

## ITEM No ...5.....

**REPORT TO:** POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 24 JANUARY 2022

**REPORT ON:** RESPONSE TO SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S DRAFT NATIONAL PLAN ON ENDING THE NEED FOR FOOD BANKS

**REPORT BY:** CHIEF EXECUTIVE

**REPORT NO:** 28-2022

### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report advises elected members about a Scottish Government consultation on proposals for a draft national plan on ending the need for food banks. It also sets out a proposed response to be submitted on behalf of Dundee City Council.

### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that elected members:
- (i) note that the Scottish Government has issued a consultation paper ending the need for food banks, which is summarised below in section 4.
  - (ii) consider and agree the draft response (Appendix 1) to the consultation to be submitted by the deadline of 25 January 2022.

### 3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no financial implications as a result of this report.

### 4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 In October 2021, the Scottish Government published a consultation on a [draft national plan](#) on ending the need for food banks. The draft plan sets out what the Scottish Government are currently doing and what more can be done by the government, alongside others, to end the need for food banks as a primary response to food insecurity. The consultation questions are to help identify further practical action that can be taken at all levels to deliver this vision.

#### **Scottish Government's vision and approach**

- 4.2 The Scottish Government recognises that insecure incomes fuelled by rising costs of living and cuts to social security lead to financial hardship and food insecurity. Whilst accessing emergency food parcels remains one of the quickest responses to financial crises, food banks are not a suitable long-term solution to poverty, as they are unlikely to be able to meet individuals' dietary or cultural needs or preferences. Accessing emergency food to supplement low incomes will not contribute to reducing future need and is contradictory to the principles of dignity and the recognition that access to adequate food is a basic human right.
- 4.3 The draft national plan defines the Scottish Government vision and approach taken to ensure that food banks are no longer the primary response to food insecurity. The Government is engaging with organisations at all levels to help deliver their vision that:

*“Everyone has a sufficient and secure income to be able to access food that meets their needs and preferences. Where financial hardship does occur, coordinated local responses prioritise access to emergency financial assistance and money advice alongside access to holistic support services. Where help to access food is needed, this is provided in a way that maximises*

*dignity and reduces future need. Delivering this in practice will take leadership and action at all levels across Scotland.”*

- 4.4 The plan further sets out policies and actions currently in place, as well future planned approaches to achieve the vision. The Government strategy is centred around ‘prevention’ measures and ‘responses’ to when financial crisis does occur.

#### **Prevention and response measures currently underway**

- 4.5 The Government's strategy to prevent the need for food banks as primary response to food insecurity is based on the three main drivers of poverty: income from employment, social security system and costs of living.
- a) Fair Work policy aims to tackle poverty by improving incomes through work and includes the Scottish Government's commitment to promote the real Living Wage and reduction of the gender pay gap. Through the introduction of Parental Employability Support Fund parents are supported to access and progress in work and increase their incomes.
  - b) Social Security Scotland currently provide benefits and grants to support families with young or disabled children, carers, 16–24-year-olds looking for employment, and those in need of financial help with costs of a funeral. This includes the Scottish Child Payment, set at £10 per week for every eligible child under 6 - this is to be rolled out to school-aged children by the end of 2022. The weekly payment is set to double over the course of this parliament.
  - c) Reducing costs of living - Key measures taken to reduce costs of living for low income households include the expansion of Early Learning and Childcare to 1,140 hours for all 3 and 4 year olds, and eligible 2 year olds, free school meals providing an average saving of £400 a year for each child and the Scottish Government's commitment to tackling fuel poverty.
- 4.6 The Scottish Government's response measures to address food insecurity using devolved social security powers include:
- a) Crisis Grants from The Scottish Welfare Fund, support for tenants through the Discretionary Housing Payments and flexible funding to local authorities during the pandemic.
  - b) Welfare advice sector delivering free money and debt counselling continues to be supported, in addition to funding being continually offered for the ongoing development of cash-first referral approaches that encourage individuals to seek income maximisation advice.
  - c) Through funding to FareShare Scotland, the Government has supported community organisations to access high quality surplus food with an emphasis on community development and access to wider services.

