



Challenge Poverty Week 2024
Policy Briefing 4

A Scotland where we live without hunger



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 representative, 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, 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;
- Supermarkets should commit to setting the lowest prices, including cutting prices, on key basic food items; and
- Deliver universal free school breakfast and lunch provision to all pupils in Scotland.

Introduction

Food is one of our most basic needs and a human right. But when people are pushed into life on an inadequate income, they are left unable to get the food they need for themselves and their household.

People are increasingly being left with no option but to turn to community food projects to feed themselves and their families – something that would have been unthinkable in previous decades. In 2023/24, the Trussell Trust alone distributed 262,400 emergency food parcels in Scotland, with almost 156,200 of them going to households with children. These figures represent a 21% increase on five years ago and a 20% increase in the number of parcels for children, with an even larger increase seen for families with three or more children, up 28%.¹

The principal cause of food poverty is clear - our weakened social security system. Some 81% of people referred to food banks were reported to solely have income

¹ The Trussell Trust (2024) *Emergency food parcel distribution in Scotland 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024*. Available at: <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/05/EYS-Scotland-Factsheet-2023-24.pdf>

from social security.² This is being made worse by the rising cost of living, with more people cutting back on food, skipping meals, as well as seeking help from food banks. In some cases, people have been forced to go without food completely. The OHCHR states that this means “individuals should be able to afford food for an adequate diet without compromising on any other basic needs”.³ Yet 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.⁴ 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.”

In their 2023 State of Caring report, Carers Scotland has found that 28% of carers say they are struggling with costs, and 60% of those people said they could not afford food costs.⁵ One carer reported that they:

“Can’t afford to eat meat anymore, it is just too expensive. We cook from scratch because of food allergies but the increases in basic items have hit us very hard”

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.

How do we get there?

The right to food forms part of Article 11 of the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. We fully expected that the right to food would form part of a new Human Rights Bill, and so be on the way to being enshrined in Scots Law. Along with many others, we were disappointed when the Bill did not appear in the latest Programme for Government. We will continue to campaign until the right to food, along with all the other human rights that underpin a decent life, are legally enforceable in Scotland. As part of the right to an adequate 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. To get to that point, we are calling for action to:

² Ibid

³ OHCHR (2010) *Fact Sheet No.34: The Right to Adequate Food*. Available at: [Fact Sheet No. 34: The Right to Adequate Food | OHCHR](#)

⁴ The Poverty Alliance and Scottish Women’s Budget Group (2022) *“It’s hard work being poor” Women’s Experiences of the Cost-of-Living Crisis in Scotland*. Available at: [SWBG PA Cost of Living Report Final.pdf \(povertyalliance.org\)](#)

⁵ Carers UK (2023) *State of Caring 2023: The impact of caring on finances*. Available at: [CUK State of Caring 2023 \(carersuk.org\)](#)

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.⁶ 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.⁷

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.⁸

As well as 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 its review.⁹ The funding allocated to local authorities by the Scottish Government for Scottish Welfare Fund awards has remained stagnant at £35.5 million since the 2020/21 budget, despite significant increases to everyday essentials. Further to this, £49.9 million worth of Scottish Welfare Fund awards were given in the 2023/24 financial year, representing a 129% overspend.¹⁰ This additional funding came from already stretched local authority budgets, and indicates the need for further national level funding. This is having visible consequences on the availability of the fund for those in crisis, with the latest statistics from the Scottish Government highlighting that award rates had fallen in most quarters of 2023/24. This is partly related to increasing pressure on budgets.¹¹

The Poverty Alliance have also heard from people living on low incomes that there is a need to speed up the current turnaround times for crisis grants, with examples

⁶ 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/>

⁷ Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Trussell Trust (2022) *Guarantee Our Essentials*. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/guarantee-our-essentials>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Scottish Government (2023) *Review of the Scottish Welfare Fund: Main Report*. Available at: [Review of the Scottish Welfare Fund: Main Report \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/review-of-the-scottish-welfare-fund-main-report/)

¹⁰ Scottish Government (2024) *Scottish Welfare Fund Statistics: annual update 2023-24*. Available at: [Supporting documents - Scottish Welfare Fund Statistics: annual update 2023-24 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-welfare-fund-statistics-annual-update-2023-24/)

¹¹ Ibid.

given of families waiting for 40 days or more.¹² 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, is therefore critical to ensuring that nobody in Scotland experiences hunger.

