



## **IFAN SURVEY February 2024 – Published Wednesday 6.3.24.**

### **Chancellor’s decision to temporarily extend the Household Support Fund in today’s budget gives food banks a short-lived reprieve but falls far short of what is needed**

Latest data from the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) collated from 194 independent food banks operating across England, Scotland and Wales finds:

- **Nearly three-quarters of organisations responding to IFAN’s latest survey had seen increases in need comparing November 2023-January 2024 with the same three-month period last year**
- **98% of organisations reported supporting people who had not asked for help before**
- **Most organisations reported an increase in the number of people seeking regular support**
- **65% of services had seen a drop in food donations while 45% of organisations contributing to the survey had seen a drop in financial donations**
- **If demand increases, nearly half of contributing organisations said they would need to reduce the size of the parcels they provided or might not be able to help everyone who asked for support**

Independent food banks are reporting staggering increases in demand despite the help of cost-of-living payments and the Household Support Fund (HSF) in England in recent months. Today’s announcement by the Chancellor to temporarily extend lifeline support across English local authorities can only give food banks and low-income households a short-lived reprieve. Many local authorities have already set budgets and this funding will, in many cases, prove to be ‘too little, too late’.

As independent food bank teams continue to report that they are overburdened and overstretched, the Chancellor’s last minute stopgap measure brings some relief for food banks but, also, a sense of foreboding about the winter to come. Food banks are reporting that yet more people are seeking out their help for the first time and that a large number of people are needing regular support. People are being driven into poverty, severe food insecurity, and destitution through the inadequacy of social security payments and wages as well as insecure work, Universal Credit waiting times, sanctions, the benefit cap, the two-child limit, benefit deductions, No Recourse to Public Funds, disability-related costs, and housing problems.

The HSF cannot possibly address the UK’s poverty epidemic which is undoubtedly causing irrevocable harm across communities, but it has gone some way to temporarily alleviate hunger in recent years. It’s been particularly welcome to see local authorities use this funding to provide invaluable direct cash first support

immediately providing income-focused relief and reducing the queues for food banks.

IFAN's latest survey found a significant number of food banks had had to purchase food to support people as food and financial donations have fallen. Nearly half of the organisations responding to the questionnaire said they would need to reduce the size of their parcels or might not be able to help everyone who asked for support if demand increased further.

IFAN urges the Government to think beyond providing short-term interventions as if this kind of temporary help will make the UK's poverty catastrophe go away. At the very least, the Government must commit to [an Essentials Guarantee](#) to ensure Universal Credit payments are enough to afford the basics. It's also essential to permanently fund the HSF so that crisis support can become a much needed and permanent fixture in local authorities and a vital element of the UK social security system.

IFAN is also calling for the removal of key drivers of severe food insecurity including the 5-week wait for Universal Credit, the benefit cap, the two-child limit, sanctions, No Recourse to Public Funds status, and benefit deductions. It's also vital that the Government makes long-term commitments on [a real Living Wage](#) and job security. Ultimately, to eliminate the need for charitable food aid, everyone needs to be able to access a [Living Income](#) allowing a [Healthy Standard of Living for All](#).

**Sabine Goodwin, Director, Independent Food Aid Network**

"The Household Support Fund has become indispensable to local communities. It has reduced the need for food bank services and has provided the resources for frontline providers to distribute vouchers and other support. Extending the HSF is far from the solution to the UK's policy-driven poverty crisis but it will certainly go some way to temporarily help food insecure households as well as food banks to get through the next few months. Its removal in October would be ill-conceived and extremely damaging. We hope this six-month extension is the first step towards ensuring crisis support is permanently in place, well-funded, well-promoted, and easily accessible in local authorities across England."

