

# A future without food banks is possible

Senedd election manifesto 2026



# A future without food banks is possible

In 2024, 660,000 adults in Wales faced hunger.<sup>1</sup> This means that people had to cut back on food or skip meals due to a lack of money. 172,000 emergency food parcels were provided by food banks in the Trussell community in Wales in 2024/25.<sup>2</sup> That's a dramatic increase of 93% compared to a decade ago. In the last five years alone, provision has risen by 26%.

Too many people in Wales need to use a food bank to survive. Many more people are going without essentials due to a lack of income without accessing any support.

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**You're looking at their incomes or finances and you're thinking, well, well, they just there's not enough money to cover what they need. You know, there just isn't; there isn't enough money for food.**

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Food bank support manager, June 2025

People need to turn to food banks because they don't have enough money for the essentials. Some are between jobs, have health conditions, or are looking after relatives and children. Some people are in work that's insecure, inaccessible, or doesn't pay enough to live on. And the lack of affordable housing, transport and childcare, alongside barriers to accessing support, are holding too many people back from opportunities to increase their income.

We need to see change in both our social security system and in targeted interventions across a range of policy areas, including housing, health, childcare and advice, to begin to turn the tide of severe hardship in Wales – and to end the need for emergency food.

All of this can, and must, change. We know what's needed to end the need for food banks.

## **Our priorities for the next Welsh Government:**

- 1. Set an ambition to end the need for food banks in Wales.**
- 2. Sustain and increase access to cash-first crisis support and advice.**
- 3. Use all devolved powers to boost incomes, and reduce child poverty in Wales .**
- 4. Ensure everyone has a safe, secure home.**
- 5. Build connected and supportive communities.**

Appalling levels of hunger and hardship in Wales should serve as a wake-up call for all political parties in Wales. A future without the need for food banks in Wales is possible. We need the next Welsh Government to step up and play its part.

## **Acknowledgments**

The evidence and policy solutions included in this manifesto have been informed by food bank colleagues in the Trussell community, and through a participation workshop involving people with lived experience of hardship.

This included teams from 13 food banks attending workshops to help Trussell better understand the drivers of food bank need across communities in Wales, three food bank teams providing feedback on suggested policy solutions, and three interviews with food bank teams to better understand the advice and support needs of people needing to use a food bank. Through one participatory workshop with people with lived experience of hardship and/or of using a food bank in Wales, we explored issues related to the barriers people face accessing community services, and solutions that would improve access to local support.

Thank you to everyone who shared their experiences and stories. We hope you can see the impact your contributions made throughout the manifesto.

# 1. Set an ambition to end the need for food banks

“

**I don't want to see a food bank in [our community]. It's very aspirational to say that. We don't want one, but the reality is people are living in perpetual poverty.**

”

Food bank in the Trussell community in Wales<sup>3</sup>

The need for food banks is unacceptably high in Wales. In 2024/25, food banks in the Trussell community provided 172,000 emergency food parcels to people facing hardship.<sup>4</sup> Our research shows that many more people are going without essentials, including food, without turning to food banks or other charitable food providers for support.

A quarter of adults in Wales experienced food insecurity in 2024.<sup>5</sup> That means that at some point in the previous year, they ran out of food and were unable to afford more, reduced the size of their meals or ate less because they couldn't afford food, or went hungry or lost weight due to a lack of money.

We are seeing charitable food provision becoming normalised in communities across Wales. While food banks, and other types of food support, can provide a lifeline, they are not the solution. We need to be evidence-led and tackle the underlying drivers of hunger and hardship in Wales.

The number and variety of food banks, food pantries, social supermarkets, affordable food clubs, community fridges and many more has increased a great deal in recent years. But the evidence is clear that both free and subsidised food are not the best forms of crisis support, and often do not embed preventative approaches that build financial resilience in our communities.

We have seen many political parties expressing support for tackling food bank need, or recognising the valuable work of food bank staff and volunteers. We must go further. We need the next Welsh Government to make an explicit commitment to drive the change needed to make ending the need for food banks a reality.

To make this commitment meaningful, the Welsh Government should also set out how their approach will not just end hunger today, but for good. Charitable food aid cannot be a substitute for action to address the core drivers of hunger and hardship.



## Our priorities for the next Welsh Government:

- Set a clear ambition to end the need for food banks in Wales, and develop a cross-governmental action plan and monitoring framework to address the drivers of hunger and hardship.
- Ensure that ongoing funding to local authorities and food partnerships aimed at reducing 'food poverty' is focused on tackling the local drivers of need for emergency food. Local solutions should be co-produced with people with lived experience of hardship.



## 2. Sustain and increase access to cash-first crisis support and advice

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**If I am running out of money or can't buy any essential things like baby stuff, I manage to get it from the food bank.**

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Man, age 18-54, Wales, interviewed as part of our Hunger in Wales 2025 research.<sup>6</sup>

In 2024, the average weekly income of people referred to food banks in Wales was just £89 a week.<sup>7</sup> For many people, this meant that they often ran out of money early on in the month, leaving them with very little to make ends meet with.

