

Welfare Reform Committee
2nd Report, 2014 (Session 4)
Food Banks and Welfare Reform

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The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Welfare Reform Committee
2nd Report, 2013 (Session 4)
Food Banks and Welfare Reform

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The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Welfare Reform Committee

Remit and membership

Remit:

To keep under review the passage of the UK Welfare Reform Bill and monitor its implementation as it affects welfare provision in Scotland and to consider relevant Scottish legislation and other consequential arrangements.

Membership:

Annabelle Ewing
Linda Fabiani
Jamie Hepburn (Deputy Convener)
Alex Johnstone
Kenneth Macintosh
Michael McMahon (Convener)
Kevin Stewart

Committee Clerking Team:

Clerk to the Committee

Simon Watkins

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Rebecca Lamb

Committee Assistant

Kevin Dougan



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Welfare Reform Committee

2nd Report, 2014 (Session 4)

Food Banks and Welfare Reform

The Committee reports to the Parliament as follows—

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Department for Work and Pension's Ministers have made it clear that they see no direct link between the increase in use of food banks in Scotland and welfare reform. They argue that the increase in use is "supply led growth" with individuals using food banks to maximise their "economic choices".
2. The Committee, however, has received first hand evidence from those managing and working in food banks that welfare reform is a significant cause of the increase they have experienced in demand for their services.
3. The Committee is convinced by the volume and strength of the evidence it has received that there is a direct correlation between welfare reform and the increase in use of food banks. The Department for Work and Pension's benefit sanctions are one of the key components of welfare reform which are leading to an increase in need for food banks.¹
4. The link must be acknowledged by the UK Government. It can no longer ignore the evidence. The UK Government has to recognise that people are struggling to meet their basic needs for food due to its direct actions.²
5. The Committee also believes that it is important that food bank provision does not 'creep' into welfare state provision. Food banks should be recognised as a community, charitable response for individuals in crisis. Food banks should not be welded into the infrastructure of the welfare state. They are a sign of a Dickensian model of welfare which should have no place in a prosperous nation. Ultimately the necessity for food banks should be eliminated.
6. The Committee, however, has seen from visits to food aid providers in their local areas the current requirement for this vital support for individuals often in desperate need of basic food provision. The Committee praises the dedication and

¹ Alex Johnstone MSP notes his dissent from this paragraph.

² Alex Johnstone MSP notes his dissent from this paragraph.

commitment shown by food bank volunteers. The Committee therefore supports the action taken by the Scottish Government to provide an Emergency Food Aid Action Plan and hopes that this will ensure any logistical issues around food bank provision are addressed.

INTRODUCTION

7. There has been increasing awareness of food bank provision in Scotland. The largest network of food banks in Scotland, co-ordinated by the Trussell Trust, has seen a fast growth in food banks and users in recent years. In the 2011-12 financial year 5,726 people received assistance from Trussell Trust food banks, this rose to 14,318 in 2012-13. In the 2013-14 financial year, 71,428 people (49,041 adults and 22,387 children) received assistance from Trussell Trust Scottish food banks, a 400% increase and five times the number compared to the previous financial year.³

8. In November 2013 the British Red Cross announced that it would provide volunteers for the first time to support Tesco's nationwide food collection for Trussell Trust food banks and FareShare. This was a response to the British Red Cross's increasing concerns about the humanitarian impact of food poverty in the UK.⁴

9. The Trussell Trust is calling for an inquiry by the UK Government into the causes of UK food poverty and the increase in food bank usage.⁵

10. A range of factors have been suggested as contributing to the increase in food banks including the UK Government's welfare reforms. In a letter to the Daily Mirror published on 19 February 2014, 27 Anglican bishops and 16 other faith leaders including Methodists and Quakers said that the Prime Minister, David Cameron, had a "moral duty" to act on the growing number going hungry and that the coalition had caused hardship and hunger through its welfare reforms. It stated that society needs to—

“face up to the fact that over half of people using foodbanks have been put in that situation by cut backs to and failures in the benefit system, whether it be payment delays or punitive sanctions.”⁶

11. Against the backdrop of increasing demand on food banks and calls from some organisations for the UK Government to recognise a link between food bank usage and welfare reforms, the Committee decided to conduct work on the issue. The Committee agreed to explore whether there was a causal link between the UK Government's welfare reforms and the increase in use of food banks.

12. To inform its consideration the Committee conducted fact-finding visits to food banks and food bank providers in Members' local areas. The Committee also

³ Trussell Trust Statistics. Available at: <http://www.trusselltrust.org/stats> [Accessed 22 May 2014].

⁴ The British Red Cross. Written submission.

⁵ Trussell Trust. Written submission.

⁶ The Daily Mirror, 19 February 2014. *27 bishops slam David Cameron's welfare reforms as creating a national crisis in unprecedented attack*. Available at: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/27-bishops-slam-david-camerons-3164033> [Accessed 22 May 2014].

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held two oral evidence sessions on the issue of food banks on 4 March and 29 April 2014 with the following witnesses—

- Marie Hayes, Operations Director (West Scotland), British Red Cross;
- Carol-Anne Alcorn, Interim CEO, Edinburgh Cyreerians, FareShare Edinburgh;
- Dave Simmers, Chief Executive, Community Food Initiatives North East;
- Denis Curran, Chairman, Loaves & Fishes;
- Jo Roberts, Development Lead, Community Food Moray;
- Ewan Gurr, Scotland Development Officer, The Trussell Trust;
- Dr Filip Sosenko, Research Associate, Heriot-Watt University;
- Dr Nicola Livingstone, Teaching Fellow & Research Associate, Heriot-Watt University;
- Dave Kilgour, City Strategist, Aberdeen City Council;
- Mark Ballard, Head of Policy, Barnardo's Scotland;
- Dr John Ip, GP, British Medical Association;
- Keith Dryburgh, Policy Manager, Citizens Advice Scotland;
- Jamie Livingstone, Head of Oxfam Scotland;
- Barbara Kendall, Divisional Director for Community Services, West Scotland Division, The Salvation Army;
- Kay McIntosh, Tackling Poverty Team Manager, South Lanarkshire Council; and
- Neil Couling, Work Services Director, Department for Work and Pensions.

13. The Committee also held an evidence session on the Scottish Welfare Fund on 18 March 2014 where the issue of food banks was raised. Witnesses included—

- Graham Ritchie, Revenues & Benefits Service Manager, Angus Council;
- Ian Black, Director of Finance & Shared Services, East Dunbartonshire Council;
- Morag Johnston, Assistant Director of Financial Services, Glasgow City

Council;

- Stephen Devine, Scottish Welfare Fund Manager, North Lanarkshire Council;
- Leslie Rendall, Revenues Manager, Orkney Islands Council;
- Lynn Brady, Revenues & Benefits Service Manager, Perth & Kinross Council;
- Gary Smith, Revenues and Benefits Manager, Scottish Borders Council;
- Nicola Reid, Team Leader, Benefit Operations and Scottish Welfare Fund, West Lothian Council;
- Ann McVie, Team Leader, Tackling Poverty and Scottish Welfare Fund,
- Andrew Waugh, Senior Assistant Statistician, Scottish Government
- Jamie MacDougall, Head of Housing, Transitions and Support Division, Scottish Government.

The Committee also took evidence from Margaret Burgess, Minister for Housing and Welfare.

