



## **IFAN SURVEY November 2023 - Published Friday 24.11.23.**

### **“How on earth are people going to cope?” – Autumn Statement offers little hope or respite for independent food banks struggling to meet escalating demand this winter**

Latest data from 69 organisations running 173 independent food banks across England, Scotland and Wales reveals that:

- **Nearly 80% of organisations saw demand for their services increase comparing August to October 2023 with the same period last year**
- **98% of organisations supported people seeking help for the first time**
- **90% of organisations provided food parcels to people referred by NHS services while 96% supported people referred by local authorities**
- **73% organisations reported a drop in food donations**
- **Four in ten organisations have struggled to support people due to a lack of resources and the same number fear they won't have the capacity to meet rising demand**

Independent food banks cannot see how they will get through this winter as yet more people are forced to turn to charity to feed themselves and their families. The Autumn Statement leaves people struggling to afford food, and food banks doing their utmost to provide support, facing a desperate winter over the next few months. Set for April 2024, welcome increases to the National Minimum Wage, a standard increase to already woefully inadequate benefits alongside the unfreezing of Local Housing Allowance after three and half years do not provide the help or reassurance needed at the frontline now.

Draconian changes to Work Capability Assessment threaten social security claimants with 'consequences' for failing to get back into work. The real consequences are set to be hunger, hardship. And the potential abandonment of

the Household Support Fund against the backdrop of a punitive, threadbare social security system have certainly not reduced the fears of independent food banks.

Over a third of organisations contributing to IFAN's latest survey reported concerns about their capacity to provide their standard level of support. As well as raising alarm bells about their ability to source food and other resources, 45% of organisations reported poor quality surplus food while 73% had seen a drop in food donations.

The wellbeing of food bank workers and volunteers continues to be compromised as "staff and volunteers are having to face increasingly distressing and challenging situations." One food bank manager speaks of "volunteers becoming run down, both physically and emotionally" while another explains: "Staff and volunteers are having to face increasingly distressing and challenging situations. This understandably takes its toll on the team, and we have had to put extra measures in place to try and protect them, including training courses and counselling provision." And another food bank manager said: "Our volunteers are suffering as they are hearing harrowing details of some people's lives. They too are struggling from the cost of living several are behind on fuel and council tax payments. Mentally, resilience is reducing."

IFAN is calling on the Government to think again about the level of support they are providing this winter and beyond. At the very least, [an Essentials Guarantee](#) to ensure Universal Credit payments are enough to afford the basics must be put in place. It's also essential to continue to fund the Household Support Fund which has been providing vital support often by way of direct cash payments in local authorities across England.

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. Increases to the National Minimum Wage will make a difference in the Spring but still fall short of [a real Living Wage](#) and long-term commitments on job security are increasingly urgent. 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 of the Independent Food Aid Network**

“This week’s Autumn Statement demonstrates the Government’s blinkered approach to the scale of the poverty crisis facing Britain today. However positive, making National Minimum Wage increases, bare minimum rises to social security payments and unfreezing Local Housing Allowance in April is not going to give respite to people facing financial hardship and struggling frontline support agencies this winter. Draconian changes to Work Capability Assessment threaten to push yet more people into hardship and there are fears that the potential removal of the Household Support Fund could have a devastating impact in communities across England. Poverty and destitution are already having a calamitous impact on households the length and breadth of the country right now. The Government needs to urgently prioritise increasing people’s incomes and reducing hardship as the winter sets in.”

**Tom Pollard, Head of Social Policy, New Economics Foundation and author of [‘Pushed to the Edge: Poverty, Food Banks and Mental Health’](#) published with IFAN and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation:**

“This week’s announcements offer little hope to the lowest income households who are still desperately struggling to make ends meet. Increasing benefits in-line with inflation is welcome, but it is absolute bare minimum and only serves to return rates in real terms to a woefully inadequate baseline. Meanwhile, putting more pressure on ill and disabled people, and cutting support for some by almost £400 a week, is more likely to drive people into food banks than work.”

**Catherine Evans, Pontarddulais Area Food Bank in Swansea**

“The current situation is dire and we are very concerned that we won’t be able to meet demand as we go forward through the winter. It would be devastating if we have to turn people away but we have found that we must streamline our parcels down to the absolute minimum to meet need.”

**Ellie Coteau, The Welcome Centre, Kirklees**

"The Household Support Fund has provided a vital lifeline during very challenging times. We were hopeful that today's Autumn Statement would include a commitment to continuing this support, as it's needed now more than ever. Whilst we welcome the unfreezing of Local Housing Allowance and the positive impact this will have for struggling private renters, we are concerned that

unless the Household Support Fund continues beyond Spring, many more families will be forced to turn to food banks next year."

**Charlotte White, Earlsfield Foodbank, Wandsworth**

"Any rise in the minimum wage is welcome, as the level has been inadequate for so long, plus the extension to younger people is definitely a good thing. However, it doesn't go far enough. It's still below what the Living Wage Foundation calculates to be an adequate wage, based on changing living costs, and therefore it's unlikely to have the impact that is needed. Also, so many of the issues we see with working people at the food bank aren't just down to low wage, but insecure hours and bad working practices such as last-minute shift cancellation. It would be great to see these issues addressed."

"It's really tough. About 10% of the guests we see every week are in "deep crisis" (no money at all due to benefit sanctions, facing eviction, family breakdown etc). The stories are heart-breaking and many guests in crisis talk of suicidal thoughts. This means that all volunteers who are guest-facing encounter really challenging situations every week. There is so much sadness and pain, it is sometimes difficult to absorb. We are really worried about the coming months - not about our ability to meet the demand, but just how on earth people are going to cope, when they're already at rock bottom and have been struggling for so long. Without a doubt, January and February will be our worst ever months."