#### **Planned future actions**

- 4.7 The Scottish Government in their draft plan have outlined the following future strategies to ensure that food banks are no longer the primary response to food insecurity:
- Exploration of the Minimum Income Guarantee and Universal Basic Services
  - Implementation of actions set out in the new tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan – due to be published in 2022
  - Strengthening of the protection of human rights, including the right to food
  - Investment in cash-first partnership work to make food banks the last port of call
  - Piloting of shopping vouchers in place of food bank referrals
  - Development of shared values between national food insecurity funders on access to emergency financial assistance and holistic support
  - Collaboration with the Trussell Trust and Independent Food Aid Network to support their food bank transition and exit strategies

## **Tackling Food Poverty in Dundee**

- 4.8 The Covid-19 pandemic created significant demand for food across Dundee, particularly during lockdowns. The Dundee Food Insecurity Network (FIN) established at the start of the pandemic brought 26 community food providers together to work with the Council to meet the needs of our citizens. The Dundee FIN played a crucial role in responding to the emergency food requirements created by the ongoing pandemic.
- 4.9 Dundee was at the forefront of the Cash First approach having participated in the national pilot project to develop practical ways to build additional financial support into crisis food responses from local services. Partners within the Food Insecurity Network are working together on measures to address ongoing food poverty in Dundee and are currently finalising a new Community Food Strategy for the city and this will be presented to Committee in the coming months. Key aims of the strategy are to help reduce the need for emergency food, reduce food surplus and increase dignified access to food at reduced costs and increase people's connectedness to others in their communities.
- 4.10 The goal of the Cash First approach is to reduce the ongoing need for emergency food supply by maximising people's incomes and reducing costs of living through benefit maximisation, debt counselling and referring for further support if necessary. Faith in Community Dundee, in partnership with Money Advice agencies, have developed a training programme for the volunteers of the food projects which will allow them to gain understanding of the issues that people present with as well as skills in signposting or referring to help people access appropriate support. Money Advice agencies will provide support to the volunteers to help them keep up to date with relevant information and to strengthen the relationship between services. The first round of volunteer training took place in November and December 2021 and it is envisaged that the volunteers will cover each ward and will be based within current food projects. In addition, a number of awareness sessions are to be held for local organisations that make the most food banks referrals, to increase their awareness of alternative provisions such as community fridges, larders or cafes.
- 4.11 Dundee recognises the importance of food growing in reducing food insecurity. Expansion of Community Growing projects is one of the key actions contained in the 2016-2027 City Plan under the Building Stronger Communities theme. Currently there are over 500 allotment sites managed by Dundee City Council and more than 20 community growing spaces across all city wards, which have been developed by local community growing organisations as well as Dundee City Council. This has been possible to achieve through strong links and partnership working between the Communities Officers, local schools, Criminal Justice Service – the Unpaid Work team, local community growing projects and the Community Allotments Officer.

## **5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 This report has been subject to a screening for any impacts on Equality and Diversity, Fairness and Poverty, Environment and Corporate Risk. As the report concerns a response to a consultation document, and will not directly result in any changes immediately, an equality impact assessment has not been carried out at this stage.

## **6. CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 The Council Management Team was consulted in the preparation of this report.

## **7. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1 None

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**DRAFT NATIONAL PLAN ON ENDING THE NEED FOR FOOD BANKS – CONSULTATION RESPONSE FROM DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL**

- 1. Do you think that the approach outlined is consistent with the vision to end poverty and the need for food banks? Is there anything else you think should be included?**

The approach outlined is consistent with the vision to end the need for food banks in Scotland.

In addition to the three key drivers of poverty that form the basis for future actions in the draft plan, the strategy for prevention of food insecurity could also consider approaches to re-distribute surplus food that would otherwise go to landfill. Such policy would align with the government's net zero ambitions, which would potentially encourage increased usage of surplus food, thus ensuring that people have reduced costs of living and more disposable income to cover other essentials.

