

# LONELY NATION

Tackling the human and economic costs  
of Britain's loneliness epidemic

December 2024



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# About the CSJ

Established in 2004, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) is an independent think-tank that studies the root causes of Britain's social problems and addresses them by recommending practical, workable policy interventions. The CSJ's vision is to give people in the United Kingdom (UK) who are experiencing the worst multiple disadvantages and injustice every possible opportunity to reach their full potential.

The majority of the CSJ's work is organised around five "pathways to poverty", first identified in our ground-breaking 2007 report *Breakthrough Britain*. These are: educational failure; family breakdown; economic dependency and worklessness; addiction to drugs and alcohol; and severe personal debt.

Since its inception, the CSJ has changed the landscape of our political discourse by putting social justice at the heart of British politics. This has led to a transformation in government thinking and policy. For instance, in March 2013, the CSJ report *It Happens Here* shone a light on the horrific reality of human trafficking and modern slavery in the UK. As a direct result of this report, the government passed the *Modern Slavery Act 2015*, one of the first pieces of legislation in the world to address slavery and trafficking in the 21st century.

Our research is informed by experts including prominent academics, practitioners and policymakers. We also draw upon our CSJ Alliance, a unique group of charities, social enterprises, and other grassroots organisations that have a proven track-record of reversing social breakdown across the UK.

The social challenges facing Britain remain serious. In 2024 and beyond, we will continue to advance the cause of social justice so that more people can continue to fulfil their potential.

# Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the individuals and organisations who have generously given their time and experience during our research. Local charities and grassroots organisations demonstrate the best of our communities in the support, love and companionship they provide to those who need it most. Without them, the UK would be a much lonelier place.

The full reports making up our loneliness research can be found below.

*[Lonely Nation Part 1: How family can help to end the loneliness crisis](#)*

*[Lonely Nation Part 2: Ending loneliness among older people](#)*

*[Lonely Nation Part 3: How to tackle loneliness through the built environment](#)*

*[Lonely Nation Part 4: Loneliness and food banks](#)*

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Disclaimer: Please note that the views, findings and recommendations presented in this report are those of the CSJ alone, and not necessarily those of any organisation or individual who has fed into or enabled our research. Any errors remain our own.

# Executive Summary

Britain is a lonely nation. The government's own statistics show that 2023/24 was the loneliest year on record.<sup>1</sup> Polling for the CSJ reveals that nearly six in ten adults feel lonely most, often or some of the time.<sup>2</sup> This equates to 32 million people.<sup>3</sup> Over one in five adults (22 per cent) feel existentially lonely, a fundamental separateness from other people and the wider world.<sup>4</sup> Loneliness is a public health emergency. The effects of loneliness and social isolation have been shown comparable to smoking, obesity and physical inactivity.<sup>5</sup> Loneliness is endemic and getting worse. It leaves lives marked by sadness and despair, without the fundamental relationships essential for true flourishing.

In addition to the human cost, loneliness is contributing to the Treasury's financial black hole, costing the taxpayer billions of pounds. The cost to health and social care services of severe loneliness in older people is in excess of £6,000 per person.<sup>6</sup> Researchers found that preventing loneliness could see savings of £3.6 million.<sup>7</sup> The impact of loneliness on the workforce has been estimated to cost employers £2.5 billion per year (including health outcomes, depression and lost productivity).<sup>8</sup> Other research has identified that the wellbeing, health and work productivity cost associated with severe loneliness is £9,900 per person per year.<sup>9</sup>

These costs will only rise unless government acts on the root causes of the loneliness epidemic. This will require a refreshed loneliness strategy, resolutely focused on addressing four key areas: strengthening family relationships, tackling the acute causes of loneliness among older people, ensuring planning reform delivers good quality, well-designed communities, and responding to increasing poverty, particularly the relationship between loneliness and surging food bank use.

Politicians have often found it difficult to address these four areas due to their cultural sensitivities. Is the decline of family stability an unspoken cause of loneliness? Are communities taking enough responsibility for the loneliness of older neighbours? How can planning reform and housebuilding foster stronger social connections? Is loneliness pushing people towards food banks? To prevent the crisis of loneliness spreading further it is crucial that the government begins to engage with these issues.

