

Emergency food parcel distribution in Wales

1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024



Background

This factsheet reports on the number of emergency food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Wales during the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 inclusive (2023/24). During this time period, food parcels were distributed from 147 locations across Wales, as part of the Trussell Trust network.¹

It is important to recognise that data from food banks in the Trussell Trust network is just one part of the picture of need across Wales. There is a wide range of charitable food aid that will be supporting people that is not captured in this parcel data. There are also many people who are severely food insecure who do not receive support from food banks.²

Key facts from the 2023/24 statistics

1. Record number of food parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Wales as people struggle to get by on low incomes.

Food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Wales distributed 187,400 (187,458) emergency food parcels in 2023/24. This is the highest number of parcels that the network has ever distributed in a single year and represents a 1% increase on 2022/23.

Over 68,500 (68,594) parcels for children and 118,800 (118,864) food parcels for adults were distributed over this period. The number of parcels provided for children across Wales fell slightly from the record levels seen in the previous year (-2%) but remain significantly higher than the number distributed just five years ago in 2018/19 (64%). The number of parcels for adults saw a 3% increase on the previous year.

“the need has gone up... we've been giving out a lot more... We are giving out more than we are receiving. “

“I feel like next year... we are going to get busier. Change is needed. We are helping so many people, this will be a busy year.”

– Caerphilly Foodbank in the Trussell Trust network

¹ The locations that food banks distributed parcels from are not counted at a point in time. They are instead counted if they have distributed food parcels at any stage during the time period. Some will have opened, and some will have closed during this period. For reference there were 149 locations in the same period in the previous year.

² The Hunger in Wales research, produced by the Trussell Trust in partnership with Ipsos, reported that in the 12 months to mid-2022 one in five (20%) people across Wales had experienced food insecurity, equating to an estimated 753,000 people. However, three in four (74%) people experiencing food insecurity reported that they have not used any form of food aid in the last year.

See: Hunger in Wales (2023), Bull R, Miles C, Newbury E, Nichols A, Weekes T, Wyld G. *The Trussell Trust*, Available at: <https://www.trusselltrust.org/what-we-do/research-advocacy/hunger-in-the-uk/>

The significant increases in need seen over the last few years are linked to the soaring cost of living for people across Wales and the fact that people's incomes (especially from social security) have failed to keep up with these costs. Inflation measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) started at 8.7% in April 2023 and remained higher than 4% for much of the year until falling to 3.2% in March 2024.

The cost of the essentials has continued to rise in this period. Food inflation was at 19% in April 2023 and remained above 10% for much of the year until falling to 4% as of March 2024. While it is welcome that inflation is slowing, the continued high inflation in the cost of essentials, particularly food, continues to make it harder for families to make ends meet. The cumulative impact of very high levels of food inflation alone over the last few years means food prices are 24% higher in March 2024 than March 2022.³

Our most recent evidence collected in February 2024 highlights that despite the fall in inflation far too many people are having to go without the essentials. When surveyed in February more than half (55%) of people receiving Universal Credit in Wales said that they had run out of food in the last month and couldn't afford more.⁴

“Prices are continuing to rise and one off payments to help and support for energy are stopping. I am worried that I will get long term health problems from being cold at home and not eating a balanced diet. I am also worried about so many services putting high increases on things like broadband and mobile contracts which will add a high value to keeping connected to the world .”

–Person claiming Universal Credit in Wales interviewed in February 2024.⁵

The level of need over the last year has placed a significant strain on food banks across the country. We are hearing multiple examples of food banks placing temporary limits on the number of referrals a person can access, in order to manage the food bank's resources and capacity at a time of unprecedented need. The Trussell Trust are doing all we can to support food banks through this, as they strive to respond as fully as they can to the need in front of them. We therefore know that the data reported for this period is likely to be only part of the part of the picture of actual need in communities.

“It's definitely been busier. I mean every year, sadly it is...We're seeing more people through the doors from all different backgrounds of life and life situations.”

–Strategic Manager, Vale Foodbank in the Trussell Trust network

³ Consumer Price Index, UK: March 2024 (2024), *Office for National Statistics*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/consumerpriceinflation/march2024#:~:text=The%20core%20CPIH%20annual%20inflation,in%20the%20constructed%20historical%20series.>

⁴An online survey by YouGov of 1,370 adults (16+) including 144 people in Wales currently claiming Universal Credit. Fieldwork was undertaken 18 January – 5 February 2024.

