



*Supporting individuals and families in the Stirlingshire area
who are experiencing homelessness, housing difficulties and financial hardship.*

PE1571/D

12th October, 2015

Dear Sirs

Petition PE1571 (Food Bank Funding)

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate.

Background

Start Up Stirling is a registered charity which has been in existence for nearly twenty years and started life as a supplier of starter packs to young homeless people moving in to new tenancies and as an extension of this service we began providing a Food Bank service to the wider community approximately three years ago. Our third key service is the provision of befriending to our clients/recipients.

Whilst we are operating at the sharp end of crisis intervention we seek to provide a holistic service and referrals are passed to us through our network of trained referrers namely: Stirling Council, Housing Associations, CAB , Money Advice etc. We seek to provide food parcels for a period in the region of 6 weeks which is normally sufficient for recipients to be guided by the appropriate agency to a solution to the issue at hand. It is possible for a recipient to present again for help but we believe our approach moves people away from dependency.

We are independent and rely on the community to support the community and in doing so we have established strong relationships with over 50 churches, 65 businesses and 37 schools as well as local supermarkets, Boys Brigade companies and various other interested parties.

We operate three crisis food bank access points across Stirling and each week, on average, we provide crisis food to 160 individuals, 40 of whom are children, and this equates to 1550 meals per week. We rent warehouse premises in an industrial estate for storage purposes (c 3000 square feet) and we employ 4 FTE who are supported by a volunteer team in the region of 50 to 60.

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Scottish Charity No: SC 035477

An Initiative of Churches in the Stirling Area

Funding

We have received annual funding from Stirling Council towards the combined cost of Starter Packs and food bank provision although this funding is subject to annual appraisal and is generally on a downward trend as budgets are challenged. This funding equates to roughly 10% of our costs

We also received Big Lottery Funding which was used to cover a move to new premises in 2014 as well as funding new salaried positions. This funding was not all drawn within the original time-scale and has been extended until 30th March 2016 but we are clear there will be no further extension of this.

Future Challenges

We face two major challenges in the future which, we believe, will be shared by all food bank providers:

Firstly, in common with other providers we are seeing increasing demand for food bank services and with the pending impact of universal credit changes and, to a lesser degree, the arrival of international refugees we cannot see this improving in the near future. We also “don’t know what we don’t know” and we believe there are still sectors of the population who may need our services but who we are not reaching e.g. the elderly and lonely. We also face the challenge of reaching the rural areas where demand appears to be growing faster than the urban areas.

Secondly, funding continues to be a major challenge - most grant and trust funders will **not** provide funds for food, preferring instead to fund projects addressing prevention as opposed to crisis intervention. In addition, premises and staff costs are not a luxury - they are essential for storage and the provision of quality service. Our premises cost approximately £20,000p.a. and because of the funding challenges we depend on fund raising activities to meet this cost. As more Food Banks expand they will find themselves faced with this problem

Views of the petition and subsequent discussion

In light of the foregoing context and experience we would comment as follows:

1. There is currently an unclear picture of the provision of food banks across the country. Whilst there is a collective voice from the Trussell Trust, it does not reflect the experience of independent Food Bank providers. We would welcome some means of providing this.
2. There are clearly many different operating models and potentially different methods of providing statistics, both of which make it difficult to understand the need and how it is being addressed although, despite that, we concur that there is continual pressure on food supply and we also carry

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out regular appeals for food. We do not believe, however, that providing food alone is the answer and it is essential to address the reasons why people present at Food Banks.

3. Communities do respond to need and it is humbling to watch the way they do. Generally speaking, however, they respond with food which does not cover running costs. In this context there is scope to develop relationships with commercial partners - we have had success with local fruit and veg merchants and meat producers which allows us to offer a better balanced food parcel.
4. We would welcome a fund to which we could apply for help with running costs which need to be seen as essential for the service provision. We note the discussion related stories of food banks starting up in homes and whilst this response to need is fantastic, food needs to be managed, stored and distributed in a properly regulated manner. If such a fund was available, a clear and fair means of applying needs to be in place as opposed to the £1m funding in 2014 which appears to have been distributed at the discretion of government. (We certainly were unaware of the fund).
5. We would be uncomfortable with a voucher system which, in addition to the potential stigma, is also open to misuse.
6. We do not believe that Food Banks should become part of the Welfare System but we do believe that government has some responsibility to make funds available to support those in the community who respond to the need.

Summary

There is general acceptance that Food Banks will be part of Scottish society for some time and we appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the debate arising from the petition.

We always find that people gain a fuller understanding of the situation when they visit us and we would extend a warm welcome to any members of the committee who wished to come along to discuss these views further

Yours faithfully,

Colin Smith
Convenor

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