**Ian Harwood, Brackley Foodbank in West Northamptonshire**

"Our food bank has become, if not the first port of call, then certainly one of the more prominent options given by local council and NHS agencies to people approaching them in situations of food poverty. We are becoming a significant and regular support to people referred to us in these circumstances. This is a very risky strategy."

**Su Parrish, The Easter Team in Crawley**

"I am concerned for our clients who are now facing a winter with less support than last year and who cannot see any hope in their circumstances improving, no matter what they do to try and improve them, or how hard they work. I also have huge concerns about the coming months in terms of our capacity to continue to deal with an ever increasing number of requests for food support. Each request comes with an amount of stress and emotion for the client requesting and the

volunteer responding and I'm seeing volunteers becoming run down, both physically and emotionally.”

**Cher Smith, Swindon Food Collective in Swindon**

“We are now purchasing food stock to the tune of £3,000+ each month. Food banks are a sticking plaster on a huge problem. There needs to be a constructed plan for change and influencing the government including not withdrawing the Household Support Fund.”

**Neill Mitchell, Kirkcaldy Foodbank in Fife**

“We mark our 10th anniversary this month and do so with a mixture of thankfulness for the incredible support we have received from our community, and anger that people still require to rely on a charity such as ours to meet the basic need for food.”

## 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 74 organisations running a range of venues including 173 independent food banks and some other charitable food aid venues responded to IFAN's November 2023 survey between the 11th and the 15th of November 2023. Questions related to August to October 2023 as compared to August to October 2022. Contributing organisations operate in 75 local authorities in England, Scotland, and Wales. 33 of the 74 organisations also contributed to IFAN's January 2023 survey while 30 of the 74 organisations also contributed to IFAN's April 2023 survey and 40 of the 74 organisations also contributed to IFAN's August 2023 survey. Access all of [IFAN's recent surveys](#).
- 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 calls 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 – November 2023

Table 1 – Routes through which people unable to afford food accessed the services of 69 organisations running 173 independent food banks.

<b>Routes through which support accessed</b>	<b>No of organisations</b>
Referral and self-referral	40
Referral only	19
Self-referral only / no records of referrals from outside agencies	10

Table 2 – Agencies making referrals as reported by 59 organisations running 155 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.)	57
Advice agencies (including Citizens Advice)	56
Third sector (mental health support agencies, agencies supporting people with NRPF, etc.)	53
NHS services (GP surgeries, health visitors, hospitals etc.)	53
Schools	51
Jobcentres	23
Other	18

Table 3 – Levels of need in August-October 2023 compared to August-October 2022 as reported by 69 organisations running 173 independent food banks.

<b>Levels of need</b>	<b>No of organisations</b>
Yes, we've seen a slight increase (roughly 25%)	32
Yes, we've seen a significant increase (roughly 50%)	23
Stayed the same	5

Decrease in need	4
Other	5

Table 4 – Reasons behind increase in need in August-October 2023 as reported by 55 organisations running 107 independent food banks. Organisations could report any number of reasons.

<b>Reasons for use</b>	<b>No of organisations</b>
Increases in the cost of living	51
Low Social Security payments	40
Universal Credit wait times	38
Inadequate wages	38
Housing problems	37
Insecure work	34
Benefit deductions	29
Sanctions	28
No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)	23
Benefit cap	16
Two-child limit	14
Disability related costs	12
Transport costs	11
Other	8
Not sure	1

Table 5 – Supporting people seeking help for the first time in August-October 2023 as reported by 69 organisations running 173 independent food banks.

<b>Seeing people who have not needed help before</b>	<b>No of organisations</b>
Yes	68
No	1



Table 6 – Supporting people needing regular support in August-October 2023 compared to August-October 2022 as reported by 67 organisations running 168 independent food banks.

<b>Seeing more people needing regular support</b>	<b>No or organisations</b>
Yes	57
No	10

Table 7 – Capacity to continue to support people in August-October 2023 as reported by 67 organisations running 171 independent food banks.

<b>Impact of lacking resources</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
No, we have been able to support everyone	35
Yes – but we are managing to operate as per usual	23
Yes – we’ve needed to reduce the level of support we provide	9

Table 8 – Food donation levels in August-October 2023 compared to August-October 2022 as reported by 68 organisations running 173 independent food banks.

<b>Food donation levels</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
Donations levels have dropped	50
Donation levels have stayed the same	13
Donation levels have increased	5

Table 9 – Financial donation levels in August-October 2023 compared to August-October 2022 as reported by 65 organisations running 170 independent food banks.

<b>Financial donation levels</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
Donation levels have stayed the same	33
Donation levels have dropped	20
Donation levels have increased	12

Table 10 – Access to surplus food as reported by 62 organisations running 164 independent food banks in August-October 2023.

<b>Experienced difficulties accessing surplus food</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
No	34
Yes	28

Table 11 – Quality of surplus food as reported by 62 organisations running 159 independent food banks in August-October 2023.

<b>Experienced issues with the quality of surplus food</b>	<b>No of organisation</b>
No	34
Yes	28

Table 12 – Concerns about capacity to provide support if need continues to increase as reported by 69 organisations running 173 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	40
Yes - may need to reduce parcel size/voucher support	15
Yes - may not be able to support everyone seeking our help	14