The public also agrees. 79 per cent of adults agree that family breakdown is a significant cause of loneliness, yet there has been little focus on this area in the government's work.<sup>10</sup> Food bank use is at record high, but 31 per cent of people who use food bank users think most are just isolated.<sup>11</sup>

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1 Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Community Life Survey 2023/24: Background and headline findings, December 2024.

2 Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th and 16th April 2024.

3 Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th and 16th April 2024 and National Population projections by single year of age, projected year 2024, via Nomis, October 2024.

4 Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th and 16th April 2024.

5 World Health Organization, Social Isolation and Loneliness, n. d. Accessed: [www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/social-isolation-and-loneliness](http://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/social-isolation-and-loneliness).

6 London School of Economics and Political Science, Making the economic case for investing in actions to prevent and/or tackle loneliness: a systematic review, September 2017, p. 6.

7 BBC, Loneliness: The cost of the 'last taboo', September 2017. Accessed: <https://www.bbc.com/news/education-41349219#:~:text=For%20a%20decade%20of%20an, and%20higher%20risks%20of%20dementia>.

8 New Economics Foundation, The Cost of Loneliness to UK Employers, February 2017. Accessed: <https://neweconomics.org/2017/02/cost-loneliness-uk-employers>.

9 Simetrica, Loneliness monetisation report, June 2020, p. 1.

10 Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th and 16th April 2024.

11 Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 517 people who used food banks in the last 12 months between 11th and 15th October 2024.

Ever-increasing atomisation and disconnection across society is not sustainable. If we cannot create the conditions for stable and meaningful communities to flourish, then the UK will become an increasingly unhappy place. CSJ polling finds that nearly half of adults (47 per cent) disagree with the statement that most people are happy, over three in five (64 per cent) think it is harder than it used to be to make new friends and less than half of adults (44 per cent) think that most people can be trusted.<sup>12</sup>

While recognising loneliness as a problem, the government has inherited a loneliness strategy from 2018, *A Connected Society*, that is now out of date and making little progress in reducing loneliness. We need a new approach that is resolutely focused on addressing the root causes of the crisis.

This requires government to be focused on nurturing human virtue (meaning genuine happiness and flourishing), as well as addressing material and economic needs. The government can do this by supporting the local bonds and relationships which constitute our communities. Individuals flourish when embedded in groups and places, formed by traditions and responsibilities deriving from attachments like family and community life.

How do we know this is feasible and sustainable? Our work is informed by our unique relationship with more than 750 frontline charities across the UK. Many of these small charities are repairing the social fabric, strengthening communities and tackling loneliness in a way that the state could never replicate. Supporting such organisations to thrive should be considered an essential priority for the government in its approach to tackling loneliness.

An increasingly lonely nation does not have to be the UK's future. There is much more that can be done by government, but also by each individual, to turn the tide on loneliness and build a truly connected society.

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12 Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th and 16th April 2024.

## Part One:

# Put Family First

Family is one of the most neglected areas in loneliness and social isolation research. There has been little focus on this area in the government's anti-loneliness strategy and subsequent policy work. This is despite the clear link between family, loneliness and wellbeing. Strikingly, the What Works Wellbeing Centre identified that family is "itself notable by its absence in research."<sup>13</sup>

Family is the first social connection, forming our first relationships. Family relationships, particularly extended family, have been shown to counteract feelings of loneliness.<sup>14</sup> The decline in wellbeing of people in their twenties fell by ten per cent between 1995 and 2015 and was in part due to a decrease in the strength of people's family relationships.<sup>15</sup> Family breakdown and dysfunctional family arrangements have been named a key cause of rising despair and misery in modern society.<sup>16</sup>

With this context in mind, the nature of family life in Britain is cause for concern. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) found in a major review of inequalities that Britain's families are more fragile and complex than those in other western European countries.<sup>17</sup> 79 per cent of adults polled by the CSJ agree that family breakdown is a significant cause of loneliness.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, if family is notable by its absence in loneliness research, there is a conspiracy of silence on the issue of marriage. Marriage has been in long-term decline, with 2024 marking the first year on record that less than half of the adult population are married.<sup>19</sup> This is not a neutral phenomenon but is having an impact on levels of loneliness. Whilst the government recognises couple relationships as being a protective factor against loneliness,<sup>20</sup> CSJ analysis reveals that it is incorrect to assume that marriage and cohabitation are equal in the benefits they confer. Our analysis reveals that marital status is a statistically significant predictor of loneliness with married people even less likely than cohabitantes to be lonely.<sup>21</sup>