14. The findings and recommendations of the Committee are detailed in the following report.

CAUSES OF THE INCREASE IN USE OF FOOD BANKS

Department for Work and Pensions position

15. The Department for Work and Pensions has made it clear that it sees no robust evidence that the increase in use of food banks is linked to welfare reforms.

16. On 2 July 2013 the UK Government Welfare Reform Minister, Lord David Freud, told the House of Lords that there is “no evidence” of a link between the Government’s welfare reform and the increase in the numbers of people using food banks and that it was difficult to make “causal connections”. He said—

“The provision of food-bank support has grown from provision of 70,000 individuals two years ago to 347,000. All that predates the reforms. As I say, there is no evidence of a causal link”⁷

17. In parliamentary questions in the House of Commons on 24 February 2014, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith, responded to a question relating to food banks with the following answer—

⁷ House of Lords. Hansard, 2 July 2013, Col 1072.

“Food banks do a good service, but they have been much in the news. People know they are free. They know about them and they will ask social workers to refer them. It would be wrong to pretend that the mass of publicity has not also been a driver in their increased use.”⁸

18. Neil Couling, Work Services Director, Department for Work and Pensions, in evidence to the Committee expressed similar views to those of his Ministerial colleagues. He argued that the benefit sanctions regime was not a major driver in the growth of food banks—

“in my view, it is supply-led growth that is going on, which will continue over the years ahead, whatever the path of welfare policies.”⁹

19. He told the Committee that a Trussell Trust objective was to put a food bank in every town in the UK and pointed to this as an example of growth in food banks being supply led rather than demand led.

20. He suggested that when a service is expanded demand will increase—

“Why would poor people respond in a different way from rich people to incentives and things that they can claim or get? [...]”

We live in a society in which we have poor people and rich people, and people will maximise their economic choices. That is just how economies work.”¹⁰

21. Neil Couling also told the Committee that international comparisons of food bank usage supported his view of “supply led growth”.¹¹ He explained that weekly food bank usage was far higher in Canada and Germany than in the UK. He said that a generous estimate of food bank usage per week in the UK was 60,000 people, compared with 700,000 people per week in Canada (which has half the population of the UK) and 1.5 million people per week in Germany.¹² He told the Committee that—

“Germany is not some kind of welfare wasteland, where no help is available. That makes me think that supply is what is driving the growth.”¹³

22. Neil Couling further told the Committee that the reasons people gave for accessing food banks may not be reliable—

“[...] people will tell you things when they present to food banks. It might not be wilful deceit that is going on; it might well be their belief about the situation. Then, the food banks will record that and it will be presented back as a fact. However, that does not establish a causal link. The supply argument is a much stronger argument. Academics are not exploring the

⁸ House of Commons. Hansard 24 February 2014, Col 18.

⁹ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 29 April 2014, Col 1458.

¹⁰ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 29 April 2014, Col 1458.

¹¹ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 29 April 2014, Col 1457.

¹² Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 29 April 2014, Col 1457.

¹³ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 29 April 2014 Col 1457-1458.

supply argument though; they are looking at what people are reporting in food banks and citing that as evidence. That does not make it right; it is just what they are doing.”¹⁴

23. Following the Committee’s evidence session with Neil Couling, the Scottish Government’s Minister for Housing and Welfare, Margaret Burgess, wrote to the UK Minister for Employment, Esther McVey, outlining particular concerns regarding Neil Couling’s evidence on the use of food banks and welfare reform.¹⁵

24. The Minister for Employment’s response to the Scottish Government reiterated the UK Government’s views. The Minister for Employment said—

“There is no robust evidence linking food bank usage to welfare reform and the benefit system provides an adequate safety net for those in need. The suggestion that benefit delays are responsible for an increase in food bank usage is unfounded.”¹⁶

25. She explained that any benefit claimant who states they are in financial need can be considered for additional assistance, depending on an individual’s circumstances which could include a hardship payment, benefit advance and/or budgeting loan.¹⁷

26. The Minister also responded to criticism of the sanctions regime by stating—

“Sanctions are used as a last resort and anyone who disagrees with a decision can appeal. We also have a well-established system of hardship provision for sanctioned claimants who have little or no other resources available to them, to ensure they are supported throughout the duration of a sanction.”¹⁸

27. The UK Minister for Employment also said that “the international and national evidence was clear on the issue” and that there was no evidence linking the use of food aid to welfare reform. She supported the points made by Neil Couling regarding food bank usage in Canada and Germany and highlighted a recently published report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development as supporting her argument—

“The proportion of the population who report difficulty in affording food has actually reduced in the UK to 8.1 per cent in 2012 from 9.8 per cent in 2007. Furthermore, the UK is only 1 of 11 EU countries not to see an increase.”¹⁹

¹⁴ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 29 April 2014 Col 1459.

¹⁵ Letter from Minister for Housing and Welfare, Margaret Burgess to Minister for Employment, Esther McVey. 29 April 2014.

¹⁶ Letter from Minister for Employment, Esther McVey, to Minister for Housing and Welfare, Margaret Burgess. 8 May 2014.

¹⁷ Letter from Minister for Employment, Esther McVey, to Minister for Housing and Welfare, Margaret Burgess. 8 May 2014.

¹⁸ Letter from Minister for Employment, Esther McVey, to Minister for Housing and Welfare, Margaret Burgess. 8 May 2014.

¹⁹ Letter from Minister for Employment, Esther McVey, to Minister for Housing and Welfare, Margaret Burgess. 8 May 2014.

28. She also referenced an Office of National Statistics Well-being survey published in March 2014—

“the proportion of the population who report finding it quite or very difficult to get by financially was down from 12.3 per cent in 2009-10 to 10.9 per cent in 2011-12.”²⁰

Alternative views heard by the Committee

29. The Committee explored with other witnesses whether they supported the views held by the UK Government on the scale of the problem, causes of the increase in food banks and whether there was robust evidence to support its position.

30. The Committee found witnesses in disagreement with the UK Government’s position. The strong evidence received by the Committee placed welfare reform as a key factor for the increase in use of food banks.

Link between food banks and welfare reform

31. The Committee received compelling evidence that by far the biggest increase in food bank usage took place at exactly the time most of the key welfare reforms came into force from April 2013.

32. Ewan Gurr of the Trussell Trust provided statistical information on the increase in the number of people using food banks. He told the Committee that the number of people using Trussell Trust food banks in Scotland had risen from 5,726 in 2011-12 to 14,318 people in 2012-13.²¹ The Trussell Trust figures from the end of the 2013-14 financial year put usage at 71,428 people, a 400% increase and five times the number helped in the same period in 2012-13.²²

33. Ewan Gurr told the Committee that there had been an “exponential”²³ rise in the demand for emergency food—

“We are seeing evidence every day, right across our food bank network, that the welfare reforms are inextricably linked to the rise in demand for emergency food relief.”²⁴

34. The UK Government believes that evidence of a causal link between food banks and welfare reform is not robust. However, in contrast, Dr Sosenko who conducted a study for the Scottish Government on an *Overview of Food Aid Provision in Scotland*²⁵ told the Committee that the statistics the Trussell Trust

²⁰ Letter from Minister for Employment, Esther McVey, to Minister for Housing and Welfare, Margaret Burgess. 8 May 2014.

²¹ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1285.

²² Trussell Trust Statistics. Available at: <http://www.trusselltrust.org/stats> [Accessed 22 May 2014].

²³ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1285.

²⁴ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1286.

