

PE1571/B

RESPONSE TO PETITION NUMBER PE1571
ON BEHALF OF MORAY FOODBANK, (COMMUNITY FOOD MORAY
– REG CHARITY NO. SC042997).

This is a response to the correspondence received 23rd September 2015 from the Public Petitions Clerk, The Scottish Parliament following their meeting of 22nd September 2015. It relates, in particular to petition PE1571 which states; *‘Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide direct funding to food banks to ensure that demand for their services can be fully met.’*

We found this correspondence to be extremely timeous as this whole issue is a matter of pressing concern for the Moray Foodbank. As things stand at present the simple fact of the matter is that funding for this food bank ceases as of March 2016. Applications are being prepared to try and secure funding beyond this time, however, it is very clear that other food banks will be applying for the same funding putting us in competition with colleagues elsewhere across the country. We have, in fact, already contacted our local MSP asking if he could inform us as to the Scottish Government position in relation to this, explaining our very real concerns for the future. Before expanding on this however it is felt it would be worthwhile to give an idea of the position of this food bank and how it operates.

At times there can be a perception in some areas that food banks are, principally, only an issue for the larger towns and cities across the country. This could not be further from the truth. The sad fact is that food poverty is an issue being experienced in all areas with the more remote areas bringing particular difficulties, for example fuel poverty, rural poverty, and general issues of accessibility, transportation and isolation. This should not be underestimated. The Moray food bank has been in operation for over 2 years with the current manager being appointed 2 years ago to coordinate a structured response to the increasing demand for the service provided.

It has grown from supplying 4/5 emergency parcels a week to, in 2014, an average of 32 emergency parcels a week. The system used is one where people are ‘referred’ to the food bank by professional agencies such as Social Work, Scottish Welfare Fund, Health Agencies, Housing Associations and many others. This means that people are professionally assessed prior to their being referred, with the need being assessed as genuine. It is anticipated that the numbers will continue to grow.

We are affiliated to the Trussell Trust having begun as an independent foodbank before being approached by local church members who wanted to start up a foodbank in the area, being unaware of the one already operating. This means our method of operation has developed independently and has always been in response to the local demands of the area. The manager of the foodbank is a paid employee who coordinates the work of the many volunteers who, quite simply, enable the whole operation to function. The whole foodbank operation, and those who support

and donate food, is very much a community initiative and it has been noted that many people make it clear that they are donating for *their* neighbours and fellow citizens. There are, of course, many charities competing for the public's assistance and financial support. At the moment Foodbanks are very topical and feature regularly in the media, however, the worry is that at some point communities will decide enough is enough and they will put their support elsewhere. How long can we depend upon the public and, anyway, is it right that food banks are constantly going cap-in hand to the public asking them to give for their fellow citizen?

As stated at the beginning funding for Moray foodbank runs out in March 2016. The initial funding for the coordinator's post was from the Big Lottery. This ran out in September 2014. An application was then made to the Scottish Government for funding from the Emergency Food Fund and this proved to be successful with funding up to March 2016. It should be noted that part of this application was to fund a scheme to try and move people away from the need for the foodbank, as well as to see the continuation of the foodbank as it stands. This is an ongoing priority for foodbanks. Whilst supplying emergency food there also has to be efforts to try and move people in a direction of more independence, lessening their need for the foodbank. The initiative in this area is known as 'The People's Café' and consists of some basic cooking skills being given for a meal to be prepared (food provided), whilst short and sharp, professional inputs are given on cooking, debt and domestic budgeting, money and benefits advice, assisted shopping and, finally, general life skills. A food 'starter' pack is provided at the end of the meal. This is proving popular and effective with very positive feedback received, however, *as things stand this Initiative comes to a halt in March 2016!* It has also been noticed that donations already seem to be reducing. One example of the sort of situation faced is that of the downturn in North Sea oil. As more people are paid off, they can end up having to go to a foodbank to help cover their new financial position, whilst, at the same time, people who were donating to the foodbank are now less willing to do so as they are having to alter their own domestic arrangements. A double whammy!

The argument of being wary of local authority involvement, so that a situation does not develop whereby, in effect, a local foodbank is subsidising the local authority is well recognised. It is important that a foodbank retains its independence so it can properly respond to local demands, however, at the same time there is no doubt that the majority of food parcel recipients are council departments. As has been stated elsewhere the number of foodbanks, and the demand for their services has grown drastically over the last few years. Times and circumstances are changing. *The position we now find ourselves in though is that of having no funding after March 2016, whilst experiencing an anticipated rise in demand, less donations being received and having to compete with other foodbanks for any funding available.* A simple question seems to be posed, 'Is the continuation of these services across the country, a service which is going to be increasingly needed, and depended on by so many, going to depend on good luck and generosity or be a properly structured and funded scheme'. There is no doubt that this is a constant worry to foodbank staff and administrators with their priority constantly being that of securing the next bit of

potential funding to see them through the next, short term, future. This is time which could be far better served providing the service needed knowing that the future is secure. In light of all this, for the reasons given, I would certainly support this Petition.

If I can be of any further assistance I would only be too happy to oblige. Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the debate and I wish you well in your endeavours.

Andy Walker
Manager Moray Foodbank.