⁵IBID

These levels of need are part of a longer-term trend which pre-dates the cost of living crisis, and even the COVID-19 pandemic. While these two events have had a major impact on food bank need, they are not the main cause. Rather, they have exposed and exacerbated a longer-term crisis: that of a weakened social security system that is unable to protect people from the most severe forms of hardship, forcing more people to the doors of food banks.

Table 1: Number of parcels distributed in the Trussell Trust network in Wales and percentage changes from previous year and five years previously

	2023/24	2022/23	% change from 2022/23	2018/19	% change from 2018/19
For adults	118,864	115,862	3%	74,480	60%
For children	68,594	69,801	-2%	41,845	64%
Total	187,458	185,663	1%	116,325	61%

2. Majority of support provided by food banks in Wales is for families with children

Overall, nearly two thirds (65%) of the support provided by food banks in Wales in the previous year was for families with children. Families with three or more children are especially likely to face severe hardship, with 30% of parcels provided by food banks in the last year being distributed to families with three or more children.

The change in the scale of need is particularly pronounced for these families. Since 2018/19 the number of parcels provided in Wales for families with three or more children has increased by 72% compared to an 57% increase for families living without any children.

In total food banks in Wales supported 37,000 families with emergency food in 2023/24, including 33,400 children and 55,500 adults.⁶

"the age 5 to 11, is the age we have fed the most...which is quite sort of heart breaking"

– Foodbank Manager, Caerphilly Food bank in the Trussell Trust network

3. Pensioner households are increasingly likely to need to use a food bank

The prevalence of poverty among pensioners across Wales is far lower than the working age population and just 5% of the support provided by food banks in Wales in the last year was for pensioner households. This reflects one of the UK's most striking success stories in recent decades - which has been the enormous reduction in pensioner poverty. In Wales in 1996/8, 27% of pensioners were living in poverty, this had fallen to 14% by 2010/12.⁷ This change highlights just how much difference concerted action can make to achieving poverty reduction.

⁶ At the Trussell Trust we define any household as a family, this means that when we talk about families they could be individuals living alone, single parents, or multi-generational households.

⁷ Pensioner Poverty (2024), Welsh Government, <https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Sustainable-Development/Sustainable-Development-Indicators/Pensioner-poverty>

However, this has started to go into reverse, with poverty rates rising to 16% most recently, and this is likely to worsen in the coming years without action.

Our own figures show that food bank support for pensioner households in Wales is rapidly increasing. Between 2018/19 and 2023/24 food bank support for these households has more than trebled (a 246% increase), compared to an 57% rise amongst households without someone of pension age. This mismatched increase in food parcel provision continued from 2022/23 to 2023/24 (14% vs a less than 1% increase).

This finding is similar to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s (JRF) recent research which found a sharp increase in the number of pensioners facing destitution across the UK – up by 254% since 2019.⁹ Although as with the proportion of parcels going to pensioner households, pensioners facing destitution still make up a relatively small part of the total destitute population (6% as compared with being 21% of the general population).

These figures provide an early warning sign that the recent increase in poverty among pensioner households is leading to significant increases in severe hardship amongst this group, forcing them to turn to food banks.

4. Food bank support disproportionately provided for children of all ages

The distribution of support provided to different age groups across Wales is significantly different from the distribution of people across the general population. The table below highlights that the support provided by food banks is disproportionately for children. One in ten (10%) food parcels were provided for children aged 0-4 in the last year, despite children of this age accounting for just 5% of the Welsh population. Similarly, 16% of parcels were provided for children aged 5 to 11, with this age group making up 8% of the Welsh population.

There is a concurrent under-representation of support for people aged 65 and over. Just 3% of the support provided by food banks is for people aged 65 and over, despite people of pension age making up 22% of the Welsh population. However, as highlighted above that this proportion is likely to shift with the significant growth in need from pension age households in recent years.