Crisis support should be there to help people on the lowest incomes with unforeseen costs, such as the need to replace a broken cooker or bed, or to get through life events that can take a financial toll – such as a bereavement, job loss or moving house.

Crisis support is needed to help people without a financial buffer to weather these unexpected events and emergencies.

The Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) was designed to provide support to people facing a financial crisis or emergency – something that should prevent the need for people to have to turn to a food bank. This support can prevent a short-term crisis becoming long-term hardship. However, our research shows that support provided by the DAF is vastly underutilised by the people it is intended to support. Just one in four people referred to food banks in the Trussell community in Wales had received support from the DAF in the last three months.<sup>8</sup>

Emergency food intended as a stopgap is being called on to support people on a longer-term basis, simply to stay afloat. This is both unsustainable and ineffective in meeting the needs of everyone facing hunger and hardship in Wales.

The Trussell community of food banks has built up robust evidence of the strong impact of warm referrals, and close connections with wider advice to tackle the underlying reasons for being in financial crisis. Being able to refer people in a financial crisis to advice on money matters results in significant positive financial outcomes.<sup>9</sup> The next



Welsh Government should take on this learning, to ensure that people applying for the DAF are consistently and proactively linked with local advice and support services. This support must be voluntary. In this way, the DAF would become a starting point for people to build longer-term financial resilience, rather than an end point of getting one off help.

## Our priorities for the next Welsh Government:

- Retain cash-first crisis support through the Discretionary Assistance Fund, ensuring support is adequate for people to cover the essentials and, at a minimum, is increased in line with inflation.
- Ensure everyone applying for the Discretionary Assistance Fund is offered funded advice and support.



### 3. Use all powers and influence to boost incomes and reduce child poverty

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**I was at my wits' end emotionally... My card declined on the shoes... He had to go to school in old shoes until I waited for that money to come.**

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Woman, age 31-54, Wales, interviewed as part of our Hunger in Wales 2025 research.<sup>10</sup>

The level of need for food banks is predominantly driven by low incomes. For too many people, their incomes are simply not enough to cover essential costs. People referred to food banks in Wales have regularly gone without essentials in the lead-up to turning to a food bank for support. The majority (84%) had at least one day when they didn't eat at all, or had only one meal, in the month leading up to receiving support.<sup>11</sup>

The biggest and most immediate driver of low income is problems with the design and delivery of the social security system, leaving many without the financial resilience to withstand life events. While many of the key social security levers to increase incomes sit with UK Government, the future Welsh Government can and must use all available devolved powers to ensure incomes cover essential costs. Targeted intervention in Wales, beyond reserved social security policy, would help more families to afford essential costs.





Some groups have a higher risk of needing to use a food bank – including disabled people, families with children, and people with caring responsibilities. These groups are also likely to face higher inescapable costs, such as travel, utility costs, childcare and food, which are likely drivers of why these groups are particularly prevalent at food banks.

The majority (62%) of support provided by food banks in the Trussell community in Wales in 2024/25 was for families with children. A significant minority (28%) of parcels were provided to families with three or more children.<sup>12</sup>

Childcare is an inescapable cost for families with young children, to enable parents and carers to work the hours they want to and boost family income. Yet the childcare landscape in Wales is characterised by high and escalating costs, with limited financial assistance and a postcode lottery of support. Childcare costs are high in Wales, compared to the rest of the UK.<sup>13</sup> This restricts people's ability to balance caring responsibilities with work commitments, and access to job opportunities.

The next Welsh Government must be creative and ambitious in using all devolved powers to increase incomes, and provide targeted interventions for people facing high inescapable costs – in the first instance, for families with children.

## Our priorities for the next Welsh Government:

- Scope options to implement a 'Welsh Child Payment', with clear intent to roll out the scheme across Wales. Taking learnings from Scotland, this policy should help to ensure families with children are able to afford the essentials.
- Increase access to Free School Meals for children whose families are in receipt of Universal Credit, and all children with NRPF from households on or below levels of income comparable with Universal Credit.
- Boost childcare support for families on low incomes with young children, and stop the 'postcode lottery' of childcare support. We support the Bevan Foundation and others' calls for funded, good quality, part-time childcare for all children under the age of four. This offer should be available for all parents, irrespective of their work status.<sup>14</sup>
- Call on the UK Government to ensure social security is working for people in Wales, including removing the two-child limit and taking steps towards increasing social security to Essentials Guarantee levels.

## 4. Ensure everyone has a safe, secure home

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**It really upsets me that until you've got a permanent roof over your head, I don't think you can move on with anything.**

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Interview with food bank debt adviser, July 2025.

A secure and affordable home is the foundation we all need to build our lives around. Yet food banks in the Trussell community in Wales tell us that housing is one of the biggest issues faced by people needing their support. For too many people, issues with housing result in homelessness. More than a third (38%) of people referred to food banks in the Trussell community had experienced some form of homelessness in the last year.<sup>15</sup>

Action from the next Welsh Government to ensure everyone in Wales has an affordable and secure home is therefore vital if we are to end the need for food banks.

