

Food banks see usage more than double through Covid-19

Independent food banks in Scotland have seen the use of their services more than double amid the coronavirus pandemic, according to new data.

The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) recorded a 113% increase in emergency parcel distribution between February and July.

It is now calling on the Scottish and UK governments to take more measures to address what it describes as “escalating poverty”.

Sabine Goodwin, IFAN co-ordinator, said: “Independent food banks in Scotland have seen a doubling in need for their support – the writing is on the wall.

“Even more people are going to be thrown into financial crisis in the coming months, and food banks cannot continue to pick up the pieces of a broken benefit system and insufficient wages.

“The Scottish and UK governments, as well as local authorities, must do all they can to prioritise access to ‘cash first’ solutions for people unable to afford food.”



The IFAN is calling on Holyrood ministers to deliver on commitments to a “cash first” approach.

This includes promoting the Scottish Welfare Fund and taking immediate action to put in place the equivalent financial support of the Scottish Child Payment due in February 2021.

More than £110 million has been invested by the Scottish Government in responding to food insecurity as a result of the pandemic.

The UK Government is being urged to carry out a number of measures including removing the benefit cap, ending the two-child limit and making the £20 uplift to Universal Credit permanent and extending it to legacy benefits.

It is also facing calls to end the five-week wait for a first benefit payment, stopping the sanctions system and to permanently suspend no recourse to public funds status.

The IFAN said 70 independent food banks across 20 local authorities in Scotland distributed at least 182,863 emergency food parcels between February and July.

April, the first full month of lockdown, saw a 141% rise in the number of three-day emergency food parcels distributed, compared with the same month last year.

The increase in February and March had been 5% and 36% respectively.

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said: “Scotland is unique across the UK in taking a ‘cash-first’ (direct financial transfer) approach to tackling food insecurity.

“That is why we have more than doubled the national budget for the Scottish Welfare Fund and have given local authorities the flexibility to provide their allocation of Food and Other Essentials funding as cash where appropriate.”

A DWP spokesman said: “With Universal Credit, urgent payments are available and throughout the pandemic we have provided further support to people on low incomes by introducing income protection schemes, mortgage holidays and additional help for renters.

“Scotland has significant welfare powers, including the ability to top up existing benefits, pay discretionary payments and create entirely new benefits.”