Table 2: Comparison of Food Bank Support and Population Proportions by Age Group in Wales

Age Bands	Proportion of all parcels by age group (2023/24)	Comparative population proportions (June 2022 estimates, Wales)
0-4	10%	5%
5 to 11	16%	8%
12 to 16	11%	6%
17 to 24	10%	9%
25 to 64	50%	51%
65+	3%	22%

Population data source: ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates, June 2022⁸

⁸ Population estimates for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: Mid-2022 (2024), Office for National Statistics, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/population-estimates-for-the-uk-england-wales-scotland-and-northern-ireland-mid-2022>

⁹ Destitution in the UK (2023), Joseph Rowntree Foundation, <https://www.irf.org.uk/deep-poverty-and-destitution>

5. People most commonly need support from a food bank in Wales because their income is insufficient to meet the cost of essentials

In the last year people who have needed to turn to a food bank in Wales have most commonly (72%) been referred because their income is insufficient forcing them to cut back on the essentials or face being driven into unmanageable debt.

This has been clear in our operational data for many years. It was also reflected in our landmark Hunger in Wales research published in 2023, which found that the vast majority of people referred to food banks were destitute, meaning they had an income so low that they couldn't afford essential items.¹⁰

“Money is always going to be the problem... if people have money, they are able to buy food at the end of the day. So that is where the issue is.”

– Strategic Manager, Vale Foodbank in the Trussell Trust network

Problems with health are reported in over one in five (22%) referrals to food banks in Wales - with health conditions driving up costs for households and making it difficult to find or sustain employment. Our recent research found that the design of the disability benefits system was putting disabled people in impossible situations and leaving them with too little income to cover the essentials.¹¹ In Wales almost three in four (73%) people referred to food banks are disabled, more than double the proportion of people who are disabled across the whole of Wales (33%).¹²

Issues with benefits such as long waits, delays, or sanctions affect a significant minority of referrals to food banks (23%). This is illustrative of the problems with the design and delivery of the social security system which far too often leaves people waiting for payments and unable to afford essentials.

The impact of life events is also evidenced in the data with 10% of people being referred due to being insecurely housed (including being made homeless), and others seeing changes to their personal circumstance (6%) such as splitting from a partner.

¹⁰ Hunger in Wales (2023), Bull R, Miles C, Newbury E, Nichols A, Weekes T, Wyld G. The Trussell Trust, Available at: <https://www.trusselltrust.org/what-we-do/research-advocacy/hunger-in-the-uk/>

¹¹ Disability and financial hardship: How disability benefits contribute to the need for food banks in the UK (2023), Biggs H, Wildman J, Hamid A and MacGregor A (Scottish Centre for Social Research, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/10/Disability-Benefits-Research-Report.pdf>)

¹² Hunger in Wales (2023), Bull R, Miles C, Newbury E, Nichols A, Weekes T, Wyld G. The Trussell Trust, Available at: <https://www.trusselltrust.org/what-we-do/research-advocacy/hunger-in-the-uk/>

Table 3: Reasons for referral for people supported by food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Wales

Reason for referral	% of referrals with reason selected
Income or debt	72%
Issues with benefits	23%
Health	22%
Insecure housing	10%
Change in work hours or unemployment	8%
Change in personal circumstances	6%
Domestic abuse	3%
Immigration status	3%

This data was multiple choice – referral partners could select up to four responses. Data has been recoded to reduce categories.

Our data highlights that different types of families need to turn to food banks for different reasons. In the last year people living without children in Wales were far more likely to be referred due to health reasons (26% vs. 17% for households with children), or because they were insecurely housed (13% vs. 4%).

People living with children were more likely to be referred due to issues with their income or their levels of debt (78% vs. 68% of people not living with children).

The experiences of pensioner households are somewhat distinct. They are more likely to be referred due to issues with their health (29% vs. 22% of non-pensioner households) and for issues with their income or debt levels (78% vs. 72%).

Table 4: Reason for referral amongst different households in Wales

Reason for referral	One or more children		Three or more children		One or more pension aged person	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Income or debt	68%	78%	71%	80%	72%	78%
Issues with benefits	25%	20%	23%	18%	23%	18%
Health	26%	17%	23%	15%	22%	29%
Insecure housing	13%	4%	10%	3%	10%	4%
Change in work hours or unemployment	7%	9%	8%	8%	8%	5%
Change in Personal Circumstances	6%	7%	6%	8%	7%	6%
Domestic abuse	2%	4%	3%	4%	3%	1%
Immigration status	2%	4%	2%	4%	2%	1%

Across all households the most common reason for referral was due to issues with income and debt levels. The vital role of the social security system in driving these trends in Wales is clear from the fact that the majority (81%) of people referred to food banks were reported to solely have income from the social security system, with a further 7% having earned income as well as income from social security.

