

Ending the need for food banks: consultation on a draft national plan

January 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?**

Food insecurity key statistics:

- All nine of the communities Corra works alongside saw the demand for food distribution increase as a result of the pandemic.
- £164,917 of the Scottish Government's Supporting Communities Fund was distributed across the nine communities to support food provision.
- 26 projects supported through Corra's #ShiftThePower Comic Relief Covid-19 response fund contained an element of food provision. Across several grant programmes, the use of supermarket vouchers and cash first approaches are offered including through The Scottish Government's Winter Support Small Grants Fund, #ShiftThePower Covid-19 response fund and The Scottish Government's Wellbeing Fund.
- Applications for The Equity Programme proactive grants demonstrated food insecurity amongst Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, as many applications included requests for food vouchers, distribution of food parcels and access to culturally appropriate food.

“it's not about food in the moment, it's about the situation that has brought the person to this position” Corra Foundation Community Co-ordinator.

Corra Foundation welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Scottish Government's draft national plan on the need to end food banks. This response draws on insights from across Corra's work alongside communities and the voluntary sector.

For a long time, food has been both a tool for community engagement and togetherness as well as an indicator of inequality. Corra observed the ways food insecurity became more visible during the pandemic, as community groups worked at pace to meet families' basic needs. Food insecurity was identified as the most common concern across amongst local groups and communities throughout the pandemic. During 2020, Corra distributed £164,917 in Scottish Government's Supporting Communities Fund to support local initiatives working to ensure families have access to food, digital devices and fuel vouchers. During the crisis, Corra reviewed applications for the Scottish Government's Wellbeing Fund and 16%

of the funding focused on food¹ (a high proportion of applications contained an element of food distribution). These funding commitments are in addition to the £70m Scottish Government committed to the Food Fund as part of the crisis response.

This consultation comes at an important time as we consider how to build forward from the pandemic, make human rights real, and take action to stop the rising tide of poverty.

A bold commitment to tackling the issue at its heart

Through its grantmaking, place-based and partnership work, Corra continues to learn about the impacts of poverty. Food insecurity is often experienced alongside other complex inequalities. Whilst the draft plan makes important references to wider policies to tackle poverty, there is lack of detail on how bold action will be taken to eradicate poverty at its source.

Insights from Corra's work highlight the intersectionality of poverty and the multiple adversities people may face. Tackling poverty means understanding the impact on people's day-to-day lives, wellbeing and the barriers they face accessing support:

- Limited access to affordable shops and poor public transport connections can be a major challenge for people experiencing poverty. Without local supermarkets close by families are immediately restricted in what, how and where they buy their food. Some of the communities Corra works alongside support meal delivery services to elderly and disabled people in response to the issues they face accessing food. Corra welcomes discussions around 20-minute neighbourhoods² and the work of The Town Centre Expert Review³ group to revitalise town centres in the wake of the pandemic.
- The prevalence of in-work poverty is evident in learning from Corra's Getting Alongside Communities programme. Corra Community Co-ordinator's continuing to see the ways unstable jobs, zero-hour contracts and the impact of the pandemic on employment prospects is locking families into a cycle of uncertainty. Co-ordinator's regularly support people to access local food shares and signpost to crisis funds. In one area the Co-ordinator reflected on the additional strain placed on families who test positive for coronavirus, meaning they must self-isolate and are therefore unable to work.

In Carbrain, the Co-ordinator worked closely with the local Community Council Food Project who responded to the food emergency. At the height of lockdown in April and May 2020, the project was distributing 500 meals in one week. The group had to respond quickly to ensure support was there for people in their community. This included working with others to avoid duplication of support, identifying suitable premises and securing resources.

¹ [Scottish Government Wellbeing Fund Analysis; Nov 2020](#)

² [Fourth National Planning Framework: position statement - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

³ [Corra Foundation's response to The Town Centre Expert Review Group - Corra](#)

- Refugees and asylum seekers are particularly vulnerable to multiple deprivation. The draft plan acknowledges groups that have no recourse to public funds and references guidance to local authorities on tackling financial insecurity over the winter period. However, Corra would urge further work to address the specific inequalities experienced by refugees and asylum seekers. This must focus on offering greater agency, dignity and protection of their human rights at every level of the system.

