

## Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

**Petition Number:** [PE1571](#)

**Main Petitioner:** John Beattie

**Subject:** Food Banks

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide direct funding to food banks to ensure that demand for their services can be fully met.

### Background

The number of food banks across the UK has increased in recent years. However, the total number of people using food banks in Scotland is not known. Figures from the largest provider (Trussell Trust) show how use of their food banks in Scotland has increased over the last four years.

Apr to Sept figures only	People assisted (adults and children)
2011	1,692
2012	4,021
2013	23,073
2014	51,647

Source: [papers to welfare reform committee, 2014](#)

While many argue that this increase in dependency on food banks reflects changes to the welfare system including the stricter sanctions regime (see in particular the Trussell Trust and Scottish Parliament Welfare Reform Committee), this is disputed by the UK Government.

Food banks tend to be run by communities for communities and be staffed by volunteers. They are not part of the welfare system, although many do receive some public funding. A [Panorama report in 2014](#) found that a third of local authorities in England provided some financial support to food banks.

Ewan Gurr, of the Trussell Trust told the Scottish Parliament's Welfare Committee that a number of local authorities had made approaches to Trussell Trust food banks. The Trust had made it clear to local authorities that they did not wish to enter into service-level agreements or be remunerated for the food they distributed. He said that Trussell Trust food banks prefer to be

resourced by the community for the community. ([Scottish Parliament Welfare Committee report on its inquiry into food banks](#))

The UK Government does not provide (or intend to provide) support directly to food banks, as outlined by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Lord De Mauley) in April 2013:

The Government are not considering the provision of funding to support food banks. We do, however, recognise the good work of organisations that redistribute surplus food to help reduce food poverty, assist the homeless and provide access to nutritional meals for those who may otherwise struggle. [HL Deb 22 April 2013 cWA373](#)

The Scottish Government has provided £1m funding to address food poverty, half of which went to food banks (see below).

For further general background on food banks see SPICe Briefing 14/46 (2014) [The Increasing Demand for Emergency Food Aid in Scotland](#)

### **Scottish Government Action**

In a recent PQ (S4W-25885, June 2015), Alex Neil MSP stated that the Scottish Government is providing:

£1 million over 2014-15 and 2015-16 to help combat food poverty in Scotland. We want to help food aid providers support even more people and make sure those using food banks are able to access appropriate advice and support.

Half of this sum went to food banks and half went to the charity Fareshare, which redistributes food from supermarkets to the communities and charities. Details of the funding allocated is available here:

<http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/Help-for-those-in-food-poverty-f9b.aspx>

The Scottish Government also has a number of policies aimed at preventing and alleviating poverty. This includes the £38m Scottish Welfare Fund, which is used by local authorities to help people in crisis. (This has replaced part of the UK Discretionary Social Fund).

In evidence to the Welfare Committee on the Scottish Welfare Fund, the Minister for Housing and Welfare said that food banks should not be used to replace any part of the welfare system ([OR 14 March 2014](#))

### **Scottish Parliament Action**

The Welfare Committee held an inquiry into food banks which [reported](#) in 2014. This was followed up with an evidence sessions with David Mundell MP on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2014 and 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2015. A chamber debate was held on the issue in December 2014.

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17 July 2015

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