



## The Crisis and Resilience Fund and charitable food provision

November 2025

### Summary

- Trussell and IFAN welcome the UK government's intention that the new CRF will be a key plank in its approach to fulfilling its manifesto commitment to ending mass dependence on emergency food parcels. An effective, locally delivered, cash-first or income-focused crisis support system, connected to advice and wider support to build financial resilience, is key to ending the need for food banks and wider charitable food provision. This is especially needed in England where there is currently significant variation in crisis support across local authorities. It should be noted that in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland there are well-established crisis support schemes in place all providing the option of cash grants to households facing financial crisis. Furthermore, we welcome the intention that the CRF should enable local authorities to take a more preventative approach by providing support to build financial resilience before a crisis takes hold.
- We are clear, however, that the CRF is not the primary way in which we will end the need for emergency food, and are keen the CRF is not framed in this way. Successive research has shown that extremely low income is the overriding driver of food bank need in the UK, and the biggest and most immediate driver of this is our social security system. The CRF cannot make up for the more fundamental updates needed in the adequacy, design, and delivery of our UK-wide social security system, but it can play a part in reducing the need for charitable food provision in local communities.
- We are also clear that both free and subsidised food are neither the best form of crisis support nor preventative measures that build financial resilience. Models of support which provide effective gateways to advice and wider services are making a real difference to people facing severe hardship, including those delivered by food banks, social supermarkets, or other local initiatives (whether or not they include charitable food provision). However, there should be a distinction made between models of support which would outlast an end to the need for charitable food aid and those which would become redundant. Government funding should be directed towards models which can be a permanent part of the community support landscape, without the need for charitable food provision.

- Moving from free to subsidised food does not fulfil the UK government’s manifesto commitment even when the food support that’s provided also paves the way to services and support focused on increasing incomes. A preventative approach is key.

## Supporting people with food

Supporting people with food is not an effective crisis support mechanism nor a way to build longer term financial resilience. For this reason, it should therefore not be a priority for the Crisis and Resilience Fund.

As both Trussell and IFAN have set out previously, a new approach to local crisis and financial resilience support in England should recognise:

- Most people experiencing food insecurity do not receive support from any form of charitable food provision, whether food banks or alternative models like social supermarkets or pantries.<sup>12</sup> A priority for the CRF – whether to deliver on the UK government’s commitment to end the need for emergency food, or to deliver a better approach to crisis support – should be investing in long-term schemes which maximise access to help and support to maximise income for the most people in crisis. This is best delivered through statutory and public services, given this type of support is needed in the long term. At the same time, we recognise there is also an important role for local community and civil society organisations in connecting people to support and increasing engagement, particularly people who are less likely to turn to more official bodies.
- The need for charitable food provision is about incomes, not food. The key driver of food bank need in the UK is low incomes. An inability to afford food is a symptom of struggling to afford essentials, including rent, clothes, and toiletries as well. One-off or short periods of financial crisis are generally unrelated to food – e.g. eviction, job loss, short-term illness, separation, or domestic abuse. Crisis support should therefore not focus on the symptom of food insecurity but rather recognise the issues pushing people or households to a point where they are unable to cover the cost of both food and other essentials.
- A cash-first approach to crisis support will deliver better value for money by ensuring support goes to where it is most needed and a more dignified approach by ensuring people have the agency to manage their own finances, as well as encourage take-up by providing the speed, choice, and flexibility necessary for effective delivery.<sup>3</sup> As a wider joint sector note explains in more detail<sup>4</sup>, a cash-first approach still allows flexibility to suit individual needs and maintain cost effectiveness (e.g. where in-kind provision delivers better value for money in the case of white goods or furniture). Delivered well, cash-first schemes are also not purely transactional, but instead provide close connection to wider advice and support to ensure crisis support encourages prevention and builds longer term financial resilience.
- Alternative charitable food provision to food banks (e.g. social supermarkets, pantries) is not in itself a meaningful step away from emergency food and does not in itself deliver financial

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<sup>1</sup> Trussell (2023) [Hunger in the UK](#); reiterated in the next wave of Hunger in the UK (forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> DWP (2025) [Family Resources Survey: financial year 2023 to 2024](#).

<sup>3</sup> APPG on Ending the Need for Food Banks (2023) [Cash or food? Exploring effective responses to destitution](#).

<sup>4</sup> Crisis Support Working Group (August 2025) Cash first and the Crisis and Resilience Fund – Cash first but not cash only

resilience.<sup>5</sup> The existing evidence suggests that low-cost community food does not, in itself, enable people to move out of poverty or protect them from hunger and hardship. Some charitable food providers, like food banks, go beyond food provision and help to connect people to cash-first crisis support, advice and other preventative services. As a result of investment from Trussell, 92% of the food banks in the Trussell community now offer access to advice on money-related matters. The impact of such support is clear, with around 20% of advice service recipients assessed by advisers deemed likely to no longer need to use a food bank. These wider services can contribute to financial resilience, in a similar way to other local services which do not include food as part of their offer. But it is these services, rather than free or low-cost food, that can help to deliver the desired outcomes and outlast the need for charitable food.