“Since the pandemic refugees and asylum seekers have experienced severe poverty, food insecurity, isolation and mental health difficulties. These are the experiences of our community at the best of times but the emergency has deepened many of these health and social issues for families and children. These needs will undoubtedly continue for the forthcoming year and beyond.” Bikes for Refugees

- There are many factors that may trap people in a vicious cycle of adversity, including the rising cost of living, mental health issues, homelessness and drug and alcohol issues. As part of its Partnership Drugs Initiative (PDI), Corra supports charities working alongside children, young people and families affected by alcohol and drugs. Often these families are experiencing multiple challenges including poverty, social isolation, and poor mental health. In 2020 fifteen PDI projects⁴ received an emergency grant to support the distribution of food, fuel vouchers, phone top-ups and supply wellbeing resources to help families cope with the impact of lockdown.

Like many, Corra continues to explore the learning from the ongoing pandemic, and the impact this has had on communities and the voluntary sector. During the challenging months of lockdown we learnt of the extraordinary efforts of neighbours, communities and groups coming together to support one another. Much has been made of the important role community groups and voluntary organisations played in responding to the crisis, including adapting their services to be focused on supporting people to access food, clothes and other necessities as well as working hard to respond to the less visible mental health emergency that prevails.

In July 2020, Corra Foundation and Social Action Inquiry partners⁵ commissioned a short-term research project⁶ capturing learning on how communities came together during the pandemic. The research found that social action accelerated during 2020 and became a central feature of Scotland’s response to the ongoing challenges of the pandemic. However, participants in the research reflected that while they were initially motivated to take action, they also felt a sense of frustration at the persistent inequalities. Some described feeling overwhelmed by the scale of the challenges on their doorstep.

⁴ [Coronavirus Funding - Corra](#)

⁵ Carnegie UK Trust, National Lottery Community Fund Scotland, Foundation Scotland, The Robertson Trust, The Royal Society of Edinburgh and SCVO

⁶ [Social-Action-during-the-Coronavirus-Pandemic-Report.pdf \(socialaction.scot\)](#)

“It’s been a blessing and curse, glad I can help, but wish I didn’t have to.” Together We Help

This is important learning and one of the key recommendations was recognising that community action cannot be in place of wider state support to tackle inequalities. The research also reinforced the need for communities to be supported to share their local expertise on the challenges they face to influence decision making locally and nationally. Communities should be resourced and supported to respond to the issues that matter to them, alongside national level action that is combating the systemic issues. Corra calls for a greater emphasis on how the draft plan to end the need for food banks connects to wider plans for post covid social renewal. Central to this should be recognition of the importance of engaging directly with the groups and communities at the ‘frontline’ of their local coronavirus response.

In 2020 Corra’s Henry Duncan Grants priority was enabling families to cope with the impacts of poverty. Over £981k in grants were made to charities to address poverty and the impacts of poverty on families. 38 organisations received multi-year funding. From groups reporting so far in 2021, over 9,000 people have been supported, many to help manage the increased impact of coronavirus but also to deal with food insecurity.

Home-Start Clackmannanshire received £25,000 over five years in August 2020 from Corra’s Henry Duncan Grants. Over the last year the funding has helped support the organisation to provide online cooking on a budget and ‘Make and Taste’ courses for parents, with ingredients provided and delivered weekly. A face-to-face cooking course was planned for August 2021. Home-Start Clackmannanshire also have paid ‘Community Larder’ membership fees for families.

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, no, don’t know) Don’t know
3. **Do you think 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, no, don’t know) Don’t know
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?** [Open comment]

Shift power and trust to communities and voluntary sector

Corra welcomes the plan’s emphasis on dignity and human rights. This sets an important foundation for all action to tackle poverty and inequality. Communities and third sector organisations have vast expertise that could support the vision to tackle poverty. It will be important to harness this by ensuring communities are central to the development of plans.

Corra supports the Social Renewal Advisory Board's⁷ calls to shift power and listen to marginalised voices, including a commitment to place-based working. During the pandemic, communities and voluntary sector organisations took the lead in responding to local challenges, including food insecurity. As part of this response, collaboration was accelerated, and funding was distributed at pace. This was an approach centred on trust and viewing community groups as equal partners.

