A Cash First Future

Case studies, presentations and next steps from our conference







the trussell trust
Stop UK Hunger

INDEPENDENT FOOD AID NETWORK

Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN)

The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) supports and advocates on behalf of hundreds of independent food aid providers including over 550 independent food banks across the UK. Our vision is of a country without the need for charitable food aid where adequate and nutritious food is affordable to all.

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The Trussell Trust

The Trussell Trust is a UK wide network of food banks and together we provide emergency food and support to people locked in poverty, and campaign for change to end the need for food banks. There are more than 1,300 food bank centres in the Trussell Trust's network.

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Introduction

In June 2023, the Scottish Government became the first government in the UK, or anywhere in the world, to set out a plan looking to see an end to the need for food banks. A cash first approach to food insecurity is central to **Cash-first: Towards ending the need for food banks**.

The publication of this plan follows years of campaigning by food banks, other food aid providers and charities to see decisive actions to reduce food insecurity across Scotland.

In April 2021, in the run-up to the Scottish parliamentary elections, former First Minister Nicola Sturgeon committed to develop an action plan on how to end the need for food banks in Scotland. In October 2021, a draft national plan to end the need for food banks was published and a public consultation launched to gather feedback on the content. This was one of the most popular consultations to date, receiving over 400 submissions, many from people running food banks. While all 38 members of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) rely on charitable food aid providers to support people on the lowest incomes - the Scottish Government has opened the door to a strategy that would put the institutionalisation of charitable food aid into reverse.

The plan comes at a time when severe food insecurity and food bank use is rapidly increasing in Scotland, and frontline food aid organisations are eager to see the Scottish Government urgently rise to the challenge of tackling poverty as the root cause of food insecurity. Our shared vision, of a Scotland without the need for charitable food aid, will only become a reality if matched with the bold long term actions needed to turn the tide on poverty and deliver a future where everyone has enough money for the essentials.

A Cash First Future: Ending the need for charitable food aid in Scotland together

On 27th March 2023, the Trussell Trust and Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) hosted an in-person conference in Glasgow which brought together, under one roof, some of the people and frontline teams most avidly anticipating the publication of this plan.

This was also the day when people in Scotland discovered who would be their next First Minister. The successful candidate, Humza Yousaf MSP, had promised just days before that "reducing, if not eradicating, poverty" would be his "defining mission" as First Minister.[1] The elimination of the need for charitable food aid is inextricably linked to this vision.

So our conference meeting on this day, bringing together so many people working on the frontline of Scotland's poverty crisis, was symbolic not only of the enormity and urgency of people's financial hardship but the strength in numbers that this cohort of attendees represented.

Through a series of workshops, presentations and conversations throughout the day, it became clear that food aid providers, support workers, local authority teams and campaigners were not standing by waiting for the Scottish Government to direct them towards taking a cash first approach to food insecurity in their communities. A cash first approach was already being delivered in many communities across Scotland.



Attendees shared knowledge, not only about the work they and colleagues were already undertaking, but on what an ambitious Scottish Government plan to end the need for food banks would look like and mean in reality.

What could a truly ambitious plan mean for people having to rely on charity to feed themselves and their families?

What would it mean for overstretched food bank managers who can't see how they will keep up with meeting ever-increasing demand?

How could it impact advice workers who do everything they can to help their clients but still too often have to signpost to local food banks because incomes can't stretch far enough or emergency funds can't be accessed in time?

The conference was an opportunity to meet together in person, sometimes for the first time, to strengthen connections and bonds formed during the pandemic and growing cost-of-living crisis. This event was testament to the reality that food aid providers, local authorities, advice services and other community groups have been tackling an ever-worsening food insecurity crisis for well over a decade.

Two key points were abundantly clear. Firstly, the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of the groups and individuals in the room. And secondly, that the deepening food insecurity crisis could not be allowed to continue for another year, never mind another decade. It was time for a cash first future.

Since our conference

Increasing food insecurity is putting an unsustainable and unconscionable strain on people and the staff and volunteers providing support. Since our shared conference in March, we have seen the impact of this on our networks. Data from the Trussell Trust released in April 2023, showed that their network in Scotland had seen a 30% increase in food parcels between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, compared to the same period the previous year.[2] The highest ever level of need seen by the Trussell Trust's network in Scotland, including 62,000 people who had never needed to use a food bank before. A survey of IFAN members in Scotland in April 2023, showed that most organisations are now supporting people who had never needed to use their support before. Over half of responding organisations said that if demand continued to increase, they would not be able to continue supporting everyone who needs their help or would need to reduce their level of support.

The delivery of the Scottish Government's plan to end the need for food banks could not be more urgent.