**Cllr Jane Corbett, Liverpool City Council**

"Many local authorities have already set their budgets in the last few days. While we welcome this funding, it's far too short-term and the need for help continues to increase dramatically as the Government already knows. However, we will use what we've been given very carefully as we always do. The UK desperately needs a strong, sustainable, industrial and economic strategy which works for the whole of society, not just the very few at the top of the wealth ladder."

**Jen Coleman, Black Country Foodbank, Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall:**

"Cutting this vital funding in October will take away another lifeline for those who can't afford food. When cash grants are available through the Household Support Fund, the number of people using our food banks decreases - what does that tell you? This funding will make a big difference in the coming months but taking it away in the Autumn, just as the winter sets in, will increase unmanageable pressure on our food banks."

**Su Parrish, Easter Team, Crawley:**

"We have had access to HSF funding to purchase food for our food parcels during this time period. Without it, we would have to reduce our offer to clients in some way. If we do not have access to it in the next financial year, our ability to meet the current demand, let alone cope with the increasing demand, will be significantly compromised. This will have an impact on us as an organisation, but by far the greater impact will be on our clients, for whom even a small decrease in what we can support them with will be potentially devastating."

**Tina Harrison, Trinity Foodbank, Bury:**

"We always see a reduction in people accessing our services for at least 3 weeks after Household Support Fund payments are received."

**Background:**

- The [Independent Food Aid Network \(IFAN\)](#) supports and advocates on behalf of charitable food aid providers operating across the UK including hundreds of independent food banks. IFAN's vision is of a country without the need for charitable food aid where adequate and nutritious food is affordable to all.
- A total of 93 organisations running 197 venues responded to IFAN's February 2024 survey between the 6th and the 23rd of February 2024. Questions related to November 2023-January 2024 as compared to November 2022-January 2023. 89 of these organisations run a total of 194 independent food banks. The contributing organisations operated in 75 local authorities in England, Scotland, and Wales. 42 of the 93 organisations also contributed to IFAN's November 2023 survey. You can access all of [IFAN's recent surveys](#).
- IFAN co-wrote [this blog on the Future of Crisis Support in England](#) following [our joint webinar](#) on this subject.
- IFAN's Sabine Goodwin wrote [this recent piece for The Big Issue](#) on the need to extend the Household Support Fund.
- IFAN has identified at least 1,172 independent food banks operating across the UK including those run by multiple faith groups in addition to over 1,300 Trussell Trust food banks as well as hundreds of food banks run by schools, universities, hospitals, and the Salvation Army. There are also thousands of other charitable food aid providers including food pantries, social supermarkets, and soup kitchens.
- IFAN is calling for a cash first approach to food insecurity and has co-produced 'Worrying About Money?' cash first referral leaflets in over 120 local authorities in Scotland, England, and Wales. [These resources](#) help people struggling to afford food and support workers to find local advice and cash first support to maximise income and reduce the need for food charity.
- Food bank data represent the tip of the iceberg when it comes to wider food insecurity. Recent [Food Standards Agency data](#) show that a fraction of people reporting food insecurity have accessed a food bank or other emergency food aid provider while 25% of respondents were classified as food insecure.
- The [Department for Work and Pensions' Family Resources Survey \(FRS\)](#) found that in the year before the onset of the pandemic, 43% of UK households on Universal Credit were food insecure. Thanks to the £20 weekly increase to Universal Credit, there was a 16% reduction in severe and

moderate food insecurity levels for those households relying on this benefit, but the uplift was removed in October 2021.

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#### Breakdown of IFAN Survey – March 2024

Table 1 – Levels of need from November 2023 to January 2024 compared to November 2022 to January 2023 as reported by 89 organisations operating 194 independent food banks

Levels of need	No of organisations
Yes, we've seen a increase (roughly 25%)	41
Yes, we've seen a significant increase (roughly 50%)	19
Yes, we've seen an extremely significant increase (roughly 75% or more)	4
Stayed the same	9
Decrease in need	11
Other	5

Table 2 – Reasons behind increases in need from November 2023 to January 2024 as reported by 64 organisations operating 151 independent food banks. Organisations could report any number of reasons.