Family matters and must be put first in a refreshed loneliness strategy. Strengthening family relationships is a crucial element of any attempt to tackle loneliness in Britain. Whilst family wellbeing is mentioned as a factor that prevents loneliness in *A Connected Society*,<sup>22</sup> more should be included within a refreshed strategy on what government is doing to strengthen existing family relationships and help strong family units to form.

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13 What Works Wellbeing, Exploring family wellbeing, May 2023. Accessed: <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/blog/exploring-family-wellbeing/>.

14 Mauro Silva Júnior, Et al., "Emotional Closeness to Maternal Versus Paternal Lineages", *Evolutionary Behavioural Sciences*, 8:1, (January 2014), pp. 2,330-2,925, in Robin Dunbar, Friends: Understanding the Power of our Most Important Relationships, (Little Brown Book Group Limited, 2021), p. 23.

15 What Works Wellbeing, What's driving the decline of young people's wellbeing in the UK?, February 2019 Accessed: [whatworkswellbeing.org/blog/whats-driving-the-decline-of-young-peoples-wellbeing-in-the-uk](https://whatworkswellbeing.org/blog/whats-driving-the-decline-of-young-peoples-wellbeing-in-the-uk).

16 Anne Case, Angus Deaton, Deaths of Despair: And the Future of Capitalism, (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020), p. 171.

17 Institute for Fiscal Studies, Families and Inequalities IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities, June 2022, p. 1.

18 Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th and 16th April 2024.

19 Office for National Statistics, Population estimates by marital status and living arrangements, England and Wales: 2022, January 2024 Accessed: [www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesbymarital-statusandlivingarrangements/2022](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationestimatesbymarital-statusandlivingarrangements/2022).

20 Department for Culture, Media & Sport, Investigating factors associated with loneliness in adults in England, June 2022.

21 CSJ Analysis of Understanding Society Wave 13 in Centre for Social Justice, Lonely Nation Part 1: How family can help to end the loneliness crisis, May 2024, p. 37.

22 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, A Connected Society, October 2018, p. 57.

Therefore, the CSJ recommends that the government commit a chapter of a refreshed strategy on tackling loneliness to outline the steps the government is taking to support family life in Britain. Alongside this, the CSJ recommends that the government:

- **Remove the administrative and legal costs of getting married for low-income couples up to a total of £550 per couple.** Receiving the discount should be conditional on engaging in a marriage preparation course.
- **Launch a new relationship support interventions strategy** with an initial commitment of £33 million over three years to support the provision of couple relationship support services including marriage preparation and couple counselling. This should be delivered in partnership with family hubs, local charities, religious institutions and organisations in the relationship support sector.
- **Strengthen statutory paternity leave to help fathers bond with their babies and partners.** New fathers should be able to take statutory paternity leave at any time during their baby's first year, allowing fathers to be on hand when mothers most need their support. Fathers, like mothers, should qualify for leave from the first day of employment.
- **Extend the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme** to allow a return on the initial public investment and establish a national outcomes framework.

For further recommendations and analysis, please see *Lonely Nation Part 1: How family can help to end the loneliness crisis*.<sup>23</sup>

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23 See: [https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/CSJ-Lonely\\_Nation.pdf](https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/CSJ-Lonely_Nation.pdf).



## Part Two:

# Prepare for an Ageing Population

The UK has a rapidly ageing population. The total number of adults aged 65 plus is predicted to increase from 13.2 million in 2023 to 17.4 million in 2043.<sup>24</sup> Respectively, this represents a rise in the 65 plus population from 19.4 per cent to 24 per cent of the total population over two decades.<sup>25</sup> The fertility rate has dropped to a record low and the number of children born has been falling for the last decade.<sup>26</sup> Between 2021 and 2046, it is projected that net migration will account for 92 per cent of the UK's population growth.<sup>27</sup> If the government is successful in its ambition to reduce net-migration, the impact of an ageing population will be felt even more.

