



A Menu for Change MSP briefing Budget 2020–2021 Stage one debate

A Menu for Change is a partnership between Oxfam Scotland, Poverty Alliance, Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland and Nourish Scotland. It aims to reduce the need for emergency food aid by ensuring people across Scotland get the cash, rights and food they need before they are in crisis.

We have consistently found that income crises are the key trigger for food insecurity, with these driven by inadequate incomes from both work and social security. Food insecurity is not caused by a shortage of food in Scotland, it is caused by a shortage of money.

It is of huge concern that the latest foodbank data we released in January shows a significant increase in the number of emergency food parcels being distributed in Scotland.¹ We also note that the latest Scottish Welfare Fund statistics show a significant increase in Crisis Grant expenditure, including a 34% increase of the Crisis Grant expenditure on food.²

As such, while we welcome the draft budget announcement of a £3 million increase to the Fund we do not believe this goes far enough. With the pressures of low wages and an inadequate social security system creating a rising tide of poverty, further action is required in this budget to ensure everyone in Scotland at crisis point gets the emergency help they need.

Key points

- Foodbanks are not the long-term answer to food insecurity. Fundamentally, people need cash so they can buy the food they need.
- We welcome the commitment of initial funds for the Scottish Child Payment as part of wider action to boost the resources of households on the lowest incomes. We also welcome the £3 million increase to the Scottish Welfare Fund and its administration announced as part of the draft budget. However, this does not go far enough to ensure the Fund can play its full role in providing a dignified and rights-based alternative to foodbanks in Scotland.
- While the Scottish Welfare Fund is an additional support which is only available in Scotland, it has faced a real-terms cut since 2013. We believe that the budget should rise so that councils across Scotland are fully able to support people at crisis point. This means allocating more resources to the Fund's administration budget to allow the delivery of best practice, with the programme keeping pace with any increased demand.
- As things stand, the proposed increase within the Budget 2020-21 does not fully restore the real-terms value of the Fund to the 2013 level (detailed below). A £7million Rapid Poverty Mitigation Fund was set aside in the event of a hard Brexit, but the latest evidence demonstrate that Scottish households need that support now. This amount should be allocated specifically to the Fund.

¹ <https://menuforchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/IFAN-Menu-for-Change-Briefing-January-2020.pdf>

² <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/statistics/2020/01/scottish-welfare-fund-statistics-update-to-30-september-2019/documents/scottish-welfare-fund-statistics---update-to-30-september-2019/scottish-welfare-fund-statistics---update-to-30-september-2019/govscot%3Adocument/Scottish%2BWelfare%2BFund%2BStatistics%2B-%2Bupdate%2Bto%2B30%2BSeptember%2B2019.pdf>

The lived reality of food insecurity³

“I went three days without food and, literally, I was close to collapsing in the street.”
Philip, Dundee

“I’m worrying about things that I need tae really worry about, like whether I’m gonnae eat today or whether I’m gonnae pay a bill tomorrow.”
Hilary, East Ayrshire

“It gets to that embarrassing point of, dignity totally goes out the window, you know, ‘cause I felt suicidal more than I had hot dinners, and that’s no joke.”
Alison, Dundee

Strengthening the Scottish Welfare Fund

We recently published [Found Wanting](#), in-depth research that sought to understand the journeys people in Scotland take towards food insecurity, and to identify interventions that reduce and remove the need for emergency food aid. As well as showing the considerable physical, psychological and social impacts, the research showed that inadequate and insecure incomes from work and social security are key triggers for food insecurity.⁴

A key finding of the report was that people valued being able to access cash at points of financial crisis, particularly via the Scottish Welfare Fund. This added weight to previous research which examined the operation of the SWF across Scotland, [Strengthening the safety net: a study of best practice](#). As well as identifying good practice, this highlighted concern amongst SWF staff about an underfunding of the administration budget. They suggested this was preventing local authorities from consistently implementing best practice or sufficiently advertising the Fund as a source of cash support in a crisis.⁵

We are hugely supportive of the Fund as a statutory scheme providing cash support to people in crisis. It is a unique, additional source of support which is not available in other parts of the UK. However, with demand increasing each year – and expected to increase yet further in the years ahead – there is a serious risk that the Fund is no longer able to act as a lifeline for people who have been swept into income crisis. Had the £33m budget for the Scottish Welfare Fund kept up with inflation it would have been worth £37,185,850 in this budget.⁶ Instead, it is proposed to be £35.5 million. At the same time as the Fund’s value has eroded, foodbanks use has continued to grow substantially.

While we welcome the increased funding of £3 million announced as part of the draft budget, the evidence is clear that this does not go far enough to ensure the Fund can play its full role in providing a dignified and rights-based alternative to foodbanks in Scotland.

While the Fund does not provide a solution to food insecurity, it provides a safety net for people across Scotland who may otherwise be pulled further into crisis and destitution. In the face of growing foodbank demand, we must ensure that this safety net is strengthened.

Summary

³ All quotes from our [Found Wanting](#) report.

⁴ <https://menuforchange.org.uk/the-system-has-been-found-wanting/>

⁵ <https://menuforchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/A-Menu-for-Change-SWF-Report-UPDATED.Pdf>

⁶ Calculated using the SPICe inflation tool: <https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/63552.aspx>. This relates to the core fund that is available for grants.

- Foodbanks are not the long-term answer to food insecurity. Fundamentally, people need cash so they can buy the food they need.
- While we welcome the increased funding announced as part of the draft budget, the evidence is clear that this does not go far enough.
- To ensure the Fund plays its full role in providing a dignified and rights-based alternative to foodbanks in Scotland the forthcoming budget should, at a minimum, immediately restore the real terms funding of the Fund and its administration to their original value, with additional resources allocated to ensure the Fund is administered in a way that reflects best practice, and with programme budgets keeping pace with any increased demand. A £7million Rapid Poverty Mitigation Fund was set aside in the event of a hard Brexit, but the latest evidence demonstrate that Scottish households need that support now. This amount should be allocated specifically to the Fund.