

Child Poverty Action Group report launch event, hosted by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty: Minutes

Tuesday 22nd March, 2022

11 am - 12:30 pm

- 1) Welcome and introductions by Baroness Ruth Lister, Co-Chair of the APPG on Poverty**
- 2) Why is the *Ending the Need for Food Banks* project necessary? - Hannah Aldridge, Head of Policy, CPAG**
 - Hannah explained the original purpose of emergency support was to provide support for one-off income shocks.
 - Hannah went on to say that emergency support is now taking on the role of mitigating the impact of cuts to the wider social security system.
 - The latest lot of funding given to local authorities was not for emergencies, rather to cushion the impact of the £20 cut to universal credit (UC).
 - Hannah emphasised that both emergency support and the wider social security system must be very strong in order to end the need for foodbanks.
- 3) The Trussell Trust's vision for a UK without the need for food banks and the role local welfare assistance schemes can play - Sumi Rabindrakumar, Head of Policy, Research and Campaigns, The Trussell Trust**
 - Sumi stated Trussell's latest foodbank data for April to September 2021 which shows 936k food parcels were given out - nearly 2k a day for children.
 - Foodbank need is driven by economic need, and in early 2020, 95% of people needing a foodbank were classed as destitute.
 - Sumi explained that local support has the capacity to be more flexible and quick to address short-term needs than typical national social security systems.
- 4) Views from the frontline: what are the drivers of food bank use, why are people not accessing LWAS, and what needs to change - Tanya Whitfield, Head of Services, Hackney Foodbank**
 - Tanya shared her own lived experience of living on a low income as a lone parent and the lack of signposting to support services.
 - Tanya played an audio clip of a woman, Halima, explaining what brought her to Hackney Foodbank.
 - Halima explained that when her husband died, she had to raise her six children and look after an elderly relative and had no idea where to look to for help.
 - Tanya highlighted that most people are not aware that local welfare assistance schemes (LWAS) exist and that when calling their customer service hotline, calls are automatically cut off after 1 hour 59 minutes and 59 seconds.
 - This creates a significant barrier to people on low incomes with little phone credit to spare.
 - Tanya called for the end of the five-week wait for the first payment of UC.
 - Tanya also underlined that people are being sanctioned for missing appointments with their work coach, but they weren't aware of the appointment change due to not having enough mobile credit/ data.

- *“People’s anxiety through these times are going through the roof and there is no one there to help them.”*

5) Q&A - part one

- Marjorie Bahhaj stressed the need to develop a firm platform of support for all of society to rely on.
- Tallulah Eyres from the Salvation Army asked whether this report, alongside people in frontline services, could feed in ideas to the National Food Strategy.
- Wayne Green recommended having a Citizens’ Income due to the administrative burden of social security on DWP.

6) **Ending the Need for Food Banks: findings and recommendations - Kimberly McIntosh, Senior Policy and Research Officer, CPAG**

- Kimberly gave a brief overview of the project - 2-year project funded by arbrdn Financial Fairness Trust.
- Kimberly explained what emergency support should cover:
 - Key stage development payments for short-term cost increases associated with raising children.
 - Lumpy costs payments to cover one-off costs that are difficult to save up for if you are on a persistently low income.
 - Transitional payments to cover the costs associated with a life shock or transitional phase such as homelessness, leaving care or prison.
 - Emergency payments to cover the cost of essentials following an unexpected crisis such as the onset of a health condition, bereavement, separation or divorce.
- Kimberly detailed how to move towards a better system including when giving awards, ensure they reflect each family’s circumstances and family size.
- Other examples include advertising in places where people go regularly (e.g. schools and supermarkets), informing applicants about the reason behind an award rejection and clear signposting to alternative support.
- In addition, Kimberly underlined that emergency support is a postcode lottery with 1 in 5 local authorities not having any LWAS provision whatsoever.
- To conclude, Kimberly called for long-term, multi-year funding for local authorities so they are able to plan their support more effectively.

7) **Lessons from Scotland: Independent Food Aid Network’s (IFAN) ‘cash-first’ leaflets and the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) - Mary McGinley, Chair, Helensburgh and Lomond Foodbank**

- Mary started by speaking about the importance of a cash-first approach in giving dignity and agency to people on low incomes.
- Mary highlighted work she had done with IFAN to develop a leaflet, which helped people identify the key issues that had led them to attend the foodbank.
- The leaflet goes on to provide options to address the problem and contact details of local support services.
- Mary explained that although the leaflets follow the same recognisable template, they are each customised to the local council area and signpost people to local known services committed to a cash-first approach.
- 96% of people in receipt of their first award, engaged with welfare support services afterwards.

- Mary stressed that the underlining problem of unrelenting poverty due to a low income must be addressed in order to end the need for food banks.
- Mary called for benefits to be set at a realistic level and be available at the time of need with minimum delay. Otherwise, people in food insecurity will have no choice but to turn to charitable aid.

8) The local authority perspective: barriers to setting up and delivering LWAS and best practice - Gill Wilson, Service Manager, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (LBBD)

- Gill talked through what her local authority is doing in terms of food and financial support. Over the last 2 years, there has been over 8000 applications and 5000 awards totalling £4 million.
- Gill admitted that LBBD has stopped taking any more hardship fund applications because there have been so many.
- Gill explained some of the new initiatives carried out by LBBD including Asda supermarket vouchers, Post Office utility cash out vouchers and The Source food top ups.
- Gill emphasised how difficult it is to distribute money when councils don't know how long the money will last when it comes to short-term, ad hoc funding settlements.
- Gill detailed the outcomes of modelling that LBBD carried out which showed that once financial risk factors have been addressed, out of 1000 highly indebted households:
 - 258 households would be significantly less likely to present as homeless in the next 3-6 months.
 - 37 households would be significantly less likely to be involved with Children's Services in the next 9 months.
 - 5 households would have a reduction in the risk of an unplanned hospital admission.

9) Q&A - part two

- Gareth Evans from Cash Perks, highlighted the hesitancy among organisations when it comes to pushing a cash-first approach.
- Adrian McDowell, GLA, asked about the scope of local welfare assistance and whether it included support such as DHP and council tax support or just the schemes themselves.
 - Kim explained that as part of the project, CPAG held a workshop on what local welfare should cover. She reiterated that this is challenging to define in the current circumstances where LWAS is being used as a replacement for an adequate wider social security system.
- Adrian also queried whether the report takes on board what's working on the ground with local authorities and residents.
- Beth from the Food Ethics Council asked why the project didn't cover Northern Ireland.
 - Hannah responded that CPAG currently does not have an office or any staff stationed in Northern Ireland so it wouldn't feel right to do work in Northern Ireland without people on the ground.

Meeting closed at 12:30 pm.

You can read the full report [here](#) and watch the recording of the event on [CPAG's website](#).