Whilst the ageing population presents multiple challenges across all areas of society, less considered is the impact on loneliness. Whilst significantly less lonelier than the adult population as a whole, and young people in particular, there are acute and complex challenges that can cause and perpetuate loneliness in later life.<sup>28</sup> These challenges will only grow in scale if the government fails to prepare for a much older population.

Specifically, the CSJ has identified six issues regarding public transport, digital exclusion, unsuitable housing, changes to family life, a lack of intergenerational engagement and retirement that are driving loneliness in older people.

A decade long decline in bus routes has left many older people at risk of social isolation.<sup>29</sup> Older people are the most likely to be digitally excluded and cut off from the social opportunities of the internet.<sup>30</sup> Much of the housing stock is inaccessible and unsuitable for older people with accessibility needs.<sup>31</sup>

Changes to family life have left many older people isolated from traditional support structures.<sup>32</sup> This presents new challenges and raises questions about what obligations individuals owe to older relatives. Britain is more intergenerationally segregated than ever before, with young and old less likely to live in the same communities.<sup>33</sup> Retirement is increasingly presented as a time to escape work and obligations, but the evidence suggests that work and volunteering protect against loneliness.<sup>34</sup>

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24 CSJ analysis of National Population projections by single year of age via Nomis, 20th June 2024.

25 Ibid.

26 Office for National Statistics, How is the fertility rate changing in England and Wales?, October 2024.

27 The Migration Observatory, The Impact of Migration on UK Population Growth, May 2024.

28 Just 43 per cent of people over the age of 65 say they feel lonely at least some of the time, compared to 58 per cent of all adults and 70 per cent of 18–24-year-olds.

29 Centre for Social Justice, Lonely Nation Part 2: Ending loneliness among older people, August 2024, pp. 19-25.

30 Ibid, pp. 26-30.

31 Ibid, pp. 31-42.

32 Ibid, pp. 43-50.

33 Ibid, pp. 51-57.

34 Ibid, pp. 58-63.

Therefore, to prepare the nation for the oncoming demographic change, and to commit to tackling loneliness among older people, the CSJ recommends that the government:

- **Commit to building a transport network that supports people's social connections** by extending the Tackling Loneliness with Transport Fund (if shown in its evaluation to have effectively tackled loneliness), ensure bus shelters meet the needs of older people and including a loneliness test within the long-term strategy for transport.
- **Set out a new Digital Exclusion Strategy and Digital Champions Fund.**
- **Ensure the commitment to build 1.5 million homes meets the needs of older people** with higher standards for wheelchair accessible homes, accessibility and adaptability.
- **Launch a new social prescribing pilot that reaches out to older people after the death of a partner.**
- **Establish a new International Engagement Fund to support new and ongoing intergenerational projects.**
- **Launch an Older Person National Volunteer Passport to ease the transition from work into retirement.**

For further recommendations and analysis, please see *Lonely Nation Part 2: Ending loneliness among older people*.<sup>35</sup>

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35 See: [https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/CSJ-Lonely\\_Nation\\_part-2.pdf](https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/CSJ-Lonely_Nation_part-2.pdf).

## Part Three:

# Build Beautiful Communities

The government's mission to build 1.5 million homes over the current parliament will leave a lasting legacy for the built environment. Whilst the government's mission is an economic one, the built environment is fundamentally related to the social fabric, human wellbeing, belonging and social connection.