Reasons for use	No of organisations
Increases in the cost of living	60
Universal Credit wait times	47
Inadequate wages	46
Insecure work	36
Housing problems	35
Benefit deductions	33
Low Social Security payments	32
Sanctions	27
No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)	25
Disability related costs	18
Benefit cap	17

Transport costs	15
Two-child limit	11
Other	11
Not sure	3

Table 3 – Supporting people who have not needed help before from November 2023 to January 2024 as reported by 88 organisations operating 193 independent food banks.

<b>Supporting people who have not needed help before</b>	<b>No of organisations</b>
Yes	87
No	1

Table 4 – Increased number of people needing regular support from November 2023 to January 2024 as compared to November 2022 to January 2023 as reported by 87 organisations operating 188 independent food banks.

<b>Supporting more people needing regular support</b>	<b>No or organisations</b>
Yes	67
No	20

Table 5 – 85 organisations operating 186 independent food banks reported on food donation levels from November 2023 to January 2024.

<b>Food donation levels</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
Donations levels have dropped	56
Donation levels have stayed the same	23
Donation levels have increased	6

Table 6 – 87 organisations operating 192 independent food banks reported on financial donation levels from November 2023 to January 2024.

<b>Financial donation levels</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
Donation levels have dropped	40
Donation levels have stayed the same	31
Donation levels have increased	16

Table 7 – 80 organisations operating 170 independent food banks reported on access to surplus food from November 2023 to January 2024.

<b>Experienced difficulties accessing surplus food</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
No	43
Yes	37

Table 8 – 80 organisations operating 170 independent food banks reported on the quality of surplus food from November 2023 to January 2024.

<b>Experienced issues with the quality of surplus food</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
Yes	44
No	36

Table 9 – 89 organisations operating 194 independent food banks reporting on the organisations need to purchase food to supplement for donations from November 2023 to January 2024.

<b>Have you purchased food?</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
Yes, a broad range	69
Yes, particular items	16
No, we have not	4

Table 10 – Concerns about capacity to provide support if need continues to increase as reported by 88 organisations operating 193 independent food banks.

<b>Level of concern about capacity to provide support</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
No - confident about being able to access supply to meet demand	49
Yes - may need to reduce parcel size/voucher support	24
Yes - may not be able to support everyone seeking our help	15

Table 11 – The way of operation of the 89 food aid providers operating 194 independent food banks. Participants could choose all options that applied.

<b>Way of operation</b>	<b>No of organisations</b>
Run a food bank or other food parcel distributor	89
Run advice services alongside food support	40
Distribute shopping vouchers/cards/energy	36

vouchers alongside or instead of food parcels	
Run a food pantry	19
Run another kind of food aid service	16
Other	13

Table 12 – Ways in which people unable to afford food access the services of the reporting 89 independent food aid providers operating 194 food banks.

	<b>No of organisations</b>
Referral and self-referral	57
Referral only	21
Self-referral only / no records of referrals from outside agencies	11

Table 13 – Agencies referring people to food aid providers as reported by 78 organisations operating 175 independent food banks. Participants could choose all options that applied.

<b>Referral agencies</b>	<b>No of organisations</b>
Local authority teams (social services, housing, welfare/benefits advice etc.)	76
Third sector (mental health support agencies, agencies supporting people with NRPF, etc.)	73
Advice agencies (including Citizens Advice)	68
NHS services (GP surgeries, health visitors, hospitals etc.)	66
Schools	66
Other	19

Table 14 – 88 organisations running 193 independent food banks reporting on whether Jobcentres have been referring or signposting clients to their services. Participants could choose all options that applied.

<b>Jobcentres have</b>	<b>No of organisations</b>
Signposted clients to our services	35
Not signposted or referred clients to our services	33
Officially referred clients to our services	23