This report

This report summarises the learning from the Cash First Future conference including best practice examples on promoting a cash first approach to food insecurity in local authorities across Scotland and how these should inform the direction of next steps and Scottish Government actions.

Key words

Cash First

The term 'cash first' refers to food insecurity responses made by a range of different actors at local, national and UK level. Its aim is to ensure that, whenever possible, everyone has enough money to afford food and other essentials.

Food Bank

A charitable organisation that distributes food parcels to people experiencing financial hardship (may operate on a referral basis).

Charitable Food Aid

A term for any charitable organisation that distributes food (including donated and surplus food) to people experiencing financial hardship. This includes groups such as food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens.

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.

Cash first best practice is happening across Scotland



Highland

The ‘Money Counts’ course developed by NHS Highland helps frontline workers and volunteers to use the ‘Worrying About Money?’ leaflet to start money worries conversations.

North Lanarkshire

North Lanarkshire’s referral gateway connects people to cash first options and holistic support to help them in the long term - this was bolstered by a ‘cash first pledge’ taken by local partners.

Argyll and Bute

The Flexible Food Fund in Argyll and Bute provides financial grants to people in crisis. The Flexible Food Fund ‘roadshow’ helped people learn about and access the fund across the Local Authority.

Orkney

The ‘Orkney Money Matters’ partnership project brings together the third and public sectors to reduce financial insecurity through a new referral pathway to increase access to cash first support.

Aberdeenshire

The creation and dissemination of the Aberdeenshire ‘Worrying About Money?’ leaflet, including training sessions and translations has improved access to financial advice and support.

Dundee

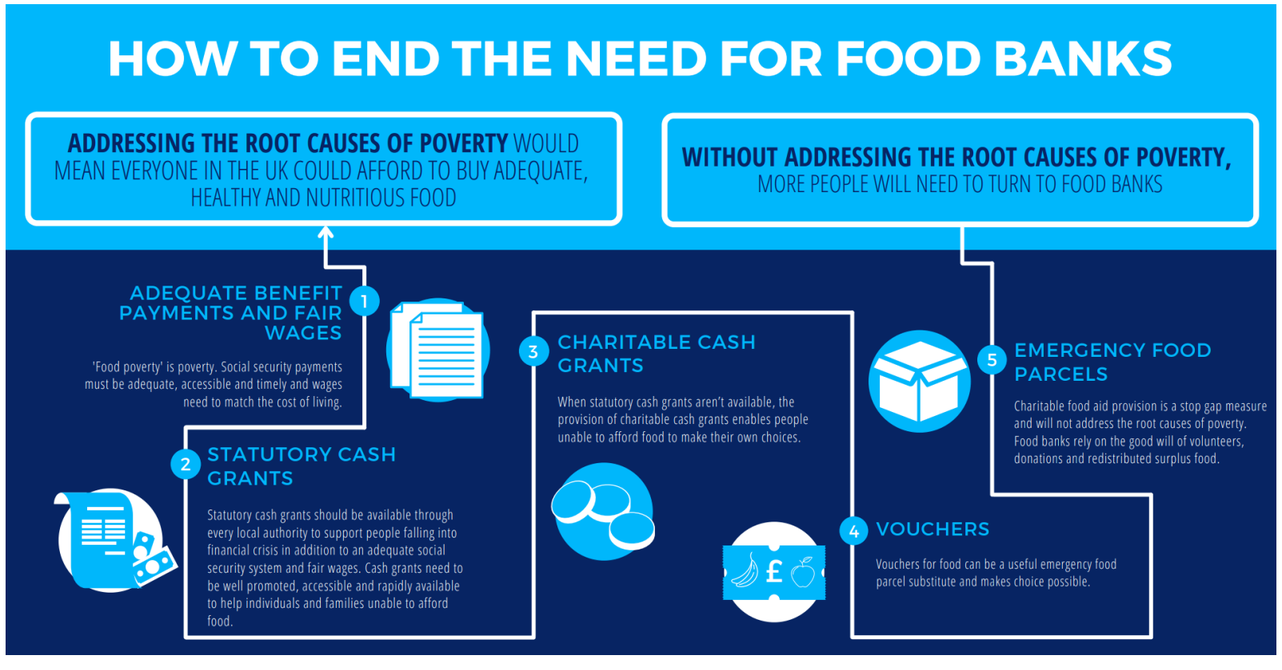
Work done by Dundee Fighting for Fairness brings together people with personal experience of financial insecurity with decision makers to identify areas of unfairness and develop solutions.

First plenary session: What do we mean by cash first?

