



Shona Robison MSP

Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh EH1 3DG

26 May 2022

Dear Shona Robison

Tackling the cost-of-living crisis needs a cash first approach

The Trussell Trust and the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) support hundreds of food banks operating across Scotland.

Over the last twelve years increasing numbers of people are being pushed to the doors of food banks because they haven't got enough money to buy food. Since the cut to Universal Credit and the start of the cost of living crisis in October 2021, demand for charitable food aid has steadily increased. People who were already struggling to afford food are being hit the hardest as energy, food and travel costs all becoming out of reach. Alarming, we are seeing a growing number of parcels being provided for children, for example, more than 1 in 3 food parcels issued in the Trussell Trust network last year were for children. And the next 12 months look bleaker still.

Many food bank teams are struggling to cope as demand outstrips resources and they make difficult decisions about rationing supply and dipping into financial reserves. Many food banks are having to cut back on supplying fresh fruit and vegetables and shopping cards because they themselves can't afford these purchases. And they are trying their best to distribute particular foods that can be eaten without the use of an oven as people can't afford the cost of energy. Volunteers are over-stretched and exhausted.

We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to develop a national plan to end the need for food banks within the first year of this parliament and in particular its commitment to addressing the root causes of food insecurity with measures to increase people's income through the social security system preventing people from needing charitable food aid. We welcome the Scottish Government's whole-hearted acknowledgement that a cash first approach to food insecurity is more effective and dignified than the distribution of 'sticking plaster' emergency food parcels.

The Scottish Government's commitment to cash first interventions and increasing the money in people's pockets to buy the food and essentials could not be more important at this time of crisis. This includes ensuring people can access advice and support services which can help them maximise their income.

IFAN and the Trussell Trust urge the Scottish Government to respond to the worsening cost-of-living crisis with a cash first approach and further solidify its commitment to ending the need for food banks in Scotland:



Strengthen the Scottish Welfare Fund

- The Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) must be immediately prioritised as an essential cash first service to help people facing financial crisis.
- The cost-of-living crisis should be classified as an 'exceptional circumstance' in SWF criteria to enable people to access more than three payments in each year.
- The SWF budget must be increased significantly to help local authorities meet rising demand over the next financial year.
- The Scottish Government must work with COSLA to ensure there is the necessary resource and support for local authorities to administer crisis grants as quickly as possible and can advertise that this support is available

Improve access to advice and support

- Action to strengthen advice services so anyone can access help to maximise their income at the first port of call, as set out in *Best Start, Bright Futures*, must be expedited.

Improve the reach of the Scottish Child Payment

- Redouble efforts to ensure all eligible families claim the Scottish Child Payment, increase this invaluable boost to families' incomes to £40 and roll it out to all children in Scotland by the end of the year.
- Immediately double bridging payments for school aged children (until the Scottish Child Payment is fully rolled out).

Build a stronger safety net

- Increase all Scottish social security benefits in line with inflation.

We stand ready to work with you to deliver a cash first approach to growing poverty and the cost-of living crisis in Scotland.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Polly Jones".

Polly Jones
Head of Scotland
The Trussell Trust
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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sabine Goodwin".

Sabine Goodwin
Coordinator
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