- There is a wide range of models of community food provision, not all seeking to maximise choice and dignity, or able to sustain the quality required to do so. For people receiving support from food banks, even the nominal ‘membership’ fees are out of reach (particularly if this is a recurring cost, because they are unable to move out of severe hardship through low-cost food provision alone).<sup>6</sup>
- While the expansion of organised surplus food redistribution is sometimes presented as a way of tackling both food waste and food insecurity, it is important not to conflate these two distinct problems. A charitable food provision response to poverty cannot provide more than a sticking plaster and a focus on redistribution of food waste to charitable food providers risks entrenching this response. We have also heard from some food banks that they find they have to discard some of the redistributed food waste that comes to them, and that the management of this adds to the burden on overstretched teams.<sup>7</sup> Keeping the food poverty and food waste problems distinct is vital to tackle the root causes of both and taking a cash first approach to food insecurity epitomises this differentiation.
- CRF distribution should maximise access to cash-first support and wider preventative services. Government funding will be most effective where it is directed towards services which can be a permanent part of the community support landscape, without the need for charitable food provision. If the CRF is used to support community organisations that have a food offer alongside services focused on building financial resilience, it should avoid embedding approaches to preventative support that are contingent on accessing free or subsidised food. This is necessary if the UK government is to sustainably reduce the need for charitable food provision, including emergency food parcels.

Taking an evidence-based approach to existing charitable food provision and effective crisis support would indicate that, in thinking about supporting people with food via the CRF, DWP guidance and best practice for local authorities should:

- Explicitly recommend local authorities prioritise cash-first provision to meet crisis needs through local CRF schemes, and not advocate for the provision of food or voucher support that is restricted to food. Guidance should clearly explain what is meant by a cash-first approach to local crisis support.

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<sup>5</sup> Trussell (2025) [How the child poverty strategy can tackle hunger and hardship](#), p22-24.

<sup>6</sup> Trussell (2025) [How the child poverty strategy can tackle hunger and hardship](#), p22-24.

<sup>7</sup> Foodrise (2025) [Used By: How businesses dump their waste on food charities](#)

- Explicitly recommend local authorities do not use the CRF to fund free or subsidised food provision by community organisations as a means of crisis support or as a proxy for preventative support. Instead, it should recommend any CRF-backed support for local community organisations is targeted on models that deliver preventative support e.g. community hubs, or, if necessary, where charitable food provision is just one strand of immediate assistance alongside effective wider, more preventative advice and support such as community advice services focused on income maximisation. It should be made clear this approach is not about embedding the provision of free or subsidised food, and preventative support needs to outlast the need for charitable food provision.
- Avoid stipulating support for food as a necessary function of crisis support, or specifying minimum thresholds or target groups for support with food (even if support with food is one of the possible ways that some organisations may assist people, alongside preventative services).

### Support during the school holidays

Support for families with children during the school holidays is more predictable and regular, serving a fundamentally different need to discretionary support for a one-off or sudden crisis. It should, therefore, be provided by other mechanisms rather than the CRF.

If the DWP keeps additional school holiday support within the scope of the CRF, it is important to this provision follows the same key principles of effective local crisis support. That is, cash-first support that is flexible and needs-led, and not based on prioritisation or minimum thresholds of support for particular groups. In this way, financial hardship (including food insecurity) during the school holidays would be treated as crisis support until better arrangements can be made (e.g. a national system of support delivered via Universal Credit).

In practice, this means guidance should ensure any reference to school holiday support encourages and explains the need for:

- Cash-first support: Families with children (a key target demographic for additional holiday support) do not only struggle with the additional cost of food during the school holidays, but other essentials too. Prioritising cash-first support is therefore a more effective mechanism for additional holiday support than direct provision of food (through community organisations or vouchers).
- Flexibility: Lessons from previous delivery shows effective crisis support rests on avoiding minimum thresholds or quotas for particular groups. This allows space for local authorities to be attentive to families with children during longer holiday periods (e.g. summer, Christmas), but have the flexibility to determine how they respond rather than guidance specifying what this looks like.
- Avoiding duplication: Ensuring guidance is not prescriptive in stipulating any levels of holiday provision will also ensure value for money by not duplicating provision, for example with the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme.

