of people who had experienced at least one life event that had left them worse off financially, 22% reported having used a foodbank to cope with the costs.

It is vitally important people know where to turn at this point of crisis, but that the approach to ending the need for foodbanks proactively seeks people out at this point. Shame and stigma around asking for help, the mental impact of experiencing a life event and not knowing where to turn, are all barriers in people seeking and receiving the support they need. Any plan that aims to prevent poverty should address all of these barriers.

We believe the time to capitalise on the collaborative working among many sectors and services that was accelerated during the pandemic is now. The learnings from the Coordinated Community Support (CCS) programme, led by the children's Society and devised in response to the localisation of welfare assistance, which may be useful in informing and enhancing plans to create such networks in Scotland. This programme is currently in its third and final year of trialling joint working in four pilot locations.

The key features of good co-ordination identified by the CCS programme are:

- Network – of organisations who share a desire to achieve better outcomes collaboratively.
- Referral System – to facilitate robust referrals.
- Resource – to run the network and manage the referral system.
- Legitimacy – to manage the network in the longer term.

So far, the CCS programme has found this approach has the potential to increase referrals to local social security schemes, and we would recommend this be an objective in Scotland.

As a grant-making organisation, we strongly believe in the cash-first approach. Cash-first approaches are empowering, and respect people on low incomes suffering a short-term financial crisis as individuals who should have agency in the choices they make just like anyone else.

**“People asking for emergency help have been through enough without being made to feel like we don't trust them to choose the right baked beans.”** Citizen's Jury participant for Ending the Need for Foodbanks Project

Focusing upon dignity within this plan is an approach that resonates with Turn2us, and we would like to see a further emphasis on cultural change throughout this intervention. Members of the End Poverty Edinburgh citizens group often highlight the experience of seeking and accessing available support and resources as a point of harm and shame.

**“To end poverty in the city, the pre-condition and the single biggest transformation Edinburgh could achieve would be to make the experience of seeking help less painful, more humane, and more compassionate. In fact, we believe that without this shift in culture and ways of working, none of the other actions will have the impact they need to.”** A Just Capital Report: Actions to End Poverty in Edinburgh

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

- Yes  
 No

**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?**

- Yes  
 No

**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?**

The Ending the Need for Foodbanks project suggested that guidance within the Scottish Welfare Fund could be clearer, by outlining when a family should be considered in hardship, the amount of support they should expect (particularly in relation to family size), and how individual applications should be prioritised. Similarly, as part of workshops held for this project, there was consensus that in order for state support to be a genuine alternative to food banks and food aid, it must be accessible, well-funded, well-promoted, have clear outcomes and have fast turnaround times.

Once more, the Scottish Welfare Fund should be renamed, so its purpose is clearer and people are not deterred from accessing help because of negative connotations with 'welfare'.

**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?**

Any measurements of impact should focus on the outcomes for the people who have been supported and if needs their needs were met rather than an increase in access/number of referrals alone.

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

It is worth expanding the understanding of what events test people's financial resilience and result in the need of financial support. Turn2us's research on life events highlighted the following major life events:

- Bereavement.
- Illness.
- Relationship breakdown.
- Unemployment.
- Having a baby.

Similarly, CPAG's Ending the Need for Foodbanks project has identified the following:

### *Events that test financial resilience:*

- Keeping the home warm in winter.
- The need to purchase and replace essential household goods (e.g. white goods).
- The costs associated with Christmas and birthdays.
- The cost of school uniforms and supplies.
- Feeding children in the school holidays.

### *Scenarios where people need short-term financial support*

- Leaving care.
- Leaving prison.
- Setting up a home after a period of homelessness or escaping domestic violence.

The plan should consider trigger events in the broadest possible sense as for people with very low financial resilience much smaller events can cause significant financial disruption, such as the breakdown of an appliance.