During the pandemic new community groups established, new partnerships emerged, and existing groups changed their focus to meet local need. Learning from across the communities Corra works alongside highlights that community action worked well when Local Authorities resourced community efforts. In Dunterlie, the Local Authority and Third Sector Interface connected with the Dunterlie Foodshare to support collaboration, planning and information sharing. Through effective joined up working the foodshare was able to reach and support more families.

The draft plan acknowledges the importance of joined up approaches. Working collaboratively is a key feature of place-based working. In Langlees, the Community Co-ordinator supported the community to join up local food provision, working alongside the local school and food shares. The community also worked to remove barriers, for instance removing the ten-item limit per food bank visit, as this was not enough to sustain a family. Together this network continues to share ideas on how to reduce food insecurity in the area.

In Scotland we have a strong foundation of community policies to build from which will be important starting points as we look to learn from what worked well during the pandemic, how to support greater collaboration and embed principles of participation, human rights and local democracy.

The emergency response continues

It is important to acknowledge that the emergency response continues in many communities. Many organisations are experiencing an increased demand for their services and are projecting that this need will continue for some time to come. The Community Council in Carbrain continue to supply emergency food parcels and run a weekly food pantry, supporting approximately 100 people each week.

In December 2021, Corra administered the first round of the Scottish Government's Winter Support Small Grants Fund, the first round of funding was oversubscribed, and 120 grants were made totaling £490,751. These grants supported third sector organisations and community groups to distribute funds on a cash first basis directly to families in need.

The funding also illustrated the considerable diversity of people experiencing poverty. Groups included: refugees and asylum seekers, Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, disabled people, people experiencing mental health problems, homelessness,

⁷ [If not now, when? - Social Renewal Advisory Board report: January 2021 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2021/01/If-not-now-when-Social-Renewal-Advisory-Board-report-January-2021.pdf)

people affected by drugs and alcohol, victims of domestic abuse, vulnerable women and girls, older and younger people.

A transition away from food banks will need to be carefully managed and proactively seek the views of communities and voluntary organisations working to support people experiencing poverty. Gathering learning from groups already using cash-first and voucher approaches will provide useful evidence on how to support food bank exit strategies, along with the pilot of supermarket vouchers referenced in the draft plan.

Choice and flexibility create the conditions for dignity

Important steps are being taken to offer greater choice and flexibility to those experiencing food insecurity, and this is acknowledged in the draft plan. Corra welcomes its emphasis on cash first partnership work and the use of shopping vouchers in place of food bank referrals. However, greater clarity is needed on how this will be rolled out across communities in a way that maintains dignity and a person centred approach. Alternatives to food banks should acknowledge the varied circumstances experienced by families and communities.

As well as this, long term solutions to tackling food insecurity and poverty should be central to all plans. There is a need to ensure measures are preventative rather than a short-term 'sticking plaster' amid wider systemic issues.

"Families have told us that they need mental and emotional support to help make lasting change. They need autonomy and independence, they don't want to be relying on support from charities, they would like to work towards being able to support themselves." Moray School Bank

Connections must also be made to ambitions to roll out the recommendations of The Christie Commission, which have received renewed focus as a result of the report's ten-year anniversary in 2021⁸. The four pillars of Christie; prevention, partnership, participation and performance, align with the aspirations included in the plan to end the need for food banks.

Conversations with other independent funders, charities and communities frequently emphasise the importance of creating conditions that support a shift from crisis interventions, to one where people and communities can thrive. Corra is committed to designing and delivering funding programmes that support this, including increased flexibility in funding and participatory grant-making involving people with lived or shared experiences.

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? [Open comment]

Poverty is arguably the biggest threat to human rights in Scotland. Recent policy developments such as the commitment to fully incorporate the UNCRC into Scots Law, along with the planned Human Rights Bill and doubling the Scottish Child Payment mark significant progress. Measuring impact on the plan to end the need for food banks should be

⁸ [Power and Participation, A Human Rights Approach to Christie \(corra.scot\)](#)

integrated with other measurements aligned with the vision to end poverty. An emphasis on how action on food insecurity connects to wider responses to tackling inequality will be important to fully understand progress.