²⁵ Scottish Government. (2013) *Overview of Food Aid Provision in Scotland*. Available at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0044/00440458.pdf> [Accessed 22 May 2014].

collected on the reasons for the increase in food bank usage were “robust and reliable, and not anecdotal”.²⁶

35. Dr Sosenko explained to the Committee that the “harshest changes” to benefits and the welfare system occurred in April 2013. He listed the ‘bedroom tax’, benefits being uprated by 1 per cent rather than in line with inflation, reassessment of people on disability living allowance and the benefit cap as being key changes made at that time. He told the Committee that the strongest evidence for the link between welfare reform and the demand for food aid was the growth of food aid at a faster rate post April 2013.²⁷

36. The Committee also heard that the more gradual increases in the number of people using food banks before April 2013 was also caused by some initial welfare reform changes. This challenged the statement by Lord Freud that there was no “causal link” between welfare reform and food banks, Dr Sosenko told the Committee—

“I believe that Lord Freud’s statement is factually incorrect. The changes to the welfare system started before April 2013. Yes, the majority of the harshest changes happened in April last year, but JSA sanctions got tougher in October 2012, five months before April 2013, and the absolute number of JSA sanctions was already rising a lot from about 2009.”²⁸

37. Other food aid providers highlighted welfare reform as a key contributing factor in the rise in demand for their services. Community Food Moray said in its written submission that—

“[...] the impact of welfare reform was evident almost overnight.”

38. It pointed to the increase in referrals post April 2013, increasing from 10 per month to an average of 15 per week. Jo Roberts of Community Food Moray told the Committee that in January and February 2014 it had received 301 referrals to its food bank.

39. Loaves and Fishes, a Christian charity which is based in East Kilbride and feeds and clothes people who are homeless or in poverty, told the Committee that since the changes to the benefit system, requests for food parcels had increased from 800 food parcels in 2012 to 1250 food parcels in 2013.²⁹

40. Benefit sanctions and benefit delays were referenced repeatedly by witnesses in both written and oral evidence as reasons for the increase in the use of food banks. The Trussell Trust highlighted that the three main problems that led people to its Scottish food banks in 2013/14 were benefit delays, low income and benefit changes. 28% of referrals were due to benefit delays, 19% due to low

²⁶ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1309.

²⁷ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1309.

²⁸ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1308.

²⁹ Loaves and Fishes Written Submission.

incomes and 19% due to benefit changes. The Trussell Trust stated that the vast majority of benefit changes were found to be related to benefit sanctions.³⁰

41. Dr Sosenko in his study of food aid provision in Scotland found that Trussell Trust monitoring was robust and suggested that the Trussell Trust data on chief reasons for referrals was largely representative of the national picture.³¹

42. Keith Dryburgh of Citizens Advice Scotland told the Committee that its national evidence and the evidence from its front line services highlighted welfare reform and specifically benefit sanctions as the cause of the increase in demand for food banks—

“In our experience, sanctions are a major factor in the referrals and signposting that citizens advice bureaux have had to make. In the period from January to March, we have had to signpost 1,300 clients – or about one in 50—to food banks. According to a recent survey of front-line advisers, 90 per cent agreed that sanctions had led directly to an increase in demand for food parcels.”³²

43. Oxfam Scotland in its written submission suggested why benefit sanctions and benefit delays were leading to an increase in use of food banks—

“People on benefits usually have the lowest incomes with no savings to cover unforeseen circumstances, and even a slight delay in receiving benefit can mean they have no money to buy food for themselves or their children.”³³

Other contributing factors to food bank usage

44. As well as welfare reforms being a key cause for the increase in use of food banks, the Committee received evidence that other factors played a role. These included rising costs of food, energy and transport against the back drop of economic recession. Food prices in the UK rose by 12% in real terms over the five years to 2012, making the cost of food the highest it had been in relation to other goods since 1997.³⁴ The Trussell Trust told the Committee that in the past three months there had been a rise of between 8 and 11 per cent in fuel costs.³⁵

45. Mark Ballard of Barnardo’s told the Committee that the driver of food poverty was the decline in real wages and benefits not being uprated which created a cost of living issue.³⁶ Carol-Anne Alcorn of FareShare and Edinburgh Cyrenians expressed a similar view. She suggested that it was not just those who were unemployed that were accessing food banks, but working people on low incomes who cannot meet cost increases—

³⁰ The Trussell Trust. Press Release *Fivefold Increase in Demand-Scotland*. 16 April 2014

³¹ Scottish Government. (2013) *Overview of Food Aid Provision in Scotland*. Available at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0044/00440458.pdf> [Accessed 22 May 2014].

³² Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1427.

³³ Oxfam Scotland. Written submission.

³⁴ SPICe Note. *Food Banks and Welfare Reform*.

³⁵ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March* Col 1285.

³⁶ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 29 April*, Col 1437-38.

“the need for emergency food packs have increased because people have less money in their pockets. The cost of rent, food and fuel is rising, but income is not rising alongside that.”³⁷

46. The Trussell Trust stated that many of the people referred to food banks on low incomes were found to be in work. Many were working families struggling to make ends meet.³⁸

Demand led food bank usage

47. The Committee received evidence which contradicted the depiction by Neil Couling of the Department for Work and Pensions of food banks as being supply led rather than demand driven. Nicola Livingstone of Heriot Watt University said—

“I think that food banks are addressing a need rather than creating a need and that they are a symptom of a wider cause. If there was no need for them, we would not have them at all.”³⁹

48. This view was supported by evidence from several food aid providers that ultimately they would like their services not to be required. Carol-Anne Alcorn of FareShare, which redistributes surplus food to charities, told the Committee—

“If FareShare achieves the aim that it is working towards, it will be taken out of existence.”⁴⁰

49. Ewan Gurr of the Trussell Trust expressed a similar view—

“Those of us who run food banks ultimately want to see a society in which it is we who are queuing up at the job centre”⁴¹

50. Further evidence that food banks were demand led services, rather than supply led, came from evidence the Committee received that individuals were turning to food banks when they were in desperate need.

51. Denis Curran told the Committee about the people who were accessing Loaves and Fishes services—

“There is a fallacy that there is misuse and greed and that the people are layabouts and rogues. They are people who are in total disarray. They are frightened and insecure, and they have no money.”⁴²

52. Denis Curran believed that there was a misconception regarding food banks users abusing the service and recognition needed to be made that they were people in genuine need. There can be a similar negative perception of those claiming welfare benefits.

³⁷ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March*, Col 1281.

³⁸ Trussell Trust. Written submission.

³⁹ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1306.

⁴⁰ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1299.

⁴¹ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1302.

⁴² Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1282.

53. Keith Dryburgh of Citizens Advice Scotland explained that not being able to afford food came at the end of a long set of coping mechanisms which might include skipping meals and living without electricity. He told the Committee that when they arrive at a food bank they are “often desperate and in crisis”.⁴³

54. He also highlighted that there was a significant minority of people with dependent children who needed the support of food banks—

“[...] there are families out there in which the children are paying a price either for a policy or for something that their parents may or may not have done.”⁴⁴

55. Dr Nicola Livingstone told the Committee there was a “stigma associated” with food banks.⁴⁵ Ewan Gurr of the Trussell Trust touched upon this issue when he told the Committee about his experience of having to use food bank services—

“I know the shame, embarrassment and feelings of failure that people feel when they go to a food bank because they do not have enough money in the bank account to buy toilet roll.”⁴⁶

56. The Committee received evidence that some individual’s circumstances were so desperate that they were unable to use a normal food parcel. Oxfam Scotland highlighted an alarming situation in its written submission—

“One of the most shocking pieces of evidence that Oxfam has seen which highlights the depths of people’s demise and dilemmas is that people who use food banks have actually started giving back food items that need cooking because they can’t afford to turn on the electricity to cook the food they desperately need. People can’t even afford to cook food, even if they get it for free.”⁴⁷

57. The situation described by Oxfam Scotland was supported by evidence Jo Roberts provided of the experience of Community Food Moray. She told the Committee that some individuals had to choose between whether to ‘heat or eat’. People had all the cooking facilities but could not use them because they could not afford to put credit in the electricity meter. As a result the number of cold food boxes Community Food Moray had to provide was increasing.⁴⁸

International comparisons

58. The UK Minister for Employment and Neil Couling supported their argument that growth in food banks was supply-led by referring to the high level of food bank usage in Canada and Germany. The Committee did, however, receive evidence which suggested that food bank usage in these countries was connected to welfare provision and indeed may be supplanting state provision.

