

EMAIL FROM CHRIS MOULD, CHAIRMAN OF THE TRUSSELL TRUST TO NEIL COULING, DWP WORK SERVICES DIRECTOR – 1 MAY 2014

Dear Neil

I have just finished reading the report from the meeting on Tuesday. I understand the context having given evidence to select committees myself but have to say that the Trussell Trust is deeply disappointed by some of the things you told the committee. This is in our view the more serious given the fact that the meeting you and Philippa Stroud had with David McAuley and me had given us all a good opportunity to talk about our foodbank model and the issues Trussell Trust foodbanks have been facing.

For now I will raise three points and flag that we may wish to come back to you in more detail around the first two because they warrant measured discussion of the sort we hope our meeting had inaugurated.

The urgency relates to the third point where we ask you immediately either to provide the evidence that you have to support your contention or to write to the Welfare Reform Committee to retract what you said.

1. Comparison with foodbanks in Canada and Germany is entirely inappropriate. The Trussell Trust foodbank model was specifically designed so that it is not similar to the Canadian and German models (or the prevailing models in the USA) at key points that are fundamental to the way the Trussell Trust foodbank works and fundamental to the experience of the client and fundamental to how a Trussell Trust foodbank would describe its goals in offering the service. For example Trussell Trust foodbanks do not offer a self-referral or walk in service; they do not aim to provide long term support for people on low incomes; they emphasise signposting to help clients recover from the crisis that the professional referring them decided was the reason they needed a foodbank referral. I spoke last April at the European Public Policy Conference in Paris alongside Professor Stefan Selke, whose most recent book "Schamland" provides a profound and challenging critique of the German Tafeln and the impact the movement's development has had on welfare policy and practice in Germany. Stefan's book is subtitled: "The poverty in the midst of us". At that conference we identified four fundamental ways in which the Trussell Trust model differs from the Deutsche Tafel approach and why we can consequently expect profoundly different outcomes.
2. When the Trussell Trust reports data from its data collection system, it is not primarily "looking at what people are reporting in foodbanks...". We are aggregating what over 24,000 voucher holders have told our foodbanks about the reasons they are referring their clients to us. They sign these forms to validate their requests and all referrals are traceable and auditable. Around half the voucher holders are public servants. We are sorry that you seem to be belittling the work of the Trussell Trust foodbanks and calling into question the credibility of the volunteers and project managers running them. We recognise this may not have been your intention but that is the impression your testimony leaves.

3. Finally the matter that requires urgent attention: you said “For the Trussell Trust, food banks started as an evangelical device to get religious groups in touch with their local communities.” Please provide me immediately with the evidence you have to support this assertion. You are directly challenging the integrity of a registered charity and its trustees both past and present. If you are not able to provide evidence to support this assertion please write immediately to the Scottish Parliament Welfare Reform Committee to withdraw the statement. I have contacted the Committee myself today and the Trussell Trust will be providing a response which will be supported by material taken from the minutes of relevant meetings and not simply reliant on the memory of trustees present at that time, including myself.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes

Chris Mould
Chairman