The conference opened with a straightforward but important question: what do we mean by cash first? The term 'cash first' refers to food insecurity responses made by a range of different actors at local, national and UK level. Its aim is to ensure that, whenever possible, everyone has enough money to afford food and other essentials.

Using the IFAN 'hierarchy of cash first responses' infographic, Trussell Trust area manager Katy Kitchingham explained how this can be achieved through ensuring people have enough money through employment and benefits, have access to crisis payments in cash, and know that advice and support to help maximise your income is available and how to find it.

Stakeholders involved with different sectors have a role to play in embedding cash first responses in our communities.



It's vital to be clear about the ultimate goal in terms of how cash payments should be sourced. Third sector organisations including food banks distributing cash payments can be invaluable, and certainly a step up the ladder towards a cash first future, but ultimately we need the income-focused solutions to be coming from governments and local authorities.

Once we had shared our understanding of what a cash first approach looks like, the conference broke out into sessions to learn how this has been promoted in different ways across communities in Scotland.

Panel: The crucial role of local authorities in delivering a cash first approach

Local authorities are integral to ensuring the success of a cash first approach to food insecurity on a local level, especially in their role to deliver the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF).

Best practice examples show that when local authorities take a cash first approach and work in partnership with local agencies, this can make a significant difference to the uptake of the Scottish Welfare Fund and the demand on charitable food aid organisations in the community.

The main way that local authorities in Scotland can take a cash first approach is through the effective administration of the Scottish Welfare Fund, which is used by many councils as a first port of call (so that charitable food aid can be a last resort once financial help has been exhausted). The conference heard from Rachel Ormston of Ipsos MORI on the findings of the Scottish Welfare Fund review published in March 2023. The review considered several important issues on how the fund can be improved. These included the level of funding for administration required for the long-term delivery of the fund, consistency of delivery between local authorities, whether the fund should be delivered centrally by Social Security Scotland or continue to be delivered by local authorities, and improving the experience of applicants.[3]

John Cunningham, COSLA, raised the issue of growing demand for the SWF triggered by the rising cost of living. He explained how the key to meeting the aspirations of the fund lies in securing its future funding as flat cash settlements for councils are not proving to be sufficient.

The work of North Lanarkshire Council provides an excellent example of partnership working to ensure the Scottish Welfare Fund is prioritised as the most effective crisis response for people experiencing food insecurity. John Campbell, North Lanarkshire Council, spoke on the success of the council's Food Poverty Referral Gateway, which was originally introduced in 2015 to ensure that the root cause of food poverty was being addressed, as well as resolving immediate problems. This approach was more dignified and gave individuals and families experiencing food insecurity more choice and control by putting the Scottish Welfare Fund at the very heart of the council's anti food poverty strategy. People needing to access charitable food could also get access to the fund as well as debt, money and budgeting advice. In October 2022, the council's Food Poverty Working Group hosted a re-launch event focussed on the Referral Gateway where local support agencies were invited to sign a cash first "pledge." This strategy of close working with partnership agencies and promoting an understanding of cash first, has worked to improve people's access to the Scottish Welfare Fund and financial advice and support. In turn, this change reduces pressure on local charitable food aid organisations no longer expected to be the sole crisis response for people unable to afford food. At the conference, John shared testimonies from parents who had received cash support through the Gateway and the enormously positive impact this had.

> **"£300 going into my account saved our lives; I could buy and cook them healthy food, didn't have to worry about the electricity and gas and bought my wee girls new shoes. Thank you so much."**
>
> **Mother of 3 children (Abronhill).[4]**

In Argyll and Bute, the Flexible Food Fund is another invaluable example of local authorities directing efforts into a cash first response. At the conference, Jayne Jones, Argyll and Bute Council, spoke about the success of the fund in providing cash grants alongside advice and support to help people to buy food. The fund was introduced in January 2021 and supported 550 households within the first seven months. In 2023, the project supported over 1,600 households in Argyll and Bute, with an average gain of £1,436 per household.[5] For local food banks and food aid organisations, this extra help for the people they support is significant.

This money, which was directed into the pockets of individuals and families struggling to afford food, is a much more cost effective response to food insecurity than directing funds into surplus food redistribution. The cost faced by food banks and food aid organisations of collecting donations, accessing surplus food, packing, sorting, transporting food did not need to be factored in. Rather than accessing charity for food, families could use the funds to choose and buy what they need.

Panel: Building the foundations of a cash first approach: using the 'Worrying about Money?' leaflet and building partnerships

Through funding from the Scottish Government to IFAN, the co-production of local **'Worrying About Money?' leaflets** have enabled local organisations to work in partnership to help connect people facing financial hardship, as well as support workers and volunteers, to money advice and support. It is hoped this can play a part in increasing the income people have to buy food, and other essentials, and reduce the demand for charitable food aid. At this session, conference attendees heard examples of how local leaflets had been developed and disseminated as widely as possible into communities.