⁴³ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 29 April 2014*, Col 1431

⁴⁴ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 29 April 2014*, Col 1447.

⁴⁵ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1307.

⁴⁶ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1303

⁴⁷ Oxfam Scotland. Written submission.

⁴⁸ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1287.

59. The Committee received evidence from Dr Livingstone of Heriot Watt University regarding food bank provision in the United States and Canada. She told the Committee that in these countries food banks emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s and have become an extension of the welfare state—

“They are a social safety net, and they have become normalised. They are embedded in society- they are entrenched.”⁴⁹

60. Her evidence appeared to suggest that in these countries the high number of food banks was demand driven due to a lack of state provision of welfare services. She explained that in Canada an organisation called Freedom 90, based in Ontario, previously worked with food banks for over 20 years was now working to make them obsolete. Freedom 90 was concerned that the Canadian Government was too reliant on food banks and it was using them in such a way that the Government was not having to fulfil its obligations to its people.⁵⁰

61. Food Banks Canada, the national charitable organisation representing and supporting 85% of the food bank community across Canada, outlined in its annual *Hungercount* publication the state of food poverty in Canada in 2013—

“We are at a point where the welfare office refers people to the food bank rather than provide emergency funds, and where food banks provide food to government-run agencies in order for those agencies to trim their bottom lines and meet budgets.”⁵¹

62. Dr Livingstone quoted academic Graham Riches who, reflecting on the situation in Canada in 2002, suggested that food banks—

“enable governments to look the other way and neglect food poverty and nutritional health and well-being... In countries where they are in their infancy, the question of whether to support their development should be a matter of urgent public debate.”⁵²

63. The Scottish Parliament Information Centre [SPICe] note *Food bank international practice*⁵³ also highlighted evidence from Graham Riches article *Food banks and food security: welfare reform, human rights and social policy. Lessons from Canada?* which suggested that—

“The rise of food banks in Canada is concrete evidence both of the breakdown of the social safety net and the commodification of social assistance. As such, they undermine the state’s obligation, as ratified in international conventions, to respect, protect and fulfil the human right to

⁴⁹ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1310.

⁵⁰ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1311.

⁵¹ Food Banks Canada. (2013) *Hungercount 2013*. Available at <http://www.foodbankscanada.ca/FoodBanks/MediaLibrary/Hungercount/Hungercount2013.pdf> [Accessed 22 May 2014]

⁵² Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1311.

⁵³ SPICe note *Food bank International Practice*.

food. They enable governments to look the other way and neglect food poverty and nutritional health and well-being.”⁵⁴

64. Linda Fabiani, MSP visited North America in April 2014, during Scotland Week. She represented the Committee on visits to the New York City Human Resources Administration/Department of Social Services and the Ontario Association of Food Banks in Toronto. The Member’s findings supported those of Dr Livingstone with regard to food banks in Ontario appearing to plug the gap in state provision.

65. Linda Fabiani MSP found that there were marked differences between the approach taken in New York and Ontario. Ontario had a more holistic approach to food aid provision, looking to address the root causes of hunger, find sustainable solutions and ultimately to make the provision of food banks unnecessary. Food banks did not receive direct support from local or national Government. In contrast New York received state and federal funding of the equivalent of £8.3 million for food banks.

66. Evidence Linda Fabiani MSP received from the Ontario Association of Food Banks suggested that there had been ‘food bank creep’, where services had become institutionalised and part of mainstream support. Under the Ontario Local Food Act 2013, farmers could claim a 25% tax credit based on the fair market value of the food that they donated to food banks and other charitable meal programmes.

67. Evidence was also received that in Ontario users of food banks did not use them on a long term basis. The average food bank users used the service for one year to 18 months and the association believed that less than 5% of their users were long term.

68. As well as the example of Canada, the Committee received evidence that the provision of food banks in Germany was also connected to a lack of state provision of services and an increase in need due to welfare changes. The SPICe note *Food Bank International Practice*⁵⁵ highlights an article on German food banks by Stefan Selke, a German academic. The article suggests that German welfare reforms were a contributing factor in the growth in the use of food banks. The article states that the main increase in growth of food banks began in 2005 after a series of welfare reforms, including cuts to pension and unemployment benefits. Around the same time, a new form of unemployment insurance was introduced, reducing previous benefit levels and the duration for which they could be received. Selke stated—

⁵⁴ Social Policy & Administration. (2002) *Food banks and food security: welfare reform, human rights and social policy. Lessons from Canada?* Available at http://historyofsocialwork.org/1967_food_banks/2002%20Riches%20food%20banks.pdf [Accessed 22 May 2014].

⁵⁵ SPICe note *Food bank International Practice*.

“It is becoming simpler and more normal in Germany to receive public approval for voluntary relief of poverty than political legitimacy for combating the roots of poverty.”⁵⁶

69. The SPICe note *Food bank international practice*⁵⁷ highlighted evidence from the DEFRA commissioned report on food aid by Warwick University and the Food Aid Council *Household food security in the UK: A review of food aid final report*. It suggested there may be limitations to comparing other countries food bank usage with the UK—

“Social policy contexts are different in the United States, Canada and other parts of Europe, so that drawing direct comparisons for the UK is difficult. A clear important pattern is that reductions in governmental food aid lead to increased uptake of non-governmental food aid, and that systematic government provided food assistance delivered measurable positive effects on household food security, while informal food assistance did not.”⁵⁸

70. **It is clear that there is increasing demand on food banks. The Trussell Trust figures from the end of the 2013-14 financial year put usage at 71,428 people, five times the number helped in the same period in 2012-13. The economic downturn, increases in food and fuel prices and Department for Work and Pensions welfare reforms are all contributory factors. Having considered the evidence it has received on food banks, the Committee believes that there is a direct correlation between the Department for Work and Pensions welfare reforms and the increase in use of food banks. The Department for Work and Pensions benefit sanctions are one of the key components of welfare reforms which are leading to an increase in the need for food banks. The Department for Work and Pensions benefit sanctions can be seen as a root ‘cause’ and food banks as a ‘consequence’.**

71. **The Committee calls on the Department for Work and Pensions to recognise that welfare reforms are contributing to demand for food aid. There is an increasing body of evidence which demonstrates that welfare reforms have led to a surge in demand on food banks. The Committee believes that the UK Government can no longer ignore the evidence; it must recognise that people are struggling to meet their basic needs for food due to its direct actions.**

72. **The Committee is very concerned at the desperate need of individuals for basic food provision. The Committee was horrified to hear that people are having to choose between “whether to heat or eat”. In a developed nation such as ours there should not be any need for the Red Cross, an**

⁵⁶ Selke, Stefan (July 2013) *The rise of food banks in Germany is increasing the commodification of poverty without addressing its structural causes*. EUCOPP Available at: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2013/07/11/germany-foodbanks/> [Accessed 22 May 2014]

⁵⁷ SPICe note *Food bank International Practice*.