- 2 Do you think that the actions underway will help to reduce the need for food banks as a primary response to food insecurity?**

Yes – existing actions make a meaningful contribution to reducing need

- 3 Do you think that the suggestions for what more we plan to do will help to reduce the need for food banks as a primary response to food insecurity?**

Yes – while they will not eradicate food insecurity, they will develop alternatives that reduce the need for food banks

- 4 Is there anything else that you think should be done with the powers we have at a national or local level to reduce the need for food banks as a primary response to food insecurity?**

One of the main ways in which the government is tackling food insecurity is ensuring that people have access to a benefit system designed around the principles of dignity and respect that meets their needs. As the roll out of various Scottish Social Security grants and payments is gathering pace, the Scottish Government must work on strategies that would maximise take up of benefits ensuring that each eligible claimant is receiving all that they are entitled to.

The Government needs to give regard to the most vulnerable individuals, including families with children or disabled members, as they are more likely to face challenges and barriers to claiming benefits. Older people, who may be more reluctant to access welfare assistance should also be prioritised.

Furthermore, The Scottish Government could consider developing a dialogue with the food industry representatives, from farmers to food retailers, with a view to look at ways of effective re-distribution of surplus food. The way that surplus food is distributed should allow anyone to access it, regardless of their financial capabilities. Such approach would have multiple benefits: reduction of food insecurity amongst the most deprived communities, removal of stigma felt by families or individuals who access reduced cost food due to financial hardship and positive environmental impacts. If people can use surplus food, this would reduce costs of living and minimise the need to access food banks.

Additional prevention measures around food growing could be considered, such as to encourage opportunities to grow food locally in urban communities and expand education on food growing to ensure that children and young people develop an understanding on where the food they eat comes from and to allow them to gain skills to grow their own food. This would be consistent with the human rights approach that access to food is part of the basic right to an adequate standard of living. The Scottish Government could examine ways to further support local authorities in creating community growing spaces, community gardens or allotments where people can access free fresh produce, learn about food growing and experience health benefits of eating fresh foods.

There is already evidence that communities support this approach. In a 2021 Dundee City Council citizen survey collecting residents' views (on topics including housing, the environment, parks, public transport and health), residents expressed a desire for unused outdoor areas to be transformed into community food growing spaces.

Further measures that the government may wish to consider is to support or invest in local initiatives that could expand existing provision with the delivery budget cooking classes to community members. It is important to bear in mind that people may struggle to cook their own meals at home due to lack of necessary equipment, lack of affordable ingredients, or excessive fuel costs. Therefore, improving cooking skills needs to be accompanied by improved access to the resources that are required to prepare fresh meals at home.

**5 Do you have any views on how we intend to measure impact, and what would give you confidence that we are moving in the right direction?**

The measures outlined by the Scottish Government intending to monitor the impact of the plan encompass a wide range of surveys, data gathering, independent evaluations and good practice examples. The array of methods assures that the government is committed to driving positive changes in practice.

In addition to the methods set out in the draft plan, regular monitoring on a localised level could also be considered. This could include evaluations and surveys on food bank use locally prior to the roll out of the plan, and then regular annual data gathering within each Local Authority to measure progress. Another potential measure would be to monitor and report on levels of surplus food re-distribution by area to identify communities that may require more targeted approaches.

**6 Is there anything else that you think should be considered in the development of this plan?**

The Scottish Government should consider ways to tackle stigma around using surplus food as it stops people from accessing other types of provision such as community cafes/larders or community fridges. It is important to emphasise positive messages around using excess food and to focus on the positive impact that reducing food waste has on the planet. If people are encouraged to access community food projects on a long-term basis for personal and environmental benefits, the overall costs of living will reduce for all. To remove stigma, the plan could be targeted at all communities as opposed to just those at higher risk of experiencing food poverty

In conjunction with the comments made above, the draft plan should include information on the Scottish Government's future engagement with stakeholders following the consultation process.