IFAN representatives introduced the partnership element behind the project and how the leaflets have acted as tools to bring local partners together to sequence and prioritise income maximisation.

Katy Kitchingham, The Trussell Trust, spoke about Money Counts training sessions developed in Highland by the leaflet stakeholder group in 2020, which have now been replicated in a number of different local authorities. These training sessions help frontline workers and volunteers to develop confidence in using 'Worrying About Money?' leaflets to start money worries conversations with the people they support. Through 40 sessions run in North Highland alone, attendees have reported significantly increased confidence in their ability to signpost the people they support to appropriate advice and support.

Caroline Hastings, Aberdeenshire Council, spoke about the co-development of the Aberdeenshire 'Worrying About Money?' leaflet and partnership working by Aberdeenshire Council's Tackling Poverty and Inequalities team and the Financial Inclusion Partnership to promote the resource. As of March 2023, over 21,000 printed leaflets had been distributed throughout Aberdeenshire and the resource has been translated into Arabic, Dari, Farsi, Polish, Ukrainian and Russian.

Aberdeenshire Council's Tackling Poverty and Inequalities team and the Financial Inclusion Partnership promoted the resource through social media channels and local radio. After attending a Highland Money Counts Train the Trainer course, the Aberdeenshire Council Tackling Poverty and Inequalities team, TSI Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action and public health colleagues have delivered Money Counts level 1 training courses. Participants ranged from council employees to food bank team members. A module was developed for training platforms, ALDO in Aberdeenshire Council and Turas for NHS Scotland, which extended the reach of the course.

"I have more confidence in raising the leaflet with someone who has mentioned anything that sounds like money worries"

"[I've learned] not to be afraid to start the conversation with clients at the food bank and use the leaflet to signpost them on to other services"

Training session participants, Aberdeenshire.[6]

Julie Semple from Bute Advice Centre spoke about how the Argyll and Bute 'Worrying About Money?' leaflet was used for a roadshow that travelled across the local authority to raise awareness of the Flexible Food Fund. The leaflet highlighted the Flexible Food Fund as well as services available through Bute Advice Centre, ALIenergy and other local support services. 6,000 leaflets were delivered across the region during the roadshow.

Julie spoke about the power and impact of increased access to this advice. By March 2023, Bute Advice Centre was able to access £1.8 million through benefits, grants and rebates for their clients, and partner organisation ALIenergy achieved a client gain of over £600,000.

As of August 2023, Bute Advice Centre and Alienergy have supported a total number of 1,240 cases with a client gain of £3 million (£2.3 million via Bute Advice Centre and £700,00 via Alienergy).



The combined gain for people across Argyll and Bute struggling to afford food, shows the incredible impact of local organisations working in partnership to deliver and promote money advice and how the leaflet tool has worked to build the foundations for this collaborative work.

Workshop: Ending the need for food banks with a cash first approach: projects, systems and long term change

Building a local strategy to focus on advice and cash first rather than food aid takes partnership working, careful planning and understanding of the local context.

This workshop by Harry Johnson and David Brownlee, representing, respectively, Community Consulting and The Trussell Trust gave a case study example on shifting to an advice and cash first approach in Orkney.

Participants learned about the process of identifying the challenges and opportunities presented by the local landscape. In Orkney these challenges included the shame and stigma felt in a small community, the 'poverty premium' experienced by rural and island communities, the geography of the area, and the fact that existing responses were 'crisis oriented' rather than prioritising longer term support. The opportunities for change included the strength and existing relationships in the local community, the manageable number of local agencies and a 'culture of innovation' looking to make a difference.

Harry spoke about how partners in Orkney built understanding of the problem through the 2021 Island Wellbeing Survey, which laid the groundwork for developing a strategy through the Food Dignity Recommendations Report in March 2022. This strategy was then implemented through the design and delivery of the Orkney Money Matters project which was launched in May 2023.



The Orkney Money Matters project was developed in partnership with both statutory and third sector local organisations. The aim of the project is to reduce financial insecurity by improving access to advice through the 'advice-and-cash-first' referral pathway. This pathway seeks to: strengthen cross-organisational working, build third sector capacity, strengthen the connections between the Scottish Welfare Fund team and other organisations, and promote consistent messaging on the support available to Orkney residents.