⁵⁸ Food Ethics Council & The University of Warwick (February 2014) *Household food security in the UK: A review of food aid*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/283071/household-food-security-uk-140219.pdf [Accessed 22 May 2014]

international aid charity, to be involved in the provision of food aid in the UK.

73. The Committee does not agree with the assessment of the Department for Work and Pensions Ministers that individuals are choosing to use food banks principally due to ease of access and increased awareness. The Committee believes that individuals turn to food banks primarily out of necessity; many often feel stigmatised and ashamed at having to use them.⁵⁹

74. The Committee was concerned to hear evidence that it is not just those who are unemployed who are using food banks but also people in employment who are on low incomes. This suggests that beyond the current users of food banks there may be many more hovering on the edge of needing food aid.

75. The Committee received evidence which questioned the UK Government's view of food bank usage in other countries. The Committee found evidence that in Canada food banks had become institutionalised and were replacing state provision. There was also evidence that the high level of food bank usage in Germany was related to the changes in the country's welfare provision. The Committee therefore believes that this casts doubt on the value placed by the UK Government on international comparisons as validation of its argument that food bank usage is supply led.

FOOD BANKS AND THE WELFARE STATE

76. The issue of food banks and their relationship with the welfare state was explored during evidence taking.

77. Neil Couling of the Department for Work and Pensions told the Committee that food banks were a community-led response. He highlighted that whilst jobcentres signposted people to food banks the UK Government did not have a policy on them—

“I do not think that it has been proved that food banks are an integral part of the welfare system. They are responding to a desire of people to contribute to them—they are a charitable establishment in the main, although the Scottish Government has given them some funding.

Food banks are outside the Government and state sphere. General UK Government policy is to applaud voluntary and community action. For the Trussell Trust, food banks started as an evangelical device to get religious groups in touch with their local communities. As far as I know, the Government has no policy on evangelism.”⁶⁰

78. Following the Committee's evidence session with Neil Couling, Chris Mould, Chairman, Trussell Trust wrote to Neil Couling stating he was deeply disappointed

⁵⁹ Alex Johnstone MSP notes his dissent from this paragraph.

⁶⁰ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 29 April 2014, Col 1464.

by some of the things Neil Couling had told the Committee. Chris Mould stated in his letter—

“[...]the matter that requires urgent attention: you said “For the Trussell Trust, food banks started as an evangelical device to get religious groups in touch with their local communities.” Please provide me immediately with the evidence you have to support this assertion. You are directly challenging the integrity of a registered charity and its trustees both past and present.”⁶¹

79. Neil Couling responded to Chris Mould’s points in a letter on 12 May stating—

“The Trussell Trust’s website explains how you are a community based organisation driven by Christian principles. If I have misunderstood this aspect of the work of the Trust then I am more than happy to be put right.”⁶²

80. The Committee heard from other witnesses, that there was a concern that food banks were providing services and support which they felt should be provided by the welfare state. Witnesses told the Committee that food banks should not be seen as the norm and become an institutionalised part of the welfare system. Ewan Gurr of the Trussell Trust said—

“We have to be absolutely aware that if we are not careful we could just be moulded into the infrastructure of the welfare state and that is just not our intention. For us, by working with churches and ultimately with communities, we create sustainable food banks that are not Government or state-reliant. It is a crucial thing to avoid ever being assimilated with the welfare state. That is not an acceptable policy shift that we want to see.”⁶³

81. Ewan Gurr also told the Committee that a number of local authorities had made approaches to Trussell Trust food banks. The Trust had made it clear to local authorities that they did not wish to enter into service-level agreements or be remunerated for the food they distributed. He said that Trussell Trust food banks “prefer to be resourced by the community for the community”.⁶⁴

82. The role of the state and food banks was explored in relation to the possible merits of introducing some regulation into food bank provision. Dave Kilgour of Aberdeen City Council suggested that some thought could be given to this idea, to provide some consistency of approach and to ensure that the often vulnerable people using the services were well protected—

“The whole situation around food banks is ad hoc. People are providing support that, although it is well meaning, essentially does not comply with other things concerning vulnerable people. One of the things that perhaps needs to be considered is whether there is something that the Scottish

⁶¹ Letter from Chairman Trussell Trust, Chris Mould to Neil Couling, Work Services Director, Department for Work and Pensions 1 May 2014.

⁶² Letter from Work Services Director, Department for Work and Pensions, Neil Couling, to Chris Mould, Chairman Trussell Trust 12 May 2014.

⁶³ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1302-1303.

⁶⁴ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1303.

Government could do—without getting into the bureaucracy of registration and so on—to provide practical guidance or some method of recognising what a food bank actually is.”⁶⁵

83. Jamie Livingstone of Oxfam, however, in response to Dave Kilgour’s comments told the Committee that the focus should not be on seeking to regulate and institutionalise food banks but to tackle the root causes of people going to food banks.⁶⁶

84. The limitations of food banks were given by some witnesses as a reason why they should not become part of the welfare system. Dave Simmer of Community Food Initiatives North explained—

“In our view, food banks in themselves are not a very productive or positive activity. In themselves, they create dependency, they erode dignity and – if you will excuse my saying this – they will prop up welfare reform, in isolation.”⁶⁷

85. Concern was expressed that food banks should not be part of the formal welfare infrastructure as they do not address the underlying reasons for why people required food aid. Marie Hayes of the British Red Cross told the Committee—

“A concern [...] is that we end up building in food banks as part of the welfare response rather than recognising them as a crisis response to a crisis, to which we need to find different solutions.”⁶⁸

86. Mark Ballard of Barnardo’s highlighted the Christie Commission’s call for public services to take demand out of the system through preventative actions and early intervention. He felt that the focus should be on addressing the root causes of inequality rather than having a crisis management system.⁶⁹

87. In evidence to the Committee on the Scottish Welfare Fund, the Minister for Housing and Welfare, Margaret Burgess, expressed a similar view to that of other witnesses regarding the position of food banks in relation to the welfare state. The Minister told the Committee—

“I have said from the start that food banks should not be part of the welfare system, either in an independent Scotland or in the current system. Food banks should not be used to replace any part of the welfare system. The Scottish welfare fund is there to help people in an emergency. Some people use food banks for a one-off situation, but all the evidence suggests that more and more people are turning up at food banks because of problems with the UK welfare system.”⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 29 April 2014, Col 1441.

⁶⁶ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 29 April 2014, Col 1442.

⁶⁷ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 4 March 2014, Col 1289.

⁶⁸ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 4 March 2014, Col 1297.

⁶⁹ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 29 April 2014, Col 1443.

⁷⁰ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 18 March 2014, Col 1365.

88. The Committee believes that food banks should be recognised as a community, charitable response for individuals in crisis. Food banks should not be “welded into the infrastructure of the welfare state”. Food banks are a sign of a Dickensian model of welfare which should have no place in a prosperous nation. Ultimately the need for food banks should be eliminated.