A minority (7%) of referred people have no income at all or do not have sufficient access to any income.

Table 5: Source of income for people referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Wales

Source of income	% of referrals
Benefits, not earning	81%
Earnings and benefits	7%
Earning, no benefits	4%
No income or insufficient access to it	7%

There is some variation in the income sources for particular households referred to food banks in Wales. With people living with children being more likely to report earned income (17% vs. 8% for people not living with children). Three in four (76%) people living in households with one or more children rely solely on benefits for their income compared to 84% of households without children.

The reasons why someone was referred to a food bank in Wales also vary depending on the household's source of income. Households who report that they were receiving earned income and benefits (24%) or solely earned income (22%) are correspondingly more likely (than households solely receiving benefits – 5%) to be referred due to a change in their work hours or unemployment. Highlighting the impact of work-related experiences for a significant number of households.

Households who report that they have no income or limited access to it have distinct reasons for referral. The most common of these is issues with their immigration status (23%) which is far higher than average (3%). Households in Wales with no income or insufficient access to it are also more likely to be referred because of issues with their benefits (30%) than households with different income sources.

Table 6: Reason for referral amongst households with different income sources

Reason for referral	Source of income			
	Benefits, not earning	Earning and benefits	Earning, no benefits	No income or insufficient access to it
Income or debt	74%	80%	73%	45%
Issue with benefits	24%	18%	12%	30%
Health	24%	20%	17%	17%
Insecure housing	10%	5%	7%	11%
Change in work hours or unemployment	5%	24%	22%	14%
Change in personal circumstances	6%	7%	7%	7%
Domestic abuse	3%	3%	3%	3%
Immigration status	<1%	<1%	9%	23%

6. There is consistent evidence that boosting people's incomes through the Cost of Living Payments has offered some short-term respite for people on low incomes, however levels of need quickly increased again

Through 2023/24 the UK government provided a series Cost of Living Payments to people. The highest value payments were issued to people claiming means tested benefits and people claiming Tax credits in Spring 2023 (£301 between 25th April and 17th May), Autumn 2023 (£300 between 31st October and 19th November) and Winter 2024 (£299 between 6th – 22nd February). On reviewing these payments our data shows a consistent trend of a short significant reduction in the need for food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Wales.

“There's definitely a drop at every centre actually [When the COL payment comes in], which shows when people are given that little bit of extra money, the food bank is not needed and that's evident.”

– Strategic Manager, Vale Foodbank in the Trussell Trust network

“We had a quieter couple of weeks when the cost of living payment was made...and now bang, the numbers are straight back up. That payment was great for individuals in that very short term, but is again for us not proving a longer term solution.”

– Cath, Foodbank Manager at Carmarthen Foodbank

During the period when the Spring 2023 £301 Cost of Living Payment was paid out, food banks in our network in Wales distributed 3,000 parcels on average per week to people facing financial hardship. This represented a 22% decrease from the three previous weeks when 3,800 parcels were distributed on average per week.

This respite was short-lived, however, lasting only between one and three weeks. The number of parcels distributed in the following four weeks after the payments increased by 12% to 3,300 on average per week.

The impact of the Autumn 2023 payment was initially similar seeing a 20% decrease in the average weekly number of parcels while the payment was paid out - compared to the previous three weeks. However, as people went into the winter there was a more pronounced bounce back in need. In the three weeks after the payment was distributed food banks distributed 4,300 parcels on average per week to people facing financial hardship. This represented a 47% increase on the period the payments were distributed.

The final late Winter 2024 payment saw the biggest percentage decrease – potentially due to it coinciding with the easing off of the rate of inflation. Food banks distributed 2,800 parcels on average per week in the period the payments were being distributed, a 32% decrease compared to the average of the preceding three weeks. As with the other payments there was still a increase following the payment – of 23% in the three weeks following the period the payment was in place.

In February we carried out a survey with YouGov of people receiving Universal Credit, which painted a similar picture.¹³ Respondents were asked about their views on the impact of the Autumn 2023 Cost of Living Payment. It is clear that the payment had some positive impact in the short-term for people receiving it, with over a quarter (29%) of people claiming Universal Credit in Wales stating it had prevented them from falling into arrears on bills and over a third (35%) stating it had prevented them from needing to borrow money to get by.