After hearing about this best practice example on how to sequence and promote advice and cash first in a strategic way, participants discussed how their lessons could be implemented in their own contexts. The discussion invited attendees to reflect on the opportunities and challenges presented by their own local context and what actions could further their ability to champion advice provision and cash first approaches.

Second plenary session: How to ensure people with lived experience are at the heart of a cash first approach

For anti-poverty strategies to be successful, they need to be based on the evidence and experience of people's lives. The voices of experience must be listened to throughout the process of designing and delivering cash first approaches. The second plenary session, considered how stakeholders can work to incorporate the voices of lived experience in their policy and practice.

This session heard from Emma Schoolar of the Trussell Trust Financial Inclusion Team who spoke about the principles

and work of the Trussell Trust's Together for Change Panel. The work of the panel recognises the principle of 'Nothing about us, without us.' The Trussell Trust's working principles of participation include: equity, creating safe spaces, a sense of purpose, mutual trust, honest conversations and taking action together.

Using these principles, the Changing Communities Panel sought to respond to the challenge question: "When someone is in financial hardship, how can we make sure they have a good experience accessing and engaging with support and advice, and that it leads to a good outcome?"

Together they produced a 26-page resource for food banks, to support them with both their financial inclusion and participation work, including toolkits on building trust, empowering people and alleviating the feeling of being 'judged.' Since September 2022, the resource has been disseminated widely, including through a podcast and webinar.

"Successful financial inclusion isn't all about money. It's about giving people dignity, helping them out of those feelings of guilt, shame, stigma, exhaustion, desperation, all that mental turmoil, and getting them to the point that they feel like they can get by, that they feel like they have enough to live, not just enough to survive."

Financial Inclusion from our perspective, Together for Change Panel

Danny Ogierman, Faith in Community Dundee, spoke to the conference about work done by Dundee Fighting for Fairness to bring together people with personal experience of financial insecurity with decision makers to both identify areas of injustice and develop solutions. Faith in Community Dundee worked in partnership with A Menu for Change in 2019 to develop the 'What I do I do if...' leaflet.[7]

The signposting tool was co-developed with experts by experience through focus groups who were consulted at every stage (language, colour scheme, graphics). This is an approach that Faith in Community Dundee have incorporated in all aspects of their work: "the journey can take time but it's essential."

The conference also heard from Brian Scott, Trussell Trust lived experienced panellist. Through sharing his experiences after a cancer diagnosis, Brian spoke powerfully about how poverty causes, shapes and entrenches health inequalities. He also spoke about the importance of connecting the voices of lived experience with the decision-makers who will impact their lives.

To effectively address the barriers faced by people on low income, these voices must be at the centre of designing policy and practice.



An excerpt of Brian's speech to the Cash First Future conference, March 27th 2023:

I was a nurse for five years and was on the point of promotion when I had a silly accident and overnight I found myself in poverty.

We don't need people to tell us that it's shameful to be unemployed. We do it ourselves. I had a breakdown because I had the typical macho thing of 'I should be earning for my family.'

So what does it mean, living in poverty? It means your life is not your own. People hundreds of miles away control your life. When you're in poverty, whether that's through unemployment, disability, low wages, you feel as if you don't have a voice. Everything is done to you, not with you.

I chose to get involved in the Poverty Truth Community in Glasgow because they take people's voices who have got that lived experience and take them to policy makers and the people who have the power. Whether that's politicians, civil servants - people who make the decisions that affect our lives.

There are scary statistics on poverty and I could show you charts to prove this. But, what the Poverty Truth Community does is take that parent who can't afford to give breakfast to their child before they go to school in the morning. And listen to that parent and their story.

Listen to how they feel seeing their child go hungry and [due to not having proper winter clothes] come down with cold and flu. **That has a lot more impact than me saying 'one in four children in Scotland are living in poverty.' Because this is a real story.**

I think the most important word that has been said today is dignity. People who come to you for help are no different to anyone else here. It can happen to any of us. I was lucky that I was able to fight my corner. Just think of the people that can't. And the people coming to the likes of yourselves, CAB, local authorities, food banks. There is no them and us, there is only us, we are here to help each other.

I would like to leave you with this image: imagine you're in poverty and you've got a weight tied to your feet. You're just struggling to clear the surface of water because this weight is weighing you down. And you find when you're in poverty that weight only gets heavier. Everything is stacked against you when you're trying to get out of poverty. Like trying to get a job when you're on Universal Credit; there is so much bureaucracy and confusion about what you qualify for or how many hours you can work.

I would like someone to give us all a big pair of bolt cutters to cut that chain and let the person breathe. And that's what people who are coming to local authorities, food banks, citizens advice are asking. They're saying: 'let us breathe'.