There is considerable evidence which shows the association between the quality of the built environment and loneliness. The 2018 loneliness strategy recognised the role of planning and housing in building a less lonely society.<sup>36</sup> In 2021, the London School of Economics found that features of community led housing were associated with reduced loneliness.<sup>37</sup> In 2022, the Campaign to End Loneliness published a summary report outlining how the quality and interconnectedness of the built environment reduced the likelihood of loneliness.<sup>38</sup>

This comes at a time when there has been significant scrutiny over the quality of new-build housing. A poll for the Chartered Institute of Building found that 32 per cent of consumers would describe new-build housing as poor quality, 41 per cent described it as lacking character and 48 per cent described it as overpriced.<sup>39</sup>

It is therefore unsurprising that so many people are unsupportive of new housing development. CSJ polling finds that 62 per cent of adults say they have no meaningful say in how their area changes and develops over time. 52 per cent say that local people do not have enough power to block new housing development.<sup>40</sup>

The government has a problem. It needs to increase public support for new housing development, or it will create long-term political problems. By failing to increase the quality of development in line with the preferences of local people, the government will not only run into trouble at the ballot box, but also risks building its way into the social problems of the future, including loneliness and social isolation.

The quality of the built environment is also an issue of social justice. It is not limited to taste or subjective preference. The most economically deprived are often pushed to live in degraded built environments, without the features or public services that contribute to healthy and happy lives.<sup>41</sup>

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36 Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, A Connected Society, October 2018, p. 42.

37 The London School of Economics and Political Science, 'Those little connections': Community-led housing and loneliness, November 2021, p. VI.

38 Campaign to End Loneliness, Tackling loneliness through the built environment, October 2022, p. 14.

39 Chartered Institute of Building, New-build housing – how regulation can improve the consumer journey, December 2023, p. 6.

40 Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 UK adults Nat Rep between 15th and 16th April 2024.

41 Royal Town Planning Institute, Poverty, place and inequality, May 2016, p. 2.

In the 20th century it was the poorest who were housed in cheaply built high-rise estates that were poorly constructed and maintained, too often associated with social isolation and crime.<sup>42</sup>

In the rush to build, the government must not repeat the mistakes of the past. Whilst the debate on the pressing need for many more homes is welcome and overdue, chasing housing targets cannot be the sole ambition. Creating neighbourhoods and communities matters as well and has many components.

The CSJ argue that to meet its ambition to build 1.5 million new homes, as well as tackle loneliness, the government should embrace beauty, design codes, access to green space, neighbourhood planning and community led housing, particularly as tools to regenerate Britain's most disadvantaged places. Planners, architects and others responsible for creating the built environment also need to do much better to regain public confidence.

The CSJ recommends that the government:

- **Utilise design codes to fast-track beautiful development.** The government has indicated that they are interested in the use of design codes to fast-track planning applications on brownfield sites<sup>43</sup> and more broadly in a national scheme of delegation to reform planning committees.<sup>44</sup> Design codes produced in consultation with local communities should be seen as an important way of increasing public confidence in development and speeding up the planning process.
- **Replace the Community Right to Bid with a Community Right to Buy.** This should include the right to force a sale of land that is abandoned or neglected.
- **Require every local authority to adopt a community ownership strategy.** Strategies should include provisions that strengthen the Community Asset Transfer and community led housing organisations.

For further recommendations and analysis, please see *Lonely Nation Part 3: How to tackle loneliness through the built environment*.<sup>45</sup>

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42 Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission, *Living with Beauty*, January 2020, pp. 30, 45.

43 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *Planning Reform Working Paper: Brownfield Passport*, September 2024.

44 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *Planning Reform Working Paper: Planning Committees*, December 2024.

45 See: [https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/CSJ-Lonely\\_Nation\\_3.pdf](https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/CSJ-Lonely_Nation_3.pdf).

## Part Four:

# Address the Link Between Rising Food Bank Use and Loneliness

Food bank use has hit a record high. In 2022/23, 2.3 million people lived in a household that had used a food bank within the last 12 months, equating to 3.4 per cent of the UK population.<sup>46</sup> This is an increase from a total of 2.1 million in 2021/22.<sup>47</sup> CSJ polling can reveal that 59 per cent of people who use food banks expect to still be dependent on food aid in a year's time.<sup>48</sup>

Food bank use increased dramatically from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The Trussell Trust, the UK's largest association of food banks, increased their supply of emergency food parcels from 1.9 million in 2019/20 to 2.6 million in 2020/21.<sup>49</sup> However, it appears improbable that the initial rise in food banks at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic can be solely explained by a sudden rise in poverty or drop in household income. CSJ analysis can reveal that household income for the poorest 20 per cent increased by 3.6 per cent from 2019/20 to 2020/21.<sup>50</sup> Absolute and relative low income (before and after housing costs) and food insecurity also fell during the initial year of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>51</sup> This begs the question why there was such a significant increase in food bank demand in a period where, supposedly, food insecurity and poverty fell?