Alongside commissioning independent evaluation of funded activities, collating evidence around the use of food vouchers and cash first approaches would also be a helpful measurement. Support for communities and groups to adapt their approaches from food distribution to cash first in a way that maintains dignity, choice and does not create additional barriers for people is key. Measurements around impact should incorporate learning from pilot schemes and funding, for example the Scottish Government Winter Support Small Grants fund, to provide useful insights into what works, and highlight what needs further consideration. Fundamental across all impact measurement is listening to people closest to the issues, to fully understand what is different and how this has made a difference to their lives.

6. Is there anything else that you think should be considered in the development of this plan? [Open comment]

Lived experience must be heard and understood to create change

The plan to end the need for food banks must pay close attention to the lived reality of poverty. Insights⁹ from across Corra's work indicate that living in poverty, amongst the many challenges, brings negative implications for people's mental and physical health. We have also heard from funded work and communities about the stigma that comes with not having enough household income for food, fuel and other basic necessities. This can further isolate people from their communities and perhaps the services that intend to support them.

It is important to understand fully the way stigma plays into people's experiences of poverty. Corra Community Co-ordinators continue to highlight the stigma associated with food insecurity and wider issues connected to poverty. When these experiences are misunderstood there is a risk the stigma may be amplified, for instance:

- Long forms can be a barrier to people accessing the financial support they need. Financial advice offered to people experiencing poverty must be person-centred, compassionate, and rooted in dignity.

The Bridge Community Project is funded through Henry Duncan Grants to deliver a money advice service. Many of the people supported through the project also struggle with their mental health and some people have found accessing support online a challenge. The Bridge Community Project has gone beyond their traditional money advice service, offering a listening service as well as referrals to school uniform banks.

- People who access food banks have diverse lifestyles, family sizes as well as cultural and dietary needs. Learning from across Corra highlights that often people do not

⁹ [Corra Insight Briefing on Poverty; October 2019](#)

feel able to ask for more food or culturally appropriate alternatives. In some of the communities Corra works alongside families are accessing more than one food bank to ensure they have enough food. Community fridges and pantries are working to address this by offering people greater choice and agency. Reflections from Community Co-ordinators highlight that these models work best when people are not limited in the number of items they can select.

- Language can be a powerful tool to both emphasise and eradicate stigma. For instance, in Blackland's the community group prefers to describe clothes as 'pre-loved' rather than second hand.
- Stigma can prevent people accessing the support they are entitled to. In Castlehill, one of the local food initiatives found that people's concerns about queuing outside a food bank prevented them from accessing it. In response to this, the group offer a meal delivery service which has enabled them to extend their reach to more families as well as signpost people to other local services.

Corra calls for the plan to acknowledge the repercussions of stigma and the way this can prevent people fully accessing their human rights. The voices of communities and people with experience of poverty must be central to plans.

Climate change is a community issue

"Climate change is a health issue, an equality issue, an educational issue, an economic issue, a cultural issue, a scientific issue, a security issue and a local community issue." Funders Commitment to Climate Change¹⁰

In 2021, Corra joined over fifty UK funders pledging to take action by signing the Funder Commitment on Climate Change. This commitment recognises that climate change is a threat to equality and bold action is needed to tackle the issue. In relation to food insecurity and poverty this could include, addressing food waste management and considering the findings from the Scottish Government's Local Food for everyone consultation.¹¹ As well as this aligning with ambitions to prioritise wellbeing, greener jobs and transitioning to a low carbon economy. Reflections from Co-ordinators acknowledge that many elements of current food provision are not sustainable, and work is needed to ensure reliance on food banks does not continue to escalate. Access to affordable, nutritious food will require whole-system action on poverty and the climate crisis.

¹⁰ [Funder Commitment on Climate Change \(fundercommitmentclimatechange.org\)](https://fundercommitmentclimatechange.org/)

¹¹ [Local food for everyone – a discussion: consultation - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-food-for-everyone-consultation/pages/10/index.aspx)

About Corra Foundation

Corra Foundation exists to make a difference to the lives of people and communities. It works with others to encourage positive change, opportunity, fairness and growth of aspirations which improve quality of life. Corra wants to see a society in which people create positive change and enjoy fulfilling lives.

In 2020 Corra launched a ten-year strategy. It is long term because making a difference on the big challenges will take time. At its heart is the strong belief that when people find their voice, they unlock the power to make change happen.

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