OPERATION OF FOOD BANKS

89. Another subject explored during the Committee’s evidence taking was the operation of food banks. During fact-finding visits to food banks and food aid providers in their local areas, Committee members witnessed first-hand the dedication and hard work of both employees and volunteers in delivering a food aid service to people in their local communities. Ewan Gurr of Trussell Trust described food banks in the following terms—

“I know the love, grace, mercy and compassion that reside on the other side of the threshold of that door”.⁷¹

90. Keith Dryburgh of Citizens Advice Scotland told the Committee that food banks were a “fantastic” community response from the bottom up rather than the top-down, with services being designed to work for local people in their local community.⁷²

91. The Committee also received evidence of the role of supermarkets in providing surplus and additional food to food banks. Dr Livingstone explained that the Trussell Trust and Tesco conduct two national collections each year and smaller local collections around four times per year. Tesco gave 30% of the overall food value to the food bank, enabling the food bank to buy additional food as it is needed.⁷³

92. During its evidence sessions, the Committee recognised the good work being done by food banks. Whilst the Committee believes that in modern day Scotland there should be no place for food banks, it also recognises the current reality of the situation of food bank provision. It explored in evidence how it could be ensured that individuals got access to the food aid they needed.

Scottish Government initiatives

Interaction of Scottish Welfare Fund with food banks

93. One area explored in relation to food banks and the Scottish Government was the Scottish Welfare Fund. The fund is delivered by local authorities and provides two types of grant. Crisis Grants provide a safety net in the event of a disaster or emergency and Community Care Grants provide support for independent living.

94. In evidence to the Committee on the Scottish Welfare Fund, the Minister for Housing and Welfare told the Committee that she hoped there would be less reliance on food banks once the Scottish Welfare Fund was used to the full, and

⁷¹ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 4 March 2014, Col 1303.

⁷² Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 29 April 2014, Col 1444-1445.

⁷³ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 4 March 2014, Col 1313.

bedroom tax mitigation was put in place along with other measures the Scottish Government was taking to help families increase and make best use of their incomes.

95. The Minister, however, told the Committee that there may be further pressure on the Scottish Welfare Fund and Scottish local authorities and food banks due to UK Government policies—

“[...] the main reason why people are going to food banks is not anything that has been created by the Scottish Government; it has been created by the Westminster Government, and we cannot control what it will do next.”⁷⁴

96. Ewan Gurr of Trussell Trust expressed concern that in the first six months of the 2013-14 financial year, Dundee Food Bank had received over 1,000 instances of people being signposted directly by their local authority from the Scottish Welfare Fund to its services without having been asked their financial situation.

97. Dr Sosenko of Heriot Watt University told the Committee that food banks should be considered an additional source of support and not a replacement to the Scottish Welfare Fund—

“Referring to food banks is fine, and it is useful to applicants, as long as it does not replace the grant.”⁷⁵

98. The Committee received evidence from Stephen Devine that North Lanarkshire Council did not see a referral to a food bank as an alternative to a grant. The local authority sought to make a decision on the application for a grant first, independently and fairly. When the local authority was unable to make an award for a grant it referred customers to food banks. He explained how decision makers used their discretion with regard to food bank referrals—

“If someone is turned down for a crisis award and a food bank is available in their area on that day, we will refer them to the food bank for assistance. However, if no food bank is available on that day, we will make an exception, overturn the decision and make the award. We will not tolerate a person sitting without food.”⁷⁶

99. Evidence from the Minister for Housing and Welfare also emphasised that anyone entitled to payment from the Scottish Welfare Fund should not be referred to a food bank in the first instance—

“I do not think that anybody who has been assessed as being eligible for a payment for food support from the Scottish welfare fund should be sent to a food bank. However, there will be people who make an application to the Scottish welfare fund but who, for whatever reason, are not eligible for a payment from the fund, and they may be referred to a food bank.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 18 March 2014*, Col 1365.

⁷⁵ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1311

⁷⁶ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 18 March 2014*, Col 1333.

⁷⁷ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 18 March 2014*, Col 1364.

100. Eligibility for a payment from the Scottish Welfare Fund was discussed in evidence by both Oxfam Scotland and Dr Filip Sosenko of Heriot Watt University who raised concerns that sanctioned JSA claimants were not eligible for crisis grants from the Scottish Welfare Fund.⁷⁸

101. Dr Sosenko explained to the Committee that he had spoken to colleagues in the welfare division at the Scottish Government who had advised that there was a legal issue in broadening the eligibility for crisis grants to include sanctioned people—

“there are legal limitations on how eligibility for a crisis grant is set-legally, they are not meant to subvert what the DWP is doing, and if people who have been sanctioned were eligible for crisis grants, that would undermine the policy of the DWP.”⁷⁹

102. Following the Committee’s consideration of this evidence on 31 March 2014, the Minister for Housing and Welfare wrote to the Committee to advise that an updated version of the Scottish Welfare Fund guidance had been published. The revised guidance clarified that those subject to benefit sanctions would no longer be precluded from applying to the Scottish Welfare Fund. It stated—

“those who are in a crisis situation, following sanction by the Department for Work and Pensions, are subject to the same eligibility criteria as other applicants.”⁸⁰

103. The Committee also considered in this context whether those in need should be provided with money rather than food aid. Jamie Livingstone of Oxfam Scotland told the Committee that providing cash to deal with food poverty was a useful way to deal with the issue—

“If cash is given instead of food, that not only gives people choice and dignity; it also boosts the local economy—people who go for food support will spend any money that they get in their local economy and boost that economy. Given our programme experience, cash, rather than food, would be our preference.”

104. The Committee recognises the important role local authorities play in providing crisis support to people through the Scottish Welfare Fund’s Crisis Grants and Community Care Grants.

105. The Committee received evidence that some individuals were being referred by local authorities to food banks rather than being able to access financial support through the Scottish Welfare Fund. The Committee recognises that signposting to food banks is permitted under the Scottish Welfare Fund and some local authorities have relationships set up with food banks in their areas. However, the Committee supports the comments made by the Minister for Housing and Welfare that anyone entitled to payment

⁷⁸ Oxfam Scotland. Written submission.

⁷⁹ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1308.

⁸⁰ Letter from Minister for Housing and Welfare, Margaret Burgess, 31 March 2014.

from the Scottish Welfare Fund should not be referred to a food bank in the first instance.

106. **The Committee welcomes the announcement by the Scottish Government that those individuals subject to benefit sanctions will no longer be precluded from applying to the Scottish Welfare Fund. The Committee hopes that this will ensure that individuals who seek support from their local authority are provided with assistance from the Scottish Welfare Fund rather than having to turn to food banks. The Committee however, advocates a range of options being available to those in crisis and believes that financial support rather than simply food aid during an individual's time of crisis can ensure the individual retains a greater freedom of choice and feeling of control.**

Emergency Food Aid Action Plan

107. On 11 April 2014 the Deputy First Minister announced an Emergency Food Action Plan.

108. The Minister for Housing and Welfare wrote to the Committee on 22 April 2014 to provide further information on the £1 million funding that would be made available through the Action Plan across the 2014/15 and 2015/16 financial years. The Minister told the Committee that the Action Plan would provide support to those working in the emergency food aid sector, helping to address food poverty by: building capacity in the sector; fostering stronger links to mainstream advice services, particularly money, benefits and employment advice; and improving sustainability by reducing food waste.⁸¹

109. The letter from the Minister detailed that funding of £500,000 was to be provided to FareShare to tackle food waste and food poverty across Scotland. The remaining £500,000 was to be used over two years to support an Emergency Food Aid Grant Fund. Once the criteria for the new fund is developed, food banks and organisations working with those who seek emergency food aid would be able to apply for funding.⁸²

110. The Committee welcomes the announcement by the Deputy First Minister on 11 April 2014 of a Scottish Government Emergency Food Aid Action Plan. The Committee believes that the £1 million provided by the plan will deliver much needed short-term support to those working in the emergency food aid sector and help to address food poverty. However, it believes that it is important that food bank provision remains rooted in charitable efforts and does not become an institutional part of the welfare state.