Panel: Recognising the cash first approach in the Right to Food and other campaigns

Food aid providers, community groups and advice services are involved in a wide range of campaigns. A cash-first approach aligns with, and can be part of, many current campaigns.

This panel heard from Pete Ritchie, Nourish Scotland, on their project **"Our Right to Food: Affording to eat well in a Good Food Nation."** The project looked at the affordability of a healthy diet in modern Scotland and how this can inform the Right to Food. Through recruiting community advisors, the research considered the cost for an average family in Scotland to afford an enjoyable, 'healthy enough' diet that also fits with reality. The research considered what families would choose to include in a shopping list if their income from benefits and wages were sufficient. Understanding this reality is crucial to informing a cash first approach, the ultimate ambition of which is achieving at least a Minimum Income Standard approach to deliver a Scotland where everyone can afford the food that keeps them healthy and well.

The panel also heard from Polly Jones, Trussell Trust, on their **Essentials Guarantee campaign**, being delivered in partnership with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.[8] The Essentials Guarantee calls for legislation to ensure that at a minimum, Universal Credit always protects people from going without essentials. This Guarantee would mean that Universal Credit levels would be based on an honest and robust 'consideration of what households need', increasing the standard allowance by at least £35 a week for a single adult. This would address many of the fundamental flaws in Universal Credit, including deductions.[9] Work through both the 'Our Right to Food' project and the Essentials Guarantee campaign shows that it is vital for cash first support to be realistically designed and set at levels that meet people's needs.

Attendees also heard from Tara Lillis, STUC Women's Committee, about the **Food for Thought** campaign which calls for the expansion of universal free school meals to all nursery, primary and secondary pupils in Scotland.[10] Not only would this universality ensure a free school meal is accessible to all who need one, it would reduce any shame and stigma attached to the current means-tested provision for pupils in P6-S6. Calls to improve and expand access to statutory service provision, and to reduce stigma, are important to tackling poverty and food insecurity.



Workshop: The crucial role of the advice sector in delivering a cash first approach

Adequate advice and support is essential to the success of a cash first approach. This workshop session heard from Angus McIntosh, Castlemilk Law and Money Advice Centre and Ed Pybus from Child Poverty Action Group on the role advice services play in the delivery of a cash first approach. Attendees discussed the importance of individuals being able to access high quality income maximisation advice, before charitable food aid provision, in order to ensure they are getting their full entitlements.

Through discussion, it was very clear that the most significant barrier for local advice services looking to adopt a cash first approach was a lack of adequate funding. As more people are needing to access money advice and support, already stretched advice services have limited capacity to meet this demand.

Overwhelming demand and staff burnout is impacting the ability of advice services to support everyone who needs their help. When someone facing money concerns has to wait to receive advice, their financial situation can worsen; it becomes more likely they will need to turn to charitable food aid. Lack of capacity can also impact the style of support delivered, reducing the ability to build relationships and provide ongoing support when people need it.

The other major barrier faced by advice agencies is when income maximisation is not enough to prevent someone needing to turn to charitable food aid as the support available is not enough to bridge the gap. Advice agencies have played a role in highlighting the inadequacy of support. Angus McIntosh shared case studies from Castlemilk Law Centre's clients, which showed that in many cases, even when someone's income has been maximised, this still did not match up with the income needed to cover people's essential expenditure.

The workshop concluded by drawing out the ways that the advice sector can overcome these barriers to cash first. These included more direct funding from the Scottish Government to provide and enhance their services, improvements to the accessibility and adequacy of the Scottish Welfare Fund, and more effective partnership working to build robust referral pathways with community organisations. It is critical that, despite being excessively busy, the voices of the advice sector are heard; their contribution to campaigns to increase social security payments is invaluable.

Panel: Cash first and tackling the food waste problem

Over the past decade the use of surplus food by charitable food aid organisations to support people struggling to afford essentials has proliferated. This raises questions about the entanglement of the issues of 'food waste' and 'food poverty.'

This panel considered the conflation of the food waste and food poverty problems. Where charitable organisations rely on the use of surplus food, this can impact the sustainability of their work as well as the quality of support people receive. Professor Flora Douglas, Robert Gordon University, spoke about how food insecurity exacerbates health inequalities, including through reliance on food surplus which can vary in terms of quantity and quality.

