**Scottish Government Consultation on Ending the need for foodbanks (January 2022)**

**Response from Scottish Quakers Parliamentary Engagement Working Group**

 We are seeking further suggestions on the practical actions the Scottish Government and other actors can take to end the need for food banks. The consultation will be open until 25 January 2022. We will consider these views in developing a final version of this plan which we intend to publish in 2022.

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

Yes

We welcome these proposals, particularly the Human Rights based approach which preserves the independence and recognises the dignity of all involved. As the consultation document rightly notes, food poverty is not the result of a lack of food, but a lack of financial resource. Therefore, the focus on prevention through strengthening incomes, social security and reducing the cost of living, should logically reduce the need for food banks. Where these preventative measures are insufficient we welcome the emphasis on a cash first approach alongside holistic support services, with emergency food parcels as a last resort.

While the approach outlined rightly focuses on individuals, and ensuring that those individuals have their own money and control over how they spend it, more emphasis could be given to the place of resilient communities in preventing and responding to poverty. Food access and supply can and should have community-building roots and benefits. Growing, cooking and sharing food together has many social, mental and physical health benefits. The potential relationships made through these communal and community activities provide an additional safety net for individuals and families that is qualitatively different from those “holistic support services” that can be provided by the state (although these are essential). In addition it is important that communities have access to healthy, local produce. We recognise that the government is making progress on these issues elsewhere, through the Good Food Nation Bill, the Fourth National Planning Framework, and proposals around a Right to Food within future Human Rights legislation. However, we feel that these actions and proposals could have greater prominence within the strategy, with overt reference to the role that resilient communities have to play.

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

 Yes

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

Yes

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

The current and planned actions are welcome and should make a significant and positive impact on foodbank use within Scotland. Nonetheless, while the use of public procurement practices to ensure a living wage are significant and welcome, they will only go so far. Within the current devolved powers, therefore, we see the reduction of the cost of living as an area where the Scottish government could have greater influence. We are supportive of efforts to establish a minimum income guarantee as well as steps to establish the right to food within domestic law.

One aspect of the cost of living is availability of transport to access affordable and healthy food. It is therefore striking that transport receives little mention within the strategy. Section 18 of the strategy gives one of the only references to transport, acknowledging that “people in the most deprived areas may have a low income and limited access to transport to access affordable food.” Similarly the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland’s report [“Hard Choices: reducing the need for foodbanks in Scotland”](https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/CPAG_Food_Bank_Report.pdf) gives “improved access to transport” as its second key recommendation. We recognise that the Scottish government has recently taken steps to make public transport free for under 21s. We would encourage the Scottish government to more fully consider within the strategy how it might build upon this positive step to ensure accessible, affordable and well distributed public transport as a means of ensuring access to affordable and healthy food.

Another aspect of the cost of living is the choice many have to make between adequate heating and adequate food. The public funding of retrofitting of homes to address both carbon emissions and fuel poverty must prioritise households which face this dilemma. On the same principle of a cash-first approach to food needs, a system of full grants, or of funded, targeted retrofitting / installations, must make this possible, to release household income for food needs.

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

The measurements outlined seem sensible.

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

 [Open comment]