However, the majority of people (74%) who received the Cost of Living Payment in Autumn 2023 reported that the payment had made just a little or no difference to improving their current financial situation when surveyed in January / February. Further, over six in ten (62%) said the payment made just a little or no difference to their current ability to afford essentials.

Table 7: Impact of the Autumn 2023 Cost of Living Payment for people claiming Universal Credit in Wales

Question	A great deal/ A fair amount	Just a little/ Not at all
Improved current financial situation	21%	74%
Prevented you from falling into arrears on bills	29%	65%
Prevented from needing to borrow money to get by	35%	54%
Improved current ability to afford essentials	34%	62%

Across the UK the majority (87%) of people who had received the Cost of Living Payment in Autumn 2023 said they had already spent all of it when surveyed in January / February 2024. The limitations of a flat payment for different households were also highlighted with the rate higher for households with children (90%) than without (84%). Similarly, for people who had spent all of the payment the length of time it took to spend the payment was almost double for people without benefit deductions (21.6 days on average) compared to people facing deductions from their benefits (11.5 days on average).

When asked how they had spent the payment, people most commonly said it had been spent on covering the cost of essential items. Almost two thirds (61%) of people stated that they had bought food with the payment, over a third (36%) to buy basic toiletries such as soap, shampoo, toothbrush, toothpaste or sanitary items, and over two in five (43%) had used the money to heat their home.

Many (34%) also used the money to pay off existing debts and arrears on bills. We know many people have accumulated debt and arrears in between the Cost of Living Payments, our survey found 37% of people claiming Universal Credit in January / February had fallen into debt in the last three months because they couldn't keep up with essential bills. These levels of debt and the money spent on paying them off may have limited the overall impact of the payments on reducing the need for food banks and highlights a limitation of one-off payments in supporting households' financial situation when their regular income is so far below what they need to cover essentials and avoid debt.

7. 47,700 people were forced to use a food bank in Wales for the first time in 2023/24

¹³ An online survey by YouGov of 1,370 adults (16+) including 144 people in Wales currently claiming Universal Credit. Fieldwork was undertaken 18 January – 5 February 2024.

In 2023/24, over 21,300 families¹⁴ have been forced to turn to food banks in the Trussell Trust network in Wales for the first time, including over 47,700 people. This represents a slight (-4%) decrease on the number of families having to turn to food banks for the first time in the same period last year. This perhaps reflects the significant number of people who have had to use a food bank for the first time in the previous few years. However, it is a 26% increase in the number of families using a food bank in the network for the first time compared to the same period in 2018/19.¹⁵

“We've had a number of self-employed people who for the first time ever have had to use a food bank.

To have a gentleman in his 40s come in, say ‘I’ve just sat outside for 20 minutes just getting the courage to come in because I've never ever been in a food bank before’...we give him a coffee and then he just cries...that is heart wrenching to see someone in that situation.”

– Cath, Foodbank Manager at Carmarthen Foodbank

This reflects the long-term rise in levels of deep poverty, compounded by increasing numbers of people experiencing financial hardship due to the cost of living crisis. The latest study on destitution (the most severe form of hardship) by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) finds that destitution was intensifying in the UK in the years running up to the pandemic, with the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis then compounding existing problems linked to a decade of cuts and freezes to social security. In 2022, approximately 3.8 million people experienced destitution in the UK, including around one million children. This is a 61% increase since 2019, and an increase of almost two-and-a-half-times (148%) compared to 2017.¹⁶

The incomes of people referred to a food bank for the first time in Wales differ from people who have been referred to a food bank previously. This potentially highlights slight differences in experiences and drivers of need for food banks. People referred to food banks for the first time are more likely to report that they have no income or limited access to it (11% vs. 6% for people returning to a food bank). They are also less likely to report solely receiving benefits (74% vs. 84%).

Table 8: Income comparison between people with prior experience of using a food bank and people who used food bank for the first time in 2023/24

Source of income	First Time referral	People returning to a food bank
Benefits, not earning	74%	84%
Earning and benefits	9%	7%
Earning, no benefits	6%	3%
No income or insufficient access to it	11%	6%

¹⁴ At the Trussell Trust we define any household as a family, this means that when we talk about families they could be individuals living alone, single parents, or multi-generational households.

