

SP 38

Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb,
Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau
Priorities for the Equality,
Local Government and Communities Committee
Ymateb gan: Trussell Trust
Response from: Trussell Trust

1. The Committee will be aware that The Trussell Trust operates the largest network of foodbanks in the UK and across Wales. Between April 2015 and March 2016 we provided emergency food aid to 86,142 individuals across Wales (of which 31,426 were 16 and under). This represents a 142% increase in provision since the end of March 2013 (we provided food aid for 35,637 between April 12 – Mar 13). A regional breakdown of The Trussell Trust's latest figures can be found at www.trusselltrust.org/stats.
2. The Trussell Trust in Wales is represented by its National Manager, Tony Graham, who also has 2 part time members of staff working for him based in North & South Wales.
3. The first foodbank in Wales started in 2008 in Ebbw Vale (now covering Blaenau Gwent) and we now operate 36 foodbank hubs which in turn oversee 105 distribution centres in every county and in most cities and towns across the nation. Our network of foodbank projects has become in recent years one of the largest volunteer led charities in Wales with nearly 3,000 volunteers regularly supporting the foodbank network. We are therefore ideally placed to comment on some of the challenges faced by communities suffering the consequences of poverty and inequality. Our centres are usually placed in the churches and community centres at the heart of most communities.
4. Trussell Trust foodbanks provide three days' nutritionally balanced emergency food and support to people in crisis. Over 90% of the food given out by foodbanks is donated by the public. Every foodbank recipient is referred by a frontline professional. Foodbanks also refer recipients to other agencies to help resolve the underlying cause of the crisis.
5. Everyone who comes to a Trussell Trust foodbank is referred by a frontline organisation: people cannot receive food if they are not in possession of a food voucher. Over 28,000 professionals across the UK currently refer people to Trussell Trust foodbanks and over 50% of these are statutory agencies. Referrers include doctors, social workers, school liaison officers and Citizen Advice Bureau advisers, amongst others. These professionals assess the need and make sure that people they refer to foodbanks are in genuine crisis.
6. Trussell Trust foodbanks are designed to address short term hunger and help people out of crisis. They are structured to avoid long term dependency: no self-referral; no drop in service; time-limited support. Trussell Trust foodbank clients may redeem three foodbank vouchers in a row at which point the foodbank manager will contact the referral agent about putting together a support plan to help the client break out of poverty. Longer term support from the foodbank is available in exceptional circumstances as agreed between the foodbank manager and referral agent.

7. Foodbanks in the Trussell Trust network are working to further understand how they can address the underlying causes of poverty and hunger in their local communities. In order to provide the services that would be most useful to people who are referred to foodbanks, and to provide tailored advice and support, foodbanks analyse their own data and the experiences of the people they serve to signpost people to external advice/support services or locate local advice services onsite. This reduces the need for a future referral to the foodbank. The ambition is to roll out one or more 'More Than Food' projects, including debt and welfare advice, holiday clubs, cooking and budgeting courses and fuel banks to a wider group of foodbanks. Our strategy over the next five years also involves a two year iterative evaluation of our More Than Food services with the University of Sheffield Hallam.

8. We have sought to actively engage with Welsh Government Ministers and the previous Committee looking at poverty issues across Wales. However, as we have made clear to some members of the Committee and Welsh Government we have been disappointed that no Cabinet Secretary has public responsibility for Poverty in their title although we appreciate that Carl Sergeant covers poverty in his portfolio. We believe this is a retrograde step and is suggestive of either an unwillingness to tackle poverty as a core element of the programme of government or recognition of the difficulty of tackling this complex issue and may be viewed as 'kicking the problem into the long grass'. Welsh Government officials have been at pains to state this is not the case but there is much to be read in the priorities of a government from the titles and departments that it puts in place. We will be watching somewhat carefully to see what happens to the anti-poverty division within Welsh Government.

9. It is clear, as we have stated above, that addressing poverty is an extremely difficult challenge. In recent years and in the current economic climate this problem is especially exacerbated. However, it is the duty of governments working with organisations such as our own, in the third sector, to confront challenges such as these. There are many priorities that face an incoming administration and the nature of devolved government sometimes makes dealing with those issues all the more difficult. However, Assembly Members and Government Ministers have been elected to confront and mitigate all the worst excesses of poverty and inequality in our nation no matter what those challenges may be.

10. The Trussell Trust provides the only Wales-wide data on foodbank use. Trussell Trust foodbanks operate a voucher system. Put simply, every client is given a voucher by the referral agency. This includes data such as the number of adults and children in need of emergency food, as well as the main reason for the referral e.g. benefit delay, changes to benefits, sanctions or low income. Each foodbank inputs this data into an online data collection system. The Trussell Trust is therefore able to generate nationwide statistics.

11. Trussell Trust figures record the number of times three days' food has been given to people in crisis. This does not mean that each user is necessarily unique, but sample surveys of individual foodbank data indicates that 65% of foodbank clients have only one voucher in any six month period and less than 10% have four or more.

12. Static incomes, rising living costs, low pay, underemployment and problems with welfare are some of the key drivers of the increased demand experienced by foodbanks in the last year. Just under half of referrals to foodbanks in 2015-16 were a result of benefit delays or changes.

