

Challenge Poverty Week 2023

Policy Briefing 5

A Scotland where no one goes hungry



What is Challenge Poverty Week?

Challenge Poverty Week was launched by the Poverty Alliance in 2013. We wanted to highlight the injustice of poverty in Scotland, and to show that collective action based on justice and compassion can create solutions. The week is an opportunity to raise your voice against poverty and unite with others in calling for a just and equal Scotland. Each year, hundreds of organisations in Scotland do just that, including elected representatives, charities and NGOs, local authorities, faith groups, businesses, school and colleges, trade unions, professional bodies and more.

What are we calling for?

Ensure people have dignified access to good quality, affordable, healthy and sustainable food.

How do we get there?

- **Improve dignified and 'cash first' food insecurity responses, including boosting the value and administrative responsiveness of the Scottish Welfare Fund.**
- **Support wellbeing through community food approaches, including community growing; community food hubs; community larders and meals.**
- **Supermarkets should commit to setting the lowest prices, including cutting prices, on key basic food items, including pasta, bread and milk to reduce the costs of essentials.**

1. Introduction

Food is one of our most basic needs and a human right. The realisation of the right to food is also fundamental to meeting our wider human rights. However, many people in Scotland are continuing to face food insecurity and hunger. Scotland's Good Food Nation Act enshrines in law the Scottish Government's commitment to ensuring people from every walk of life take pride and pleasure in, and benefit from, the food they produce, buy, cook, serve, and eat each day. But, at present, we are failing on that ambition.

More people in our society are being left with no option but to turn to community food projects to feed themselves and their families. In 2022/23, the Trussell Trust reported that they had distributed a record number of food parcels with a 30% increase on the previous year.¹ Of great concern is the fact food bank use is just the tip of the iceberg. One in six people in Scotland face hunger due to a lack of money, and the risk of hunger is particularly high for disabled people, families with young children, working age adults who live alone, and care experienced people.²

This situation is being exacerbated by the rising cost of living with more people cutting back on food; skipping meals; and seeking assistance from food banks. In some cases, people have been forced to go without food completely. Research by the Poverty Alliance and Scottish Women's Budget Group found that, in their role as poverty managers in the home, women were cutting back on food in order to feed their children during the crisis. One woman, Idia, a single mother aged 35-44, reflected on the challenges of being able to afford food and going hungry:

"I spoke to my friend who told me she has been starving and only eats at night. I have started doing that though it didn't go well with me the first day, but I will get used to it."

This isn't right, nobody should be facing hunger in a wealthy country like Scotland. In a just and compassionate society, everyone should have dignified access to good quality, affordable, healthy and sustainable food.

2. How do we get there?

Building on the principles of the Good Food Nation Act, the realisation of the right to food should be a core consideration in the Scottish Government's forthcoming Human Rights Bill. Access to nutritious and tasty food is critical for our physical health and wellbeing. As part of the right to an adequate

¹ The Trussell Trust (2023) *Hunger in Scotland* available at <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/06/2023-Hunger-in-Scotland-report-AW-web.pdf>

² Ibid.

standard of living, and to realise our human rights, people need to be able to access food that meets their dietary, social and cultural needs. We are calling for action to:

Improve dignified and ‘cash first’ food insecurity responses, including boosting the value and administrative responsiveness of the Scottish Welfare Fund.

It is welcome that the Scottish Government’s strategy to end the need for foodbanks is rooted in a cash first approach. The strategy commits funding to eight cash-first partnerships across Scotland and places focus on increased access to money and debt advice.³ Cash first approaches are critical to addressing the root cause of food insecurity, which is the lack of access to an adequate income, either through work or social security. Indeed, inadequate social security is the main driver of the need for support in meeting daily food needs, with analysis highlighting that 90% of low-income households on Universal Credit are currently going without essentials.⁴

Without an adequate safety net, setbacks that can happen to any of us - relationship breakdown, redundancy, ill-health or unpaid caring responsibilities - can be hard to overcome. Analysis from The Trussell Trust and The Joseph Rowntree Foundation for the essentials guarantee campaign highlight that a sufficient income to ensure people have access to life’s essentials would be £120 a week for a single adult and £200 for a couple. The universal credit standard allowance (£85 for a single adult from April 2023) falls well short of this indicative level for what’s needed to afford essentials.⁵