> **"The council gave us money to join (food surplus distributor), but as to date since we started with (food surplus distributor), the amount of produce we've been able to use is less than 20 kg a week. Because we can't take chilled produce, we can't take frozen produce... they've given us a lot more than that but the biggest item by weight we've had has been diet Irn-Bru. I would actually use that as an example of something with no nutritional value whatsoever. The second biggest item we've had, not by weight but by quantity, has been salt and vinegar crisps"**
>
> **Charitable food organisation (Slides, Flora Douglas)[11]**

Dr Maddy Power, University of York, spoke about the role and influence of supermarkets on the distribution of food surplus including the need for further commitments to reduce the price of food and the need to pay a real Living Wage to all employees and subcontracted workers. Andrew Forsey, Feeding Britain, shared concerns that the UK was now at a 'crossroads' and risks following the path of nations like the US and Canada where food banks have become embedded as a permanent response to poverty over the past several decades. Jon Molyneux of FareShare Scotland shared how before the pandemic a relatively small proportion of FareShare-distributed food was used for food aid parcels. That increased significantly during lockdown due to the suspension of many in-person services. Despite this proportion reducing in the past two years, it remains higher than pre-pandemic levels due to the cost-of-living crisis.

The panel considered how the UK is now in a constant, 'non emergency' crisis - and that solutions must go beyond how best to improve the charitable food aid model

Putting cash first into practice: lessons from today and next steps for tomorrow

John Dickie, CPAG Scotland, reflected on the scale of powerful consensus across sectors that a cash first approach should be at the heart of our response to food insecurity. He spoke about how, when the Scottish Government's working group on food poverty was first established in 2015, there was no visible path away from a charitable food aid response. But now, the lessons of cash first have taken root and continue to grow and develop in communities across Scotland; "we have come a long way together."

Lynn Anderson, The Poverty Alliance, spoke about the importance of fair work as well as investment in social security to a cash first approach. And that the Scottish Government should be applying all the levers it can to promote fair wages and fair work as a response to food insecurity. Lynn spoke about the Poverty Alliance's Living Wage Campaign, and that the willingness of many employers to make this commitment should encourage the Scottish Government to be brave in requiring employers to do more to ensure fair work and fair pay.

Annie McCormack, Broke Not Broken, reflected on the wealth of experience of attendees from a range of backgrounds including food aid, advice, local authorities, and experts by experience. Annie spoke on how this wisdom proves that we already know how to make a cash first future possible: "We are not trying to reinvent the wheel, but to find the puncture and how to fix it."

Scottish Government's plan to end the need for food banks

Nearly three months after our Cash First Future conference, in June 2023, the Scottish Government's plan outlining a strategy to reduce the need for food banks was published. **Cash First: Towards Ending the Need for Food Banks** listed nine key actions aimed at delivering on the vision of a Scotland where no one needs to use a food bank.

Responses from IFAN and the Trussell Trust

Sabine Goodwin (Coordinator, IFAN)
5th June, 2023
Food bank use and severe food insecurity are continuing to rise at unprecedented rates across the UK. We welcome the Scottish Government's Cash First: Towards Ending the Need for Food Banks in Scotland and their commitment to critical steps towards a cash first future. No other government has pushed forward a vision that could see food banks relegated to history. However, further bold actions are imperative to ensure that a cash first future can indeed be built where no one needs to turn to a charitable food aid provider in Scotland.

Polly Jones (Head of Scotland, the Trussell Trust)
5th June, 2023
We welcome this first plan to end the need for food banks from any government in the UK. Ending the need for charitable food aid requires significant leadership and urgency from all levels of government. The Scottish Government's plan to end the need for food banks has the right vision but they must go further faster and do what charities cannot, by delivering bold long-term action to increase people's income and ensure everyone can afford the essentials.

The Scottish Government's plan has been published at a time when need for charitable food aid is at a record high across both our networks.

The latest Trussell Trust data revealed a significant increase in need over the past 12 months, with 260,000 parcels distributed across Scotland, a 30% increase on last year. IFAN independent food banks across Scotland have also seen consistent and unprecedented increases in demand since the cut to Universal Credit and the start of the cost-of-living crisis.

We know this is just the tip of the iceberg. The Trussell Trust's Hunger in Scotland report, published in June, found that just 7% of Scottish households had accessed food aid but a staggering one in six people had experienced hunger due to a lack of money, equating to an estimated 1.2 million adults across Scotland.[12] As winter approaches, tens of thousands of people in Scotland are worrying about how to afford food and other essentials, due to inadequate income from work and social security.

So the publication of the Scottish Government's action plan is not just timely and very welcome, it is just the beginning of our journey to ending the need for charitable food aid in Scotland. If we are to build a cash first future and meet the hopes of the legion of "cash first" pioneers in every part of Scotland; and if the the Scottish Government is to achieve its ambitions of a Scotland where no one needs to use a food bank, then every opportunity must be grasped to increase people's incomes and ensure everyone has enough money not just to afford the essentials, but to afford a decent quality of life.