### Balance of spend within the CRF between food and other areas

In line with the points outlined above:

- Guidance should not stipulate specific thresholds to determine how the CRF is spent by local authorities. Guidance can adequately ensure there is a balance of spend across areas the DWP and Treasury have determined must be covered by the CRF by:
  - Explicitly encouraging local authorities to prioritise a needs-led, cash-first approach, rather than use specific thresholds of support.
  - Showcasing examples of good practice in delivering needs-led and outcome-focused support, rather than quota/threshold-based support.<sup>8</sup>
  - Providing examples of the types of needs that cash-first crisis support might cover.
- There should be no defined ‘appropriate’ level of spend on food. In line with the points above, direct spend on food, vouchers restricted to food, or organisations to provide free or subsidised food is not an effective use of crisis support funding. It is not in the interests of people in crisis nor local authorities to determine or advise on an appropriate level of spend on food.

### Fulfilling the manifesto commitment to end the need for emergency food

Ultimately, the ‘moral scar’ of emergency food, as described in the UK government’s manifesto, is the deep-rooted severe hardship that drives the need for emergency food parcels in the first place. This level of severe hardship is not inherently addressed by moving from free to subsidised provision of food. Academic research shows clearly that we will not eradicate food bank need until we ensure people can afford the essentials.<sup>9</sup>

In itself, therefore, subsidised food is a sticking plaster response to severe hardship just as emergency food parcels are. The UK government and DWP should not see investing CRF funding to support people simply with food via alternative charitable food providers like social supermarkets as progress in its pledge to end the need for emergency food.

Instead, CRF funding that doesn’t go towards cash-first support schemes, or enabling local authorities to directly connect people in crisis to wider support, should be focused on community services which provide a gateway to wider advice and support. This may or may not be via charitable food providers, but funding should ideally be directed towards preventative support in settings that can outlast the need for charitable food aid e.g. community hubs.

### Recommendations on the CRF and charitable food provision

To ensure the CRF represents the reset on local crisis support in England and helps to fulfil its manifesto pledge on emergency food as the government proposes, we recommend that DWP guidance:

- Recommends local authorities focus the majority of CRF funding on cash-first support, to ensure people both receive the immediate, flexible, and dignified support needed to get back on their feet. Ideally, this would also include good practice guidance and case studies to demonstrate that cash-first support is a better use of finite resources rather than vouchers or in-kind support, except in occasional circumstances when vouchers or white goods or furniture may prove to be the better options.

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<sup>8</sup> Trussell and Policy in Practice (2025) Resetting local crisis support in England: recommendations for the new Crisis and Resilience Fund [forthcoming]

<sup>9</sup> See for example: Loopstra, R (2018) [Interventions to address household food insecurity in high-income countries](#)

- Recommends a needs-led approach and consequently does not include any minimum thresholds for types of spending or specific demographic groups. This includes not stipulating that the CRF must be spent on food, but instead (at most) including food as one of a number of examples of costs which a person or household may be finding it difficult to cover, as a sign of crisis. Again, this would ideally be accompanied by good practice examples.
- Encourages cash-first support to be delivered via local authorities to ensure people who need crisis support can access the most direct and long-term links possible with both the local authority/statutory and community support available. Exceptions to this would be where there are established, well-known local community hub models working closely with local authorities, as these could be well placed to deliver cash-first crisis support alongside advice and support to maximise income, and could also take a preventative approach to building financial resilience.
- Clearly defines that where local authorities decide to commission community organisations to provide support using CRF funding, this should be focused on local models that provide access to wider advice and support to encourage prevention. This should mean explicitly stating through guidance or good practice examples that investing in charitable food provision in itself is not a means to encourage prevention or reduce the need for food banks, and good practice to prevention would avoid embedding approaches which are contingent on accessing free or subsidised food. Instead, local authorities should seek to partner with organisations (whether providing charitable food support or not) that provide wider support to reduce the risk of being tipped into financial crisis again and could outlast the need for charitable food provision.
- Encourages local authorities to invest in the administration and resources needed to develop (where needed) and retain an understanding of the local eco-system of wider advice and support from which people facing financial crisis may benefit and ensure strong referral pathways between relevant organisations. This should also help increase access to advice and support to maximise income before reaching the point of crisis (further preventing the need for charitable food provision).
- Finally, if the DWP and Treasury are keen for local authorities to invest at least some of the CRF in local community organisations, and to ensure discretionary crisis support is better connected to financial resilience building (whether delivered by local authorities or their partners), the UK government must recognise the implications for local authorities to do this well. As noted above, an effective approach to embed a more preventative model of local crisis support would be to invest in ensuring people get the right support at the right time. From existing practice, this means understanding the local network of community organisations and services aimed at preventing and tackling hardship and effective routes to connect people into and out of crisis support, requiring local authority funding for staff and systems. New burdens funding at relatively low cost would recognise the additional administration costs associated with delivering a new, integrated system of local crisis and resilience support.