¹⁵ In 2018/19 17,000 families were forced to turn to a food bank for the first time, these families included 37,400 people.

¹⁶ Destitution in the UK 2023 (2023), *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2023>

People needing to turn to a food bank for the first time in Wales were more likely to be referred due to an issue with their benefits than people returning to a food bank (26% vs. 22%). This could highlight the initial impact of issues such as the wait for benefits, or a change in eligibility.

People using a food bank for the first time were also more likely to be referred for reasons which could be classified as life events or shocks. For instance, they were more likely to be referred due to issues relating to insecure housing (13% vs. 8%), due to domestic abuse (4% vs. 2%), and due to changes to their personal circumstances (9% vs. 6%). Issues with work were also more prevalent amongst people referred for the first time (11% vs. 7%).

On the other hand, people with prior experience of using a food bank were more likely to be referred due to issues around income or debt than people who had used a food bank for the first time in 2023/24 (74% vs. 67%) – perhaps better reflecting the more chronic nature of their income situations.

Table 9: Reason for referral comparison between people with prior experience of using a food bank and people who used food bank for the first time in 2023/24

Reasons for referral	First Time referral	People returning to a food bank
Income or debt	67%	74%
Issues with benefits	26%	22%
Health	22%	23%
Insecurely housed	13%	8%
Change in work hours or unemployment	11%	7%
Change in Personal Circumstances	9%	6%
Domestic abuse	4%	2%
Immigration status	3%	2%

8. Increases seen across England, Northern Ireland, and Wales since last year with a small decrease in Scotland

England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, all experienced increases in the distribution of emergency food parcels in 2023/24, when compared to the previous year. Northern Ireland experienced the largest percentage increase (11%), followed by England (5%), and Wales (1%). Food parcel distribution remained largely unchanged in Scotland on the previous year with a slight (0.1%) decrease. Looking over the last five years Northern Ireland has experienced the largest percentage increases in the distribution of emergency food parcels since the same period five years ago (143%) with Scotland seeing the smallest increase (21%).

Table 10: Percentage change in number of parcels distributed in the Trussell Trust network by nation and region.

Nations and Regions	Percentage change from previous year (2022/23)	Percentage change from five years ago (2018/19)
United Kingdom	4%	94%
England	5%	109%
Scotland	-0.1%	21%
Wales	1%	61%
Northern Ireland	11%	143%

9. Food banks are doing everything possible to keep providing desperately needed support for people in their communities

Food bank staff and volunteers are providing a critical service supporting their communities and have repeatedly adapted their operational practices to meet the level and nature of need for emergency food in their local areas.

Between April and September 2023, food banks across the UK, who historically have primarily relied upon donated food, had to spend an additional third as much on food as they did the previous year to meet the need they are seeing amongst people facing financial hardship. This follows on from the existing growth in purchasing food which was reported last year; when food banks were already spending twice as much as they did on food in 2021.¹⁷ So far this year donations of food have remained at similar levels to the previous year – however, because of the significant growth in need for food banks they are having to purchase more food than ever before.

We spoke to Caerphilly Foodbank who are busy building local connections, planning for donations and stock purchasing whilst meeting the needs of the community they support with food parcels. The food bank manager shared that *"we don't want to be sat on stock, we want to help as many people as we can"*, but that this comes with *"every week I have to buy something"*. In our conversation, the food bank manager spoke passionately and emphasised the importance of community in Caerphilly but also posed the question; *"Why should we all get together as a community to help ourselves, as much as that is amazing, the government need to help... I would hope for the government to start listening."*

Vale Foodbank spoke about the challenges they were facing, particularly in terms of stock, *"Since I've worked here this has been the most that we have struggled with stock levels, so we're looking at how we can sustain it, because the need is just constant."* In our conversation they expressed a belief that food banks are resilient, but that the current situation they are facing will not resolve itself, government intervention is needed, *"it's really important that people understand that demand continues to increase and you know, that's not getting any easier or any better for people. It's getting worse if anything and food banks are struggling to keep up with that demand due to obviously other people struggling and not being able to donate. It is that cycle of high demand low stock"*

¹⁷ The research is based on an online survey by the Trussell Trust of 184 food banks in the Trussell Trust network across the UK. Fieldwork was undertaken from the 30th of August – 1st October 2023 and the survey was distributed through multiple methods across the Trussell Trust food bank network.