The quality, safety, and availability of temporary accommodation in Wales is a significant problem. One food bank in the Trussell community in north Wales has successfully campaigned locally to improve the quality of local temporary accommodation, as too many people had no access to cooking facilities, places to store food, laundry facilities or to Wi-Fi. These are essential for people to maintain or build community, to work and access local services.

This reflects wider experience; food banks across Wales regularly provide 'cold packs' and 'kettle packs' of emergency food for people without access to adequate cooking facilities, many of whom will be in temporary accommodation. It is vital that Welsh and local governments in Wales improve the quality of temporary accommodation; however, this shouldn't detract from urgent action to ensure that temporary accommodation is short term.

Finally, private renting is not providing the security that people in Wales need. Increasingly, private renters have faced a shortfall between the support they receive to pay their housing costs and their rents, meaning they must cut back on other essentials. The inadequacy of support for housing costs in the private rental sector is a critical way in which the social security system drives hunger and hardship.

Food bank teams have told us that many people they support could not afford or manage in the private rented sector, and the relief and security people feel when they can move into a social home. Increasing access to social housing must therefore be a key aim of the next Welsh Government.

## Our priorities for the next Welsh Government:

- Improve the quality, safety and access to essential facilities in temporary accommodation, with improved guidance and legislation, alongside annual reporting on the use and condition of temporary accommodation.
- Set out a clear plan to significantly increase the number of social homes in Wales. We support Shelter Cymru and others' calls for more social homes across Wales, to reduce the number of people in temporary accommodation for long periods.
- Call on the UK Government to unfreeze the Local Housing Allowance.





## 5. Build connected and supportive communities

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**No one tells you these things. Even growing up, I knew of benefits, but because of the stigma around it, you don't want to look into it further. Now, as an adult, needing the help, as soon as it comes to that, you're like, 'What's that? I was never told this. I was never suggested this.' It's like you've just got to figure out everything on your own.**

”

Woman, age 18-30, Wales, interviewed as part of our Hunger in Wales 2025 research.<sup>16</sup>

Experiencing hunger and hardship has a huge impact on people's everyday lives and is linked to worse health and educational outcomes. Yet far too many people do not receive advice and support before needing to use a food bank.<sup>17</sup>

Food banks and people with lived experience tell us it is common to find it challenging to access and connect with local services – for example debt and benefits advice, housing support, and mental health support. The experiences of people needing to access emergency food are varied, and people often need additional support to navigate services within the community. These experiences create further barriers, including many examples where people must ask for support and retell their story multiple times, are turned away, or signposted to other services. This is often frustrating, confusing, stressful and emotionally draining.

Advice and support services delivered by food banks in the Trussell community have been shown to help alleviate financial hardship and prevent people from needing a food bank in the near future.<sup>18</sup> Ensuring advice providers are resourced and funded appropriately, to deliver advice and access to wider support that prioritises people facing severe hardship, needs to be a key pillar of any strategy to reduce the need for food banks.

In addition, a lack of affordable, accessible transport was a key issue reported by food banks and people with lived experience of hardship as a barrier to people being able to participate fully in their community, access services, and take up employment opportunities. Almost a quarter of the Welsh population (23%) does not have access to a car or van, and some people do not have any public transport links within their local area.<sup>19</sup> Without viable and affordable transport options, people are at risk of exclusion from jobs, as well as vital services and social connection.

While there are concessionary public transport schemes in Wales for older people, disabled people, and young people, this leaves many people facing hardship without access to more affordable public transport.

## Our priorities for the next Welsh Government:

- Support and increase funding to ensure advice services are reaching people at highest risk of hunger and hardship, with a focus on targeted, in-depth and high-quality advice.
- Embed the Welsh Benefits Charter across Wales, ensuring all local authorities prioritise increasing and simplifying access to Welsh benefits, delivering a 'compassionate Welsh Benefits System that is based upon respect for fundamental human rights and equality'.
- Ensure people with lived experience of severe hardship, who may be excluded from being able to use public transport due to high costs, inform decision-making on routes, accessibility, and affordable travel.



# Conclusion

As we head towards Senedd elections in 2026, all political parties must set out their ambition to reduce the need for food banks in Wales.

The next Welsh Government has a moral and economic responsibility to reduce the number of people facing severe hardship in our society. Failure to tackle hunger and hardship leads to Wales spending an additional £560 million a year on public services like the NHS, schools and children's social care.<sup>20</sup> Overall, public finances and the economy in Wales could benefit by £3.6 billion each year if people were protected from hunger and hardship.<sup>21</sup>

Because we know what's pushing people to food banks, we know the actions that are needed to end hunger in Wales, for good. Our manifesto sets out what is needed to help turn the tide on levels of severe hardship in Wales, across a breadth of policy areas.

All political parties must set out their plans for tackling severe hardship in our communities. It's time to be ambitious about working towards a Wales without the need for food banks.



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