



A FUTURE WITHOUT THE NEED FOR FOOD BANKS

GENERAL ELECTION MANIFESTO 2024:
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUMMARY

It is not right that anyone should need to use a food bank because they can't afford to eat and pay bills. However, **in 2024 food bank need is at an historic high.**

In the past year, food banks in the Trussell Trust network distributed more than 3.1 million emergency food parcels – the highest number in our history. This includes more than 1.1 million parcels for children, and is almost double the number of parcels distributed five years ago (a 94% increase).¹

This is a record to be ashamed of, and the public will judge the next government on whether it succeeds in reversing this tide. 79% of the UK public agree that poverty in the UK is a big problem. 74% believe that it is the UK government's responsibility to change this.²

Such high levels of hardship are damaging our nation's health, holding back our economy, and harming the prospects of our 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.

It's 2024, and we're facing historic food bank need. As we approach the next 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 that everyone has a protected minimum amount of support to afford the essentials.

Building a future without the need for food banks will require a UK-wide effort across all levels of government and society. Cross-government action and a new partnership between government at every level is needed, as well as partnerships between civil society, businesses, employers, and communities. As we prepare for the General Election, the UK Government has many of the most important powers to turn the tide of hardship facing our communities. It is vital that the UK Government meets its responsibilities, as this will allow other parts of society to play their part.



OUR PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT UK GOVERNMENT

Building a future without the need for food banks requires 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.³

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.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

We've seen a steep increase in people needing food banks in recent years, but soaring numbers of people on the lowest incomes were facing hardship long before the Covid-19 and cost of living crises hit.

The number of parcels distributed by food banks in the Trussell Trust network has almost doubled between 2018/19 and 2023/24 (a 94% increase).⁴ We know that this reflects the rising numbers of people being pushed into the deepest, most severe form of poverty. 3.8 million people experienced destitution in 2022, almost two-and-a-half times the number of people in 2017.⁵

The UK public are clear this is unacceptable, with **79% agreeing in 2023 that poverty in the UK was a very big or fairly big problem.**⁶

Behind the statistics are the people forced to go without:

- Some people are between jobs, have health conditions or are looking after relatives and children.
- Other people are in work that's insecure or doesn't pay enough to live on.
- Barriers such as the lack of affordable childcare, transport, and flexible, accessible jobs are holding too many people back from opportunities to increase their income.
- High housing costs, especially for renters, leave people without enough money for other things – while insecurity for private renters puts them at risk of eviction and homelessness.

Our social security system is supposed to be there for us when times are tough, but it is currently failing in its most basic duty: to protect people from going without essentials. It is unacceptable that, last year, four in ten families receiving Universal Credit faced hunger, and one in five have been forced to access a food bank.⁷ It is a failing of our society that anyone should be forced to use a food bank because they can't afford essentials like food, clothing, or heating.

All of this can change. Because we know what's pushing people to food banks, and we know the building blocks that are needed to end hunger for good. **The public are with us on this mission, with more than three quarters agreeing that food banks should not be needed in the UK,** and 63% saying they do not think that food banks are the solution to hunger in the UK. People are clear that responsibility for keeping people out of poverty belongs to the UK Government.⁸

This manifesto outlines the actions we urge all political parties to support, and our priorities for the next UK Government – so they can lead us into a more hopeful future without the need for food banks, where we ensure security and opportunity for all.

79%

of the public agreed in 2023 that poverty in the UK was a very big or fairly big problem.

"I attended the food bank after being only able to pay my rent and mobile phone whilst on Universal Credit.

How, in one of the richest countries in the world, are people queuing for food – a basic necessity? In the twenty-first century people are still hungry in the UK. It strips you of your self-esteem and confidence"

– Sharron



94%

INCREASE

in emergency food parcels
distributed by food banks in
the Trussell Trust network
between 2018/19 and 2023/24

CONCLUSION

This General Election comes at a time when we are facing a generational challenge of hunger in the UK. Hardship is at record highs, and food banks risk becoming a ‘new normal’ in communities the length and breadth of the UK. This is damaging our health, harming the prospects of young people, and holding back our economy.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Elections are all about choices, and together we can choose to prioritise turning the tide on the rising need for food banks.

Public opinion is clear: the level and depth of poverty today is unacceptable, and it is the UK Government's responsibility to act.

The next government will be judged on whether it rises to meet this challenge.

That is why we are calling on all party leaders to commit to building a future where no one needs a food bank, because we have a social security system that is fit for purpose, with cross-government action to ensure everyone has enough for the essentials.

Achieving this goal will require a UK-wide effort across all levels of government and society. UK Government action should be delivered alongside urgent action from governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and from local authorities, employers, charities and community organisations.

Because we know what's pushing people to food banks, we know the building blocks that are needed to end hunger for good. Putting these building blocks in place will lead us into a more hopeful future where everyone has the security of being able to afford the essentials, and we **consign the need for food banks to history.**

Find out more:

We know what's pushing people to food banks, so we know the building blocks needed to end hunger for good.

Visit our website for further detail on the policy areas and recommendations covered in this manifesto: trusselltrust.org/building-blocks.

For more information, please contact public.affairs@trusselltrust.org.

REFERENCES

¹ Trussell Trust (May 2024), End of Year Stats April 2023 – March 2024.

² Trussell Trust (2023) Trussell Trust Public Attitudes Survey conducted by YouGov. Base: 5,393 nat. rep. UK adults. 5th-19th July 2023 – 79% of the UK public agree that poverty in the UK is a very big or fairly big problem.

³ Trussell Trust; JRF (2024) Guarantee our Essentials: Reforming Universal Credit to ensure we can all afford the essentials in hard times <https://www.jrf.org.uk/social-security/guarantee-our-essentials-reforming-universal-credit-to-ensure-we-can-all-afford-the>

⁴ See endnote 1

⁵ Destitution means not being able to afford at least two of the essentials we all need to get by, like shelter, food, heating and lighting. S. Fitzpatrick; G Bramley, M. Treanor; J. Blenkinsopp; J. McIntyre; S Johnsen; L. McMordie, JRF (2023) Destitution in the UK 2023 <https://www.jrf.org.uk/deep-poverty-and-destitution/destitution-in-the-uk-2023>

⁶ Trussell Trust (2023) Trussell Trust Public Attitudes Survey – see endnote 2

⁷ Gov.uk (2023) Family Resources Survey: financial year 2022 to 2023 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-resources-survey-financial-year-2022-to-2023>

⁸ 74% of people agree that the UK (Westminster) Government is responsible for keeping people out of poverty. Trussell Trust (2023) Trussell Trust Public Attitudes Survey – see endnote 2.

Contact us

 Unit 9, Ashfield Trading Estate,
Ashfield Road, Salisbury SP2 7HL

 enquiries@trusselltrust.org

 01722 580 180

 twitter.com/trusselltrust

 facebook.com/trusselltrust

 instagram.com/trusselltrust

www.trusselltrust.org



Photo credits: ©Chris Lacey photography

Registered Charity in England & Wales (1110522) and Scotland (SC044246).
Registered Limited Company in England & Wales (5434524).