Partnership working delivering a person centred approach

111. The Committee received evidence of the importance of ensuring effective partnership working between food banks and other support services to deliver a person centred approach to service users.

⁸¹ Letter from Minister for Housing and Welfare, Margaret Burgess, 22 April 2014.

⁸² Letter from Minister for Housing and Welfare, Margaret Burgess, 22 April 2014.

112. In the case of Aberdeen's Food Bank Partnership, the Committee learnt that it brought together a number of organisations including Community Food Initiatives North East, Instant Neighbour, Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council and community-based organisations and community projects. Dave Kilgour of Aberdeen City Council explained that it worked effectively on a community planning partnership basis to establish common standards and guidance around how food banks should operate and communicate with different services.⁸³

113. Dave Kilgour told the Committee that it was important that food banks were not considered in "complete isolation". He explained that a range of services were offered to the individual using the food bank, including diet, nutrition, money advice and personal budgeting support. This formed part of an overall approach to addressing the underlying issues leading to an individual needing food bank services.⁸⁴

114. Kay McIntosh of South Lanarkshire Council also emphasised the importance of partnership working and working out appropriate referral routes. Last year the local authority's Financial Inclusion Network had established a Food Poverty sub group in response to the need for a local partnership approach to tackling food poverty.⁸⁵

115. The Food Poverty sub group members included local food banks, other providers of food related support, the Citizen Advice Bureaus, Council departments including Social Work (Money Matters), Housing and Regeneration, NHS Lanarkshire and others.⁸⁶

116. The Committee received evidence of effective partnership working across food aid providers. The Committee recognises the importance of local networks. The Committee believes that food bank providers should be encouraged to be aware of the provision that is available in their area and work together to address need where possible. The Committee seeks further information from the Scottish Government on how its Emergency Food Aid Action Plan will seek to encourage effective partnership working.

Logistical issues

Referral process

117. The Committee received evidence on the different approaches taken by food aid providers to people accessing their services. The Trussell Trust in its written submission explained that to use its food banks everyone who was given emergency food must be in receipt of a voucher. These could be issued from a registered frontline organisation which includes social workers, school liaison officers and visitors. Trussell Trust clients may redeem up to three food bank vouchers in a six month period.⁸⁷

⁸³ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1441.

⁸⁴ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1441.

⁸⁵ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 29 April 2014*, Col 1434.

⁸⁶ South Lanarkshire Council. Written Submission.

⁸⁷ Trussell Trust. Written submission.

118. In contrast, Dr Livingstone of Heriot Watt explained that other providers were viewed as being more “informal and unconditional” in how they gave and distributed food aid. They could provide food on a regular, sometimes weekly basis to the same clients repeatedly.⁸⁸ Dave Kilgour highlighted that in Aberdeen people could self-refer to food banks.⁸⁹

119. The Committee received evidence that some food banks were requesting GP involvement in the referral process. A GP Magazine *Pulse*, highlighted in SPICe note *Food Banks and GP Referrals*,⁹⁰ found that of the 522 GPs it surveyed, 16% (one in six), had been asked to refer patients to food banks.⁹¹

120. Dr Ip from the British Medical Association told the Committee that it was a concern that GPs were being required to refer patients to food banks, particularly when food banks were experiencing significant pressures. He told the Committee that this approach lengthened the patient journey and added to GP practices’ workload—

“my concern—especially with the growing number of food banks—is that we are increasingly seen as the first port of call and that people are being told “If you’ve got a food issue, go and see the GP.” I would not support that at all.”⁹²

121. The Committee recognises that there are a range of food bank providers. Some require specific criteria for access and others offer a less prescriptive approach. The Committee believes that this diversity in the system enables those in need of food aid to access the appropriate service for them. It is important that food banks do not become a formalised part of the welfare system by all food banks requiring individuals to be referred to them.

Location of services

122. Some logistical issues were raised with the Committee regarding individuals being able to access food banks. Dr Nicola Livingstone explained that issues regarding making food more accessible to people who needed it arose in both rural areas and cities. She told the Committee of anecdotal evidence it had received of people walking nine miles to get to a food bank to find that there was no food left and then having to walk nine miles back.⁹³

123. Several Committee members who visited food banks in their local areas heard similar cases. This included the example of an individual who had walked from Ballingry to visit Dunfermline food bank which was over 12 miles away.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 4 March 2014, Col 1310.

⁸⁹ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 29 April 2014, Col 1441.

⁹⁰ SPICe Note, *Food Banks and GP Referrals*.

⁹¹ *Pulse* (18 February 2014) *One in six GPs asked to refer a patient to a food bank in the past year*. Available at: <http://www.pulsetoday.co.uk/news/finance-and-practice-life-news/one-in-six-gps-asked-to-refer-a-patient-to-a-food-bank-in-the-past-year/20005889.article> [Accessed 22 May 2014].

⁹² Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 29 April 2014, Col 1441.

⁹³ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 4 March 2014, Col 1306.

⁹⁴ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report*, 4 March 2014, Col 1292.

124. The Committee received examples of food banks which had sought to address these logistical issues. In the case of the Dunfermline food bank some discussions had taken place between the Trussell Trust food bank and Fife Council to explore the possibility of food bank vouchers being used to access public transport, to bring an end to the need for individuals to walk such distances.⁹⁵

125. Dr Nicola Livingstone told the Committee that in Dundee, additional distribution centres had been opened so there was a main central food bank and three additional distribution points. She explained that in some rural areas certain charities and local business had given food banks access to vans, which helped distribution particularly in areas such as Angus where the Kirriemuir and Forfar food banks cover an area of around 850 square miles.⁹⁶

126. Dr Livingstone also told the Committee that it was not just concern regarding access to food banks but a lack of awareness of their existence which was an issue. She said that a lot of people in more rural areas did not know how to access food from a food bank or that food banks were there to support them.⁹⁷

Cost of provision

127. As well as practical issue regarding the distribution of food, some food aid providers highlighted the expense involved in providing large storage facilities and refrigeration for food items. FareShare told the Committee that its Edinburgh storage facility cost £22,000 a year.⁹⁸ Dave Simmers of Aberdeen Foodbank Partnership told the Committee that it was “desperate for walk-in refrigeration” and investment was required to maximise the amount of food that is available to people in need.⁹⁹

128. The issue of food disposal was also raised with the Committee. Carol-Anne Alcorn of FareShare told the Committee that food that could otherwise be utilised by food banks is being diverted into other usage—

“[...] given all the food that is still going to landfill, we need to link welfare reform with environmental concerns and the capacity to feed people who are going without.”¹⁰⁰

129. The flip-side to the issue was raised by Community Food Initiatives North East who raised concerns regarding the costs that zero waste regulations were placing on food banks for disposal of food.¹⁰¹ It was suggested to Committee members during visits to local food banks that because there was a cost for disposing of any food they did not use, this was limiting the quantity of food that they could accept.

⁹⁵ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1292.

⁹⁶ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1306-1307.

⁹⁷ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1307.

⁹⁸ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1291.

⁹⁹ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1300.

¹⁰⁰ Scottish Parliament. Welfare Reform Committee. *Official Report, 4 March 2014*, Col 1299.

¹⁰¹ Community Food Initiatives North East. Written submission.

130. Whilst the priority should be to tackle the root causes of the need for food banks, the current reality of the situation must be recognised and appropriate crisis support provided to ensure individuals get access to the aid they need. The good work of food banks should be recognised.

131. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government use the funding in its Emergency Food Aid Action Plan to address some of the logistical issues of accessing food aid particularly for those in rural communities. The Committee is concerned by the evidence it received of individuals having to resort to walking for miles to access food banks. Food banks need to be as accessible as possible to the people in need. The Committee welcomes the practical examples it received of food banks reaching out into local communities, through increasing the number of distribution points and exploring the possibility of individuals going to a food bank being able to access free public transport.

132. The Committee received evidence regarding the costs that zero waste regulations place on food banks for disposal of food. The Committee believes that it is important to ensure that all the money provided to food bank providers is focused on delivering frontline services. The Committee seeks the Scottish Government's view on whether steps could be taken to exempt food banks from these regulations.

133. The Committee believes that the broad range of evidence it has received regarding food banks and the welfare state cannot be ignored by the UK Government. The UK Government must recognise that welfare reform is a significant cause of the increase in the demand food banks have experienced. The UK Government should review its position on food banks and must recognise that they are a sign of a Dickensian model of welfare which should have no place in a prosperous nation.

ANNEXE A: EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF THE WELFARE REFORM COMMITTEE

4th Meeting, 2014 (Session 4)

Tuesday 4 March 2014

Food banks: The Committee took evidence, in round-table format, from—

Marie Hayes, Operations Director (West Scotland), British Red Cross;

Carol-Anne Alcorn, Interim CEO, Edinburgh Cyrrerians, FareShare Edinburgh;

Dave Simmers, Chief Executive, Community Food Initiatives North East;

Denis Curran, Chairman, Loaves & Fishes;

Jo Roberts, Development Lead, Community Food Moray;

Ewan Gurr, Scotland Development Officer, The Trussell Trust;

Dr Filip Sosenko, Research Associate, and Dr Nicola Livingstone, Teaching Fellow & Research Associate, Heriot-Watt University.

Food banks (in private): The Committee considered evidence it heard on food banks at its round-table discussion.

The Committee agreed to hold a further evidence session on the issue of food banks.

5th Meeting, 2014 (Session 4)

Tuesday 18 March 2014

Scottish Welfare Fund: The Committee took evidence from—

Graham Ritchie, Revenues & Benefits Service Manager, Angus Council;

Ian Black, Director of Finance & Shared Services, East Dunbartonshire Council;

Morag Johnston, Assistant Director of Financial Services, Glasgow City Council;

Stephen Devine, Scottish Welfare Fund Manager, North Lanarkshire Council;

Leslie Rendall, Revenues Manager, Orkney Islands Council;

Lynn Brady, Revenues & Benefits Service Manager, Perth & Kinross Council;

Gary Smith, Revenues and Benefits Manager, Scottish Borders Council;

Nicola Reid, Team Leader, Benefit Operations and Scottish Welfare Fund, West Lothian Council;

Margaret Burgess, Minister for Housing and Welfare, Ann McVie, Team Leader, Tackling Poverty and Scottish Welfare Fund, Andrew Waugh, Senior Assistant Statistician, and Jamie MacDougall, Head of Housing Transitions and Support Division, Scottish Government.

The Minister for Housing and Welfare agreed to provide the Committee with further information in relation to the processing time of crisis grants compared to the processing time of crisis loans in local authorities.

In addition, the Minister agreed to provide statistics on the percentage of Discretionary Housing Payments that have been used which were originally provided by the Department for Work & Pensions.

7th Meeting, 2014 (Sessions 4)

Tuesday 29 April 2014

Food banks: The Committee took evidence, in round-table format, from—

Dave Kilgour, City Strategist, Aberdeen City Council;

Mark Ballard, Head of Policy, Barnardo's Scotland;

Dr John Ip, GP, British Medical Association;

Keith Dryburgh, Policy Manager, Citizens Advice Scotland;

Jamie Livingstone, Head of Oxfam Scotland, Oxfam Scotland;

Barbara Kendall, Divisional Director for Community Services, West Scotland Division, The Salvation Army;

Kay McIntosh, Tackling Poverty Team Manager, South Lanarkshire

Benefit sanctions - DWP: The Committee took evidence from—

Neil Couling, Work Services Director, Department for Work and Pensions.

Neil Couling agreed to provide the Committee with statistics on the amount of compensation that has been paid out for incorrect benefit sanction decisions. Neil Couling also agreed to provide the Committee with the quality assurance framework and checklist for jobcentre staff which was referred to in the evidence session.

Food banks (in private): The Committee considered evidence it received on food banks at its round-table discussion.

9th Meeting, 2014 (Sessions 4)

Tuesday 27 May 2014

Food banks (in private): The Committee considered and agreed a draft report.

ANNEXE B: ORAL EVIDENCE AND ASSOCIATED WRITTEN EVIDENCE

4th Meeting, 2014 (Session 4) Tuesday 4 March 2014

Written evidence

[Barnardo's Scotland](#)

[British Red Cross](#)

[Community Food Initiatives North East](#)

[Community Food Moray](#)

[Fare Share](#)

[Loaves and Fishes](#)

[Oxfam Scotland](#)

[The Salvation Army](#)

[The Trussell Trust](#)

[Heriot-Watt University](#)

[Oral Evidence](#)

British Red Cross

Community Food Initiatives North East

Community Food Moray

Fare Share

Loaves and Fishes

The Trussell Trust

Heriot-Watt University

5th Meeting, 2014 (Session 4) Tuesday 18 March 2014

Written Evidence

[Scottish Government](#)

[Scottish Government](#)

[Oral Evidence](#)

Angus Council

East Dunbartonshire Council

Glasgow City Council

North Lanarkshire Council

Orkney Islands Council

Perth & Kinross Council

Scottish Borders Council

West Lothian Council

Scottish Government

7th Meeting, 2014 (Session 4) Tuesday 29 April 2014

Written Evidence

[Aberdeen City Council](#)

[Barnardo's Scotland](#)

[Citizens Advice Scotland](#)

[Oxfam Scotland](#)

[The Salvation Army](#)

[Department for Work and Pensions](#)

[Oral Evidence](#)

Aberdeen City Council

Barnardo's Scotland

Citizens Advice Scotland

Oxfam Scotland

The Salvation Army

Department for Work and Pensions

ANNEXE C: ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE

Correspondence relating to evidence given by Neil Couling, Work Services Director DWP at a Committee meeting on 29 April 2014:

[Letter from Margaret Burgess MSP, Minister for Housing and Welfare to Esther McVey MP, Minister for Employment – 30 April 2014](#)

[Email from Chris Mould, Chairman of the Trussell Trust to Neil Couling, DWP Work Services Director – 1 May 2014](#)

[Letter from Convener to Neil Couling, DWP Work Services Director - 1 May 2014](#)

[Letter from Esther McVey MP, Minister for Employment to Margaret Burgess MSP, Minister for Housing and Welfare – 8 May 2014](#)

[Letter from Neil Couling, DWP Work Services Director to Chris Mould, Chairman of the Trussell Trust – 12 May 2014](#)

Note of visits to food banks during Scotland Week 2014

[Scotland Week 2014: Food banks](#)

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