April 2024

Dear [MP Name] MP,

Since October 2021, and the cut to Universal Credit, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has regularly distributed the Household Support Fund (HSF) to local authorities across England.

In his recent budget, the Chancellor announced a temporary, six-month extension of this funding. This eleventh-hour announcement was much needed, but its tardiness has meant uncertainty for local authorities and the closure of some support schemes. With just six months of funding to come, local authorities are also faced with the added challenge of finding ways to distribute their allocations effectively in the time allowed.

For over two years, the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) has been reporting on the struggles faced by food banks trying to meet rising demand with depleted donations and exhausted teams. Independent food banks are deeply concerned about the circumstances surrounding the funding, its brevity, and the impact that the future removal of the HSF will have on the need for their services as the winter sets in.

I am writing to urge you to call on the Government to not only extend the HSF beyond October but to ensure it becomes a permanent funding pot. It’s vital that this funding can be used by local authorities to provide discretionary support via cash payments as a crucial element of the UK’s social security system.

As poverty levels continue to soar across the UK, effective local crisis support is more important than ever. People should be able to access this kind of support, via cash payments, eliminating the need for food banks.

In the past two and a half years, the HSF has provided England’s local authorities with a vital opportunity to provide such support. Recent data from End Furniture Poverty found that 62% of all local welfare assistance spending was from the HSF. Its removal in October will inevitably result in more people falling into poverty, destitution, and severe food insecurity.

It’s essential that the HSF is extended and made permanent beyond September 2024 alongside measures to increase the levels of social security payments and wages. Local welfare assistance should be available for households facing hardship and crisis not simply because social security payments and wages are inadequate.

IFAN advocates for a ‘cash first’ or income-focused approach to food insecurity and campaigns to see a country without the need for charitable food aid. Ultimately a cash first approach to food insecurity would see people able to access a Living Income through social security payments and wages as well as help in a crisis through local authority discretionary support via cash payments.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[Name/Email/Any other contact details]