Conclusion - What's next?

Those on the frontline of the food insecurity crisis - food aid providers, advice and support services, local authorities, campaigners - have a great wealth of knowledge, skills and experience and are ready to be key agents in delivering the change we need to see. It's vital that the Scottish Government uses all its powers and resources to reduce the need for food aid as well as equips them with the resources they need if we are to realise our shared ambitions.

People working on the frontline of Scotland's poverty crisis know that a food parcel can't do more than temporarily alleviate poverty. Cash first or income-focused solutions must be prioritised, not just in words but in actions. We are ready to play our part in delivering the vision we share with the Scottish Government of ending the need for charitable food aid and we are determined to deliver this bold ambition.

Across Scotland, work is underway to make a cash first a reality. Scotland is leading the way and we are proud of what we have learned and achieved so far. **Our Cash First Future** conference demonstrated that a cash first approach to food insecurity isn't simply a dream, it's becoming a reality. In villages, towns and cities, in every corner of Scotland, many concrete examples of local and national cash first approaches are already underway and we hope you will be inspired by our report and about the possibilities for change.

Our task is now to build on the concrete examples of local and national cash first approaches already underway, to share the best practice and to work together, to build the cash first future we know we can deliver for Scotland.

Footnotes

1. Poverty Alliance Election Hustings. https://www.povertyalliance.org/action-on-the-injustice-of-poverty-is-new-fms-defining-mission/

2. Trussell Trust - End of Year Stats. https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/

3. Scottish Welfare Fund Review: Final Report. https://www.gov.scot/publications/review-scottish-welfare-fund-final-report/pages/16/.

4. John Campbell slides. www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/cash-first-future.

5. Argyll and Bute flexible food fund pays out £2.3m. https://thelochsidepress.com/2023/04/24/argyll-and-bute-flexible-food-fund-pays-out-2-3m/.

6. Caroline Hastings slides. www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/cash-first-future.

7. This led to the development of the IFAN's 'Worrying About Money?' cash first referral leaflets now available in nearly every local authority in Scotland. https://ifanuk.org/3tqF5xj

8. Guarantee Our Essentials Campaign. https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-involved/campaigns/guarantee-our-essentials/.

9. Guarantee our Essentials: reforming Universal Credit to ensure we can all afford the essentials in hard times. https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/guarantee-our-essentials

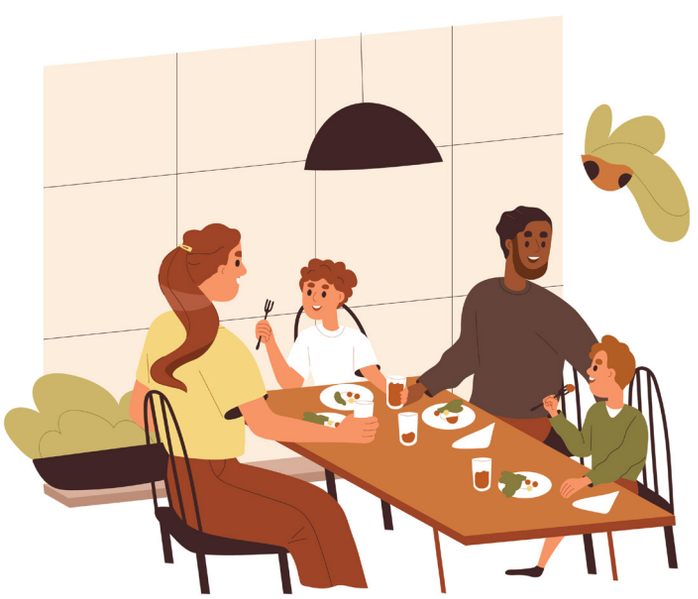
10. Food for Thought Campaign. https://food4thought.uk/.

11. The nature and extent of food poverty/insecurity in Scotland. https://www.healthscotland.scot/media/2228/the-nature-and-extent-of-food-poverty-and-insecurity-in-scotland.pdf

12. Hunger in Scotland. https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/06/2023-Hunger-in-Scotland-report-AW-web.pdf

Further reading:

- **A cash first approach to food insecurity isn't simply a dream, it's becoming a reality**
- **Cash First Future Resources**
- **The Trussell Trust: Our Work in Scotland**
- **Cash First Refferal Leaflets**
- **Why Cash First?**
- **Could food banks be relegated to the history books?**
- **Hunger in Scotland**



the trussell trust
Stop UK Hunger

INDEPENDENT FOOD AID NETWORK

Report published 3rd October 2023.

Thank you to all of the speakers and attendees at our March 2023 conference.

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