

Autumn Budget 2026: reducing hardship and the need for emergency food

A joint representation from Feeding Britain, The Food Foundation, the Independent Food Aid Network, Sustain, and Trussell.

Against the backdrop of Labour's manifesto commitment to end the need for emergency food, our organisations have worked together through the [*Living Costs in Context*](#) series and other joint work to understand the pressures driving hardship and household food insecurity.

The evidence points to a consistent picture. People's experiences of hardship are shaped by interconnected systems, including social security, housing, employment, health and local support. When incomes are not enough to afford essential costs, or support does not reach people when they need it, households can be pushed into financial crisis, while others face persistent financial and food insecurity. Evidence from frontline organisations across our work shows the consequences for people and communities when these systems do not provide sufficient security.

Much of this hardship is preventable. People should have sufficient income to afford life's essentials with dignity, secure opportunities and pursue their goals. Effective local crisis support and advice are also vital when things go wrong, but they cannot compensate for persistently inadequate incomes or substitute for a well-functioning social security system.

The Autumn Budget provides an immediate opportunity for the UK Government to act on some of the pressures pushing households into financial crisis and contributing to longer-term financial and food insecurity. Drawing on the evidence we have developed together, we would particularly encourage it to:

- **Ensure social security provides people with sufficient income to afford the essentials.** This should include action to improve the adequacy of Universal Credit and ensure that caps, deductions, sanctions and other reductions do not push already inadequate incomes lower. Action is also needed to prevent

delays and gaps in social security decisions and payments from pushing people into crisis.

- **Unfreeze Local Housing Allowance and restore its link with local rents.** In Great Britain, LHA should cover at least the cheapest 30% of local private rents and keep pace with rents in future. When housing support falls behind actual rents, households are forced to meet the shortfall from money needed for food, energy and other essentials. Equivalent action is needed in Northern Ireland through devolved arrangements.
- **Provide long-term security for effective local crisis and resilience support.** Effective crisis support cannot make up for inadequate incomes, but cash-first payments alongside wraparound support, advice and income maximisation are vital parts of a well-functioning system. The three-year Crisis and Resilience Fund in England provides an important opportunity for local authorities to plan and embed both crisis provision and preventative support. HM Treasury should ensure DWP has the resources needed for effective delivery, monitoring and learning through the Crisis and Resilience Fund to 2029, alongside a commitment to sustainable funding for local crisis support and financial resilience-building services beyond the current Fund.

These measures are not a complete response to hardship and household food insecurity. Longer-term action is needed across the systems that shape whether people have sufficient income to afford the essentials and participate in everyday life with dignity. But taking these steps at the Autumn Budget would help prevent more households being pushed into crisis, reduce wider food insecurity and reduce the need for charitable food provision – helping the Government make progress towards its manifesto ambition to end the need for emergency food.