The food banks that we spoke to in Wales acknowledge the needs of different people and situations, and work hard to make adaptations to their operation to best meet the needs of their community.

“We've had an increase in [kettle packs]. We get different requests sometimes and we get NFA's (which is no fixed abode), people in these...temporary accommodations and they do have limited cooking facilities. We have to ask...what's your situation and we have to make up parcels”

– Foodbank Manager, Caerphilly Food bank

Food banks in the Trussell Trust network provide additional support beyond emergency food provision to address the root causes of financial hardship in their communities. The vast and growing majority of food banks are offering, or signposting to, debt advice and benefits advice. These services work alongside people to support them to maximise their income and ensure that people are receiving the correct benefit entitlement and are supported with managing debt. Despite this work across the food bank network to maximise people's incomes, food banks continue to report that people across their communities do not have enough to afford the essentials.

When asked about main obstacles to their food bank making progress in the coming year: “Income maximization not achieving sufficient gains to overcome cost of living increase.”

– Food banks in the Trussell Trust network¹⁸

“Another knock on rise is people claiming that their issues are impacting their mental health. [Sometimes] this is recorded on their vouchers, but often not.”

When asked what factor, if any, has had the biggest impact on the number of people referred to your food bank in the last 6 months (since April 2023): “Cost of living and ongoing impact of long term physical or mental health condition.”

– Food banks in the Trussell Trust network¹⁹

Food banks continue to express grave concern about the levels of need and hardship across the communities that they are supporting. Both staff and volunteers continue to adapt, develop, and negotiate the challenges that have been thrown at their organisations over the last few years. With resilience, strength and compassion they continue to strive to support all people in need but there are fears that the long-term problem of social security payments being too low to cover essentials, and continued high levels of need will push some food banks to their limit and they may not be able to meet all of the need in their communities.

¹⁸ IBID

¹⁹ IBID

10. People across Wales are united in belief that food banks should not be needed in the UK

Food banks are stepping in to support people who can't afford to buy food, and other essentials for themselves. However, food banks are neither the right nor sustainable response to people going without essentials because their incomes are too low.

The Trussell Trust's long-term goal to end the need for food banks is one that has the support of the public. Polling by YouGov on behalf of the Trussell Trust suggests that the public are particularly concerned with issues related to poverty and hunger in the UK and the majority of people in Wales (81%) think that food banks should not be needed in the UK.²⁰

²⁰ Polling undertaken by YouGov Plc. The total sample size in Wales 233 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 5th and 19th of July 2023. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all adults across the UK.

What this means for policy

It is not right that anyone should need to use a food bank because they can't afford to eat and pay bills. However, our statistics show that food bank need is at an historic high in Wales.

This is a record to be ashamed of. The majority (80%) of the public in Wales agree that poverty in the UK is a big problem. Over three in five (61%) of people in Wales believe that it is the responsibility of the Welsh Government to change this.²¹

Such high levels of hardship are damaging our nation's health, holding back the Welsh economy, and harming the prospects of our children and young people. It is only through building a society where everyone can afford the essentials that we can unlock the potential in our communities.

People need to access food banks because they don't have enough money for the essentials. But all of this can change. We know what's needed to end the need for food banks, and we know that it is achievable if we make the right decisions.

Building a future without the need for food banks in Wales requires action from both the Welsh Government and the UK Government, as key aspects of social security are reserved policy.

The new First Minister has the opportunity to work to end the need for food banks in Wales. With a new child poverty strategy in place, a commitment to streamline Welsh benefits and a focus on "what matters most to people's daily lives"²², the Welsh Government has levers to turn the tide of hardship facing our communities.