In addition to taking steps to deliver a Minimum Income Guarantee, the Scottish Government should boost the value and administrative responsiveness of the Scottish Welfare Fund and act quickly to implement the findings of the Scottish Welfare Fund review. The Poverty Alliance have heard from people living on low incomes that there is a need to speed up the current turnaround times for crisis grants, with examples given of families waiting for 40 days or more.⁶ Two in five (41%) people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust’s network in Scotland had applied for, or received, a grant in the last three months from the Scottish Welfare Fund. Improving dignified and cash first food insecurity responses, including boosting the value and administrative responsiveness of the Scottish Welfare Fund, are critical to

³ Scottish Government (2023) *Cash-First: Towards ending the need for food banks in Scotland* available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/cash-first-towards-ending-need-food-banks-scotland/>

⁴ Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Trussell Trust (2022) *Guarantee Our Essentials* available at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/guarantee-our-essentials>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The Poverty Alliance (2022) *Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26: Voices from our Communities* available at: https://www.povertyalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/TPA_GHS_Child_Poverty_Plan_2022-26.pdf

ensuring that nobody in Scotland experiences hunger.

Support wellbeing through community food approaches, including community growing; community food hubs; community larders and meals.

Food is about community, not just consumption. We must ensure that dignity and the promotion of our collective wellbeing is at the heart of our responses to food insecurity. We are clear that community food approaches are an important part of this approach. In 2016, the report of the independent working group on food poverty recommended increased investment in the community food sector.⁷

Across Scotland, community organisations have developed dignified models of community food provision which promote choice, participation, community development and support pathways out of crisis. For example, the Ferguslie Community Market is a locally led weekly provision hosted by Darkwood Crew. This is resourced by surplus food from supermarkets, and other outlets across Renfrewshire, and aims to help tackle food insecurity in a dignified and sustainable way. While the market has averaged 50 visitors per week since it launched during the Covid-19 pandemic, the community has reported increased demand during the cost of living crisis. The forthcoming Community Wealth Building Bill should include provisions to increase support and investment for community food initiatives, including community hubs.⁸

The independent working group on food poverty previously recommended that food provision that is embedded within our communities is critical to ending the need for foodbanks.⁹ Sharing a meal in a communal setting, engaging in volunteering, and connecting with other community-based activities have the potential to reduce social isolation and harness the important community development role of food. We agree with the working group's position that improving linkages between emergency food aid and wider community activities is important to help people access a range of support and opportunities.

We are calling on the Scottish Government to support wellbeing through community food approaches, including community growing; community food

⁷ Independent Working Group on Food Poverty (2016) *Dignity: Ending Hunger in Scotland* available at <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/independent-report/2016/06/dignity-ending-hunger-together-scotland-report-independent-working-group-food/documents/00502395-pdf/00502395-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00502395.pdf>

⁸ Poverty Alliance (2023) *Response to Community Wealth Building Consultation* available at <https://www.povertyalliance.org/consultation-response-community-wealth-building/>

⁹ Independent Working Group on Food Poverty (2016) *Dignity: Ending Hunger in Scotland* available at <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/independent-report/2016/06/dignity-ending-hunger-together-scotland-report-independent-working-group-food/documents/00502395-pdf/00502395-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00502395.pdf>

hubs; community larders and meals to ensure that everyone in Scotland has dignified access to good quality, affordable, healthy and sustainable food.

Supermarkets should commit to setting the lowest prices, including cutting prices, on key basic food items, including pasta, bread and milk to reduce the costs of essentials.