Primary referral causes to foodbanks

	Benefit Delay	Benefit Change	Low Income	Debt	Other
2013/14	30.93%	16.97%	20.29%	7.85%	23.96%
2014/15	30.61%	13.62%	23.58%	7.54%	24.65%
2015/16	29.11%	14.17%	24.66%	6.99%	25.07%

13. The Trussell trust would like to see the new Committee continue the Inquiry into Poverty that was commenced by the previous Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee in the last Assembly session. Two strands of a four strand inquiry were dealt with and we agree that it is important to consider the impact of welfare reform and in-work poverty as key elements of the work of the new Committee.

14. There is a obvious and important difference between crisis poverty and lifting a nation out of poverty. As there is no clear definition of poverty one of the consequences is that organisations such as ours sometimes find themselves operating in loosely defined boundaries which can shift according to the agenda of the day (e.g. we have been included in discussions around surplus food and growing food projects but have limited inclusion in consultations around the future of advice services). Would it be helpful to establish some clearer boundaries around a ‘sub-sector’ of key shared priorities/agendas or are various bodies and agencies content to engage in a broader, less defined context? How can the Third Sector (and not just the ‘usual suspects’) be equipped to take the lead in creating a coherent message around tackling poverty (e.g. possible summit of key agencies to define the boundaries and environment for discussion/action; how we define poverty, share data and inform policy discussions)?

15. We would welcome a greater emphasis on data sharing and joining up the increasing array of data and evaluative work on anti-poverty interventions, to ensure that different groups working in this space are learning from one another and developing the best possible programmes to help people get out of poverty long term. We have recently been working with Hull University to develop a data mapping tool and predictive analysis of likely need based on the 2015 derivation indices in England and Wales.

16. As can be seen from our table above – low income had gradually increased as a driver for people attending foodbanks. We believe ‘in-work’ poverty is an increasing issue. A number of our foodbanks have opened after normal working hours to be available to those in work. We welcome the Committee’s desire to consider this as a possible work stream.

17. We would also welcome consideration of the effects of welfare reform and the effectiveness of the Governments response in Wales. Like many we are strongly of the view that there should be

adequate funding of the social safety net and an improvement in its responsiveness to the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable groups. We would like to see foodbank use (as detailed above) drastically reduced, with a particular emphasis on reducing the number of people attending foodbanks due to benefit changes and delays. These account for over 40% of all our referrals and many could be avoided if the DWP took some simple practical steps to improve delivery of welfare. The Welsh Government, whilst not responsible for the DWP, can bring to bear its own evidence and pressure in this area. Many of the specific recommendations on welfare delivery we originally outlined nearly two years ago in [Emergency Use Only](#) and still stand today. It is vital Government at all levels and in different countries engages with these if we are to tackle hunger and poverty. We welcome recent moves to help tackle in work poverty via the National Living Wage and hope the timetable of pay rises planned over the next few years will be met, although would like to see steps to raise this further to move towards the independently set Living Wage Foundation rate of £8.25ph and to help raise the wages of the under 25 group not currently covered by the National Living Wage. We are also concerned about the number of people now trapped in insecure work and would like to greater scrutiny to ensure employers act responsibly and give people better job security.

18. We have a particular concern with legislation being implemented by the Westminster Government and the 42 day wait period for Universal Credit. As this rolls out we may see it resulting in a larger number of foodbank referrals due to people having no income whilst they wait for a benefit they are eligible for. Presently although we do not have systemic data yet, project managers across our foodbank network report long delays in the first payment of Universal Credit as causing hardship for too many of the people they help. For someone with no income the lengthy 42 day wait will leave them struggling to afford to eat and, for those without friends, family or other support networks to help, it can leave them desperate. We wholeheartedly support the recommendation that this waiting time be reduced.

19. How will the UK's withdrawal from the EU affect our sector? One of the key aims of the previous WCVA's Third Sector Anti-Poverty Taskforce was to influence policy and delivery of the Welsh Government's tackling poverty programme to ensure it was (as far as possible) aligned with the objectives of [European Cohesion Policy 2014-2020](#) to maximize Structural Funds in relation to key department programmes. This raises lots of questions in terms of current financial commitments, replacement funding etc. and the potential impact of reduced funding in terms of the tackling poverty agenda. We presume WCVA will raise this in their response? It is probably too early to tell what the long term impact of 'Brexit' will be. There will be wider more complex questions to ask around how European fund money will be spent and what will happen once it is withdrawn.

20. Regarding the effectiveness of Communities First we would observe that in some areas, there is a reality gap between the policy agenda (and ensuing priorities for funding) and the experience of communities in poverty e.g. engagement between Communities First and foodbanks is patchy across Wales, with some Communities First teams indicating that they are not seeing people in poverty who require a referral. Is there an opportunity for the sector to develop an anti-poverty Bill to provide a broader outcome-focused approach? The diversity of the sector is a key strength (lots of grass-roots community initiatives across Wales) but there is also a need for a more joined-up approach, with key voices representing the sector and influencing the policy environment (as

Trussell Trust and others are starting to do). Moving towards this will require some baseline regional and national mapping of the environment to understand who is doing what and where as well as some coordination across the sector to ensure that (as far as practicable) collective voices are recognised. We do not believe that collective engagement will constrain independence of action and organisation - it's about strengthening the sector's voice in the discussion.

21. With all the economic and political challenges that lie ahead it is clear that the private, public and third sectors will have to ensure a far greater degree of collaboration than has happened previously. We recommend greater partnership and collaboration between the sector and Welsh Government. This has been somewhat limited historically (Third Sector Partnership Council; WCVA Anti-Poverty Taskforce – the latter no longer functions). We suggest Welsh government work with key partners (including ourselves) to set up a Wales Poverty Coalition/Council to address key issues around addressing and mitigating poverty in Wales.