We want to see Welsh Government:

- 1. Deliver a plan to reduce and prevent the need for food banks in Wales:** Change is needed in multiple areas of policy to ensure that people do not have to turn to food banks or charitable food aid to get by. A national plan is needed to reduce and prevent the need for emergency food aid in Wales.
- 2. Streamline and simplify Welsh benefits:** The Welsh Government must ensure the Welsh Benefits Charter is implemented, and that one of its key aims – to reduce the need for emergency aid including food banks – is achieved.
- 3. Set clear targets and accountability measures to reduce child poverty in Wales:** Following the publication of the Child Poverty Strategy for Wales, Welsh Government must set out a clear monitoring framework to ensure impact is monitored, steps are able to be taken where progress is stalling, and the ambitions set out in the strategy are achieved.
- 4. Ensure crisis support meets individuals' needs:** For people experiencing financial crisis, the Discretionary Assistance Fund can help to pay for essential costs. The Discretionary Assistance Fund requires increased funding to meet rising demand for help, including with the costs of moving and essential furniture and white goods.
- 5. Call on the UK Government to introduce an 'Essentials Guarantee':** This change to legislation would ensure that the basic rate of Universal Credit is always enough for people to afford the essentials, and would take us a significant distance down the road towards a UK without the need for the food banks.

²¹ Polling undertaken by YouGov Plc. The total sample size in Wales 233 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 5th and 19th of July 2023. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all adults across the UK.

²² First Minister for Wales, 16th April 2024, Senedd Cymru (point 164) <https://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/13872#A87474>

As we approach the UK general election, we urgently need to hear how parties will build a future where no one needs a food bank to survive. Urgent reform of our social security system, which currently isn't even providing enough support for people to afford the essentials, is critical. Introducing an 'Essentials Guarantee' into Universal Credit would ensure everyone has a protected minimum amount of support to afford the essentials.

What we want to see from the UK Government

Building a future without the need for food banks will require a UK-wide effort across all levels of government and society, but the UK Government has many of the powers to turn the tide of hardship facing our communities. [Our General Election manifesto](#) sets out the actions we urge all political parties to support, and our priorities for the next UK Government. These priorities are:

Establishing an Essentials Guarantee in the social security system, ensuring that people's incomes cover the cost of living, while supporting the wellbeing of everyone who needs its help. We can do this by:

- 1. establishing an Essentials Guarantee legal minimum in Universal Credit.** This would embed in legislation the principle that, at a minimum, Universal Credit should protect people from going without essentials, such as food and bills. This should be based on an independent process to regularly determine the Essentials Guarantee level, based on the cost of essentials. This proposal enjoys widespread support, with 72% of the general public in favour.³⁰
- 2. taking swift action to dramatically reduce the amount that the UK Government can claw back from people's Universal Credit payments through deductions.** Delivering an Essentials Guarantee should begin by introducing a protected minimum amount in the system at a starting level which would limit the amount that the Universal Credit standard allowance can be reduced by from the current 25% to 15%. Alongside this, debt repayments to central government should be capped at a maximum of 5%.

Everyone should be able to get the right support at the right time, especially when times are tough, through:

- 3. a long-term and cash-first approach to local crisis support,** to help already struggling councils deliver joined-up local support targeted at people lacking a financial buffer to manage unexpected costs. Multi-year funding should at least match the level of investment in the Household Support Fund.
- 4. a UK financial inclusion strategy that prioritises people facing destitution,** by ensuring that people on low incomes can access the advice and support they need on money matters, including social security eligibility and debt.

People must be supported in a way that reflects the reality of their lives, especially if they're facing the higher costs and barriers that may affect – for example – parents, carers, and disabled people, through:

- 5. delivering swift and accurate decisions about disability social security support for all applicants,** through increased operational capacity and expertise to conduct accurate, compassionate, and person-centred assessments.

6. **an overhauled employment support offer**, underpinned by a new strengths-based approach to engagement supported by long-term funding to expand voluntary, specialist employment support, and a new framework for Jobcentre Plus outcomes that incentivise tailored support and effective job matching, rather than box-ticking.
7. **removal of the caps and limits that have reduced the value of children's social security support**, by introducing a protected minimum amount in the system at a starting level which would mitigate the impact of the benefit cap, and by scrapping the two-child limit – helping to ensure that all members of a family are protected from going without essentials.

Everyone should have the security we all need to access opportunities and have hope for the future, through:

8. **new workers' rights legislation** to ensure new rights to job security, effective enforcement of existing rights, predictable working hours, and flexible working from day one.
9. **building 90,000 new social homes every year in England**, to provide the dignity of a safe, secure, and affordable place to live.
10. **empowering communities by designing places, spaces, and public transport services which build connection** – and drawing on people's own expertise to do so. This should include a new community right to shape public services and social infrastructure, and resources to ensure people on the lowest incomes can participate.