Supermarkets should commit to setting the lowest prices, including cutting prices, on key basic food items

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. There is evidence that soaring inflation has, in part, been caused by so-called 'greedflation' in the private sector.¹³ The 'rebuilding of profit margins' during the cost of living 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.¹⁴

Inflation hits people on low incomes the hardest, and the soaring price of food has had damaging implications for people who are already struggling. Although food inflation has slowed this year, food prices remain at record highs, and this continues to have a significant impact on people struggling across the UK.¹⁵

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. 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 the industry for raw materials had been falling. For companies who break this agreement, the French government have threatened the use of sanctions.¹⁶

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 must not lead to further squeezing food producers, many

¹² 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

¹³ Unite the Union (2023) *Food prices: The British public are hostages to 'greedflation'*. Available at: <https://www.unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2023/march/food-prices-the-british-public-are-hostages-to-greedflation>

¹⁴ Oxfam (2023) *Welcome to the era of "greedflation"*. Available at: <https://views-voices.oxfam.org.uk/2023/01/greedflation/>

¹⁵ The Food Foundation (2024) *Food Prices Tracker*. Available at: <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/news/food-prices-tracker-april-2024>

¹⁶ The Guardian (2023) 'France's food industry pledge to cut prices after government pressure'. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/09/frances-food-industry-pledges-to-cut-prices-government-pressure>

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.

Deliver universal free school breakfast and lunch provision to all pupils in Scotland

The 2023/24 Programme for Government set out plans to expand free school meal provision to all Primary 6 and Primary 7 pupils during 2026¹⁷ That this commitment did not appear in the latest Programme for Government, which only refers to making school meals available to all P6 and P7 pupils who are eligible for the Scottish Child Payment,¹⁸ is very disappointing.

At the time of the last Scottish Parliament elections in 2021, the SNP pledged to provide free breakfasts for all pupils in primary and special needs schools. But, in government, that promise has not been delivered. Magic Breakfast are clear that, in delivering free school meals, parity must be given to breakfast and lunch provision. This is particularly as research shows that 35% of children and young people say it is difficult to concentrate when they arrive at school hungry.¹⁹

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has found that providing a free, nutritious breakfast to children boosted reading, writing and maths by an average of 2 months progress over the course of the academic year compared to pupils in schools with no provision.²⁰ Additionally, a 2021 study looking into the economic impact of the work of Magic Breakfast found that school breakfast provision can offer a 50 times return on investment. This shows that tackling hunger and poverty today has significant wider benefits for the Scottish economy.²¹

The academic and anecdotal evidence for both school breakfast and lunch provision is clear. As such, we again call on the Scottish Government to meet its election promises around school meal provision.

¹⁷ The Scottish Government (2024) *Programme for Government 2024 to 2025*. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/collections/programme-for-government/>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Magic Breakfast (2023) *What's for breakfast? Children, young people and parents reflect on their morning routines*. Available at: [whatsforbreakfastreport2023optimisedandinteractivev.pdf \(magicbreakfast.com\)](https://www.magicbreakfast.com/whatsforbreakfastreport2023optimisedandinteractivev.pdf)

²⁰ Institute of Fiscal Studies (2016) *Breakfast clubs work their magic in disadvantaged English schools*. Available at: [Breakfast clubs work their magic in disadvantaged English schools | Institute for Fiscal Studies \(ifs.org.uk\)](https://www.ifs.org.uk/breakfast-clubs-work-their-magic-in-disadvantaged-english-schools)

²¹ Magic Breakfast, Heinz and Pro Bono Economics (2021) *The economic cost-effectiveness of the Magic Breakfast model of school breakfast provision*. Available at: [The-economic-cost-effectiveness-of-the-Magic-Breakfast-model-of-school-breakfast-provision.pdf \(magicbreakfast.com\)](https://www.magicbreakfast.com/the-economic-cost-effectiveness-of-the-magic-breakfast-model-of-school-breakfast-provision.pdf)

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 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.
- 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. However, there is also a need to provide access to support to meet immediate food needs in the short-term.
- 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.
- There is a need to place choice at the heart of programmes and services intended to provide access to food. People living on low-incomes should not be restricted and confined to the cheapest options, but have access to nutritious food and choice over meals.
- Within cash first support, there is a need to consider barriers to applying; the way people living on low-incomes view this support; and the application processes.

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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