The cost of living crisis is continuing to have a disproportionate impact on people living on low incomes, heightening the risk of food insecurity and hunger for people across Scotland. While soaring inflation has been influenced by international factors such as the war in Ukraine, it has also been caused by so-called ‘greedflation’ in the private sector. The ‘rebuilding of profit margins’ during the rising costs crisis have protected the profit of the large supermarkets, and the income paid to their shareholders, at a time when people are struggling to make ends meet.¹⁰

Inflation hits people on low incomes the hardest, and the soaring price of food has had damaging implications for people who are already struggling. In 2023, food prices have reached the highest level for 45 years, rising by more than 19 per cent in March and April 2023. Inflation is worst in staple foods with the price of sliced white bread increasing by up 28%, and dried pasta by 22%. Similarly, while the mark-up on a pint of milk has been in the 25p-30p range for three decades, it rose to 40p at the end of 2022.¹¹ Research from consumer body Which? has concluded that own-brand budget items have risen by 25%. These huge price increases have occurred at a time, as a recent evidence session at the House of Commons Business and Trade Committee has shown, when shareholder dividends and corporate salaries at our large supermarkets have remained staggeringly high.¹²

Solving food insecurity is not the sole responsibility of our governments, public and third sectors. The private sector, particularly our large supermarkets, have a critical role to play. We are calling on supermarkets to commit to setting the lowest prices, including cutting prices, on key basic food items, including pasta, bread and milk to reduce the costs of essentials. Similar policies have been adopted in France, Greece and Croatia, where governments have struck deals with retailers to cap the prices of some basic food items. In France, the government reached agreement with 75 manufacturers to reduce the price of staple foods by between 2% and 10% after signs that the prices being paid by

¹⁰ Oxfam (2023) ‘Welcome to the era of “greedflation”’ available at <https://voices-oxfam.org.uk/2023/01/greedflation/>

¹¹ Dunn, Will (2023) ‘The Age of Greedflation’, *The New Statesman*, 31ST May 2023, available at <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/economy/2023/05/age-greedflation-rising-prices-inflation-corporate-greed>

¹² Business and Trade Committee (2023) *Food and fuel price inflation: will prices come down this year – Oral Evidence* available at <https://committees.parliament.uk/event/18792/formal-meeting-oral-evidence-session/>

the industry for raw materials had been falling. For companies who break this agreement, the French government have threatened the use of sanctions.¹³ Our governments should seek to negotiate with supermarkets to embed similar agreements to those outlined above. Within the UK context, we are clear that the implementation of this ask cannot be about further squeezing food producers, many of whom are themselves struggling to make ends meet. Rather, the cost of implementing this policy should come from the profit margins of our supermarkets.

¹³ Butler, Sarah (2023) ' France's food industry pledge to cut prices after government pressure', *The Guardian*, 9TH June 2023, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/09/frances-food-industry-pledges-to-cut-prices-government-pressure>

Developing our policy asks

This year, the policy asks for Challenge Poverty Week were developed in collaboration with a short life working group with representation from public bodies, the private sector and a variety of third sector organisations. We would like to thank these organisations for their participation in this process.

What we heard from our Short Life Working Group:

- Access to food is essential and should be the foundation of a human-rights based approach to challenging poverty. Everything else comes from the realisation of this basic right.
- The responsibility for ensuring everyone in Scotland has access to good quality, affordable, healthy and sustainable food goes beyond the Scottish Government and public bodies. The private sector, primarily large supermarkets, have a key role to play in achieving food security in Scotland.
- Access to good quality, healthy and sustainable food cannot be separated from action to improve access to an adequate income. Inadequate and insecure incomes is the key driver of food insecurity.
- Our communities and community organisations are critical to the realisation of food security. Many communities provide dignified food responses, including community food programmes such as larders and community fridges, and should be adequately and sustainably funded to deliver these services.
- Food is tied to the realisation of wider Scottish Government priorities including, for example, closing the poverty-related attainment gap.
- Education on food is critical for young people. 'Whole school food plans' which connect the curriculum with the catering sector and the community, and link schools with local producers and processors, should be developed.

How will this help Scotland to meet our child poverty targets?

- Many households across Scotland are rationing food to make ends meet during the cost of living crisis, with implications for children's health, wellbeing and educational attainment. Ensuring that everyone has access to good quality, tasty food will help to ensure children live healthier and happier lives.
- *Best Start, Bright Futures* acknowledges that access to food is critical to alleviating the impact of poverty in Scotland. The plan includes commitments around Best Foods and expanding eligibility for free school meals. The ambition of these actions is furthered by the policy asks outlined in this briefing.

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