*Lonely Nation Part 4* argues that it is important to recognise other drivers of food bank use in addition to insufficient income. Loneliness and social isolation are prime examples. People who use food banks are significantly more lonely than the general population. Just one in four people who use food banks (26 per cent) say they never feel lonely, compared to two in five adults across the general population (40 per cent).<sup>52</sup> 71 per cent say they feel lonely at least some of the time, compared to 58 per cent of all adults.<sup>53</sup> Over twice as many people who use food banks (19 per cent) feel lonely most of the time or always compared to all adults (9 per cent).<sup>54</sup>

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46 CSJ analysis of DWP HBAI data.

47 Ibid.

48 Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 517 people who used food banks in the last 12 months between 11th and 15th October 2024.

49 House of Commons Library, Food banks in the UK, May 2024, p. 4.

50 CSJ analysis of DWP HBAI data.

51 Ibid.

52 Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 517 people who used food banks in the last 12 months between 11th and 15th October 2024 and polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 2,066 nationally representative adults between 15th and 16th April 2024.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

Loneliness has been shown to be a significant predictor of food insecure status. A 2021 analysis found that those who felt lonely often were nearly ten times as likely to be food insecure than those who hardly ever or never felt lonely.<sup>55</sup> Whilst the majority of people we surveyed (63 per cent) said that they use a foodbank due to not being able to afford food, we identified a significant minority who report that isolation and lack of support networks are driving their food insecurity.<sup>56</sup>



Most discussion on ending the need for food banks has focused on addressing the fundamental driver of insufficient income, particularly through the welfare system. This approach does not tackle the wider economic and social drivers, which include loneliness, social isolation, negative interactions with the welfare system, including sanctions and debt repayments, worklessness, insecure housing, family breakdown, domestic abuse, immigration issues, problem debt, addiction, educational failure, and health problems. To end dependency on emergency food parcels, the government must address the root causes of poverty, and the non-financial drivers of food bank use.

55 The Trussell Trust, State of Hunger: Building the evidence on poverty, destitution, and food insecurity in the UK, May 2021, p. 78.  
 56 Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 517 people who used food banks in the last 12 months between 11th and 15th October 2024.  
 57 Ibid.  
 58 Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Community Life Survey 2023/24: Background and headline findings, December 2024.  
 59 Polling conducted by Whitestone Insight of 517 people who used food banks in the last 12 months between 11th and 15th October 2024.  
 60 Ibid.  
 61 Ibid.  
 62 Ibid.

The government has stated that they want to end “mass dependence on emergency food parcels, which is a moral scar on our society.”<sup>63</sup> To achieve this, the government must review how it funds emergency food aid, currently upwards of £200 million a year (also including food vouchers and cash) and if this is helping people to move out of poverty. In their traditional format, focused solely on the distribution of free food, food banks can only address the symptoms of failing social and economic life. This is merely managed decline.

The CSJ recommends that the government:

- **Implement a new ‘root cause test’ for all public funding that is given to food banks and other organisations whose charitable purpose includes the distribution of free and/or subsidised food.** This would ensure that tax payers money is spent on addressing the root causes of food bank use and poverty, instead of just treating the symptoms of dysfunctional economic and social arrangements.
- **Ensure that public money is only given to food banks that operate a referral and registration process for their service users.** This would ensure that charities are able to understand and address the drivers of food bank use among those who access their services.
- **Require that whenever a public body refers an individual or household to a food bank, they are also referred to appropriate agencies and services equipped to help them address and overcome the root cause drivers of their food insecurity.** This would help to end the bad practice of referring people to food banks without any attempt to address the underlying crisis.
- **Place a new duty on local authorities to increase the co-location of statutory services with small and medium sized charities and food banks.** This would ensure that public services are able to reach vulnerable individuals and families effectively.
- **Encourage food banks to identify who is accessing food aid due to reasons of loneliness and social isolation** and be supported to help service users access