

## Further written evidence submitted by the Trussell Trust (WPS0024)

### Welfare Policy in Scotland

1. Have there been any knock-on costs to your services in response to the introduction of Universal Credit and the demand needs of service users? If so, what have these been, and how have you tackled them?

The Trussell Trust works with our food bank network and a range of advice sector partners to support people in crisis to access specialist income maximisation and wider social welfare law advice. This can include:

- Helping people to navigate the complexity of the benefits system, which can be particularly challenging for a person in crisis.
- Determining eligibility for Universal Credit and other benefits, and to make and sustain Universal Credit claims. The claims process and ongoing conditionality of Universal Credit is challenging for many people, particularly for those with mental health problems.
- People also often need advice and support on how to manage the five week wait (including advance payments) for benefit, as well as in dealing with any delays in their Universal Credit or other benefit claims being determined, as well as budgeting support to manage the monthly payment cycle, once Universal Credit is in payment.
- We also work to support people facing benefit sanctions or with other appeals and Mandatory Reconsiderations as appropriate.

#### *New volunteers*

Our UK-wide network has risen to meet growing demand through additional volunteers, with 10,000 additional people registering to become volunteers during the first six weeks of last year's lockdown alone. The network also had support through partnerships, such as one with British Gas which saw 3,000 British Gas employees made available to support food banks across the network with parcel deliveries.

#### *Strategic shift towards income maximisation*

Evidence from food banks in our network has underpinned our strategic shift towards income maximisation. As the work we undertake shows, demand for emergency food is often driven by problems in the benefit system – such as payment levels which are too low, flawed decision-making and administrative errors.

- This shift has meant developing stronger partnerships with other sector organisations providing specialist support and welfare advice.
- This builds on existing work, such as co-location of welfare advisors in food banks, signposting to mental health and other support in the community.
- As an organisation, we are also pushing for stronger provision of local crisis support to minimise people needing a food bank in an emergency, via the Scottish Welfare Fund.

#### *Costs to services*

There have been inevitable costs for the organisation, in staff, training, and support. We are also working on how we evaluate and look at impact, to learn lessons for our work and government policy for Scotland and the UK. But we have decided it is better we invest in this strategic shift - better to make efforts to ensure people have the money to pay for essentials - than continuing as we were in simply distributing emergency food.

2. What challenges have you experienced in relation to collaborative working with the DWP and Social Security Scotland and other agencies involved in social security/benefit administration in Scotland?

- From learning at a UK level, early communication and consultation with relevant agencies and organisations is very important to effective policy. We always appreciate the DWP clarifying ways in which we can meaningfully feed in frontline evidence i.e. to shape and improve delivery and design.
- Data from the DWP and other government departments, for example in the form of the claimant count, allows us to identify patterns of hardship and need and to prepare our network.
- In partnership with Heriot-Watt University we use data published by DWP to assess the link between the social security system and levels of need for food banks.
- Lack of specific information about benefit issues, such as the irregular release of number of advance payments, and the size of deductions reduces our ability to accurately understand the links between social security and levels of need for food banks. More regularly reporting in this areas would be beneficial for our work, helping us to anticipate levels of need and analyse what is driving it.

3. Is there a stigma around social security in Scotland?

Evidence from the 2019 longitudinal qualitative research conducted by the A Menu for Change project gives the most comprehensive current analysis of people's experiences of food insecurity and the social security system in Scotland.

Full details can be found in Found Wanting (A Menu for Change, 2019): [found-wanting-a-menu-for-change-final.pdf \(wordpress.com\)](#).

The study found shame is a key barrier to those seeking help in a crisis, and the nature of support provided can make a significant difference to a person's outcomes. Asking for help was often a source of shame for interviewees when struggling to afford to meet their basic needs. Some reported feeling undeserving of help and chose not to seek out support despite experiencing extreme need.

The findings in this study highlight the relevance of food insecurity to a wide range of services and the importance of a holistic, person-centred approach to service design and delivery to improve people's outcomes. The study also suggests there is evidence of the new Social Security Scotland Agency adopting this approach, which considers people's wider needs, and welcomes this. It goes on to make the case for a role for the Scottish Government, local authorities and other public bodies to:

- Embed principles of investment, dignity and respect throughout public services and proactively communicate a rights-based approach to service delivery;
- Encourage cross-sectoral working on food insecurity, recognising its relevance to health, social care, housing and advice service design and delivery and the importance of holistic, person centred ways of working;
- Improve referral pathways between statutory, voluntary and community services, so people have ready access to welfare rights advice and income maximisation opportunities; and

- Invest in the availability of welfare rights advice and advocacy support in community-based settings and via public services like schools and GP surgeries, drawing on the evidence of life events that increase vulnerability to income crisis.

#### 4. Further evidence on the Scottish Welfare Fund

The Committee is strongly encouraged to draw on the evidence in *Strengthening the Safety Net – a study of best practice* (A Menu for Change, September 19) to evaluate the efficacy of the Scottish Welfare Fund. Comprehensive analysis of its delivery in all 32 local authorities in Scotland lead to the following set of findings and recommendations to improve the accessibility, speed of decision-making and quality of decision-making.

In considering best practice in Scottish Welfare Fund delivery, this study identified that all local authorities should:

1. When taking crisis grant applications by phone, have the same member of staff take the application and make the award decision;
2. Not use an “eligibility checker” for online applications;
3. Re-evaluate what evidence from applicants is deemed to be “essential” and reduce this, where appropriate;
4. Make active referrals to advice and support services rather than simply signpost people in crisis;
5. Pay all applicants in cash as opposed to vouchers;
6. Give all applicants their decision over the phone initially, followed by a written decision.

In order to maximise the capacity of local authorities to deliver the best practice identified in this study, the Scottish Government should:

1. Consult local authorities to determine the budget they need to administer the fund to a high standard, including implementing the above recommendations;
2. Increase the SWF administrative budget based on the findings of this consultation process;
3. Increase the overall SWF programme budget to meet increased demand;
4. Provide opportunities for sharing best practice between SWF frontline staff;
5. Review and revise statutory guidance on the SWF to reflect the recommendations in this report; and
6. Review the existing monitoring and evaluation of the SWF to ensure an approach based on best practice is being delivered across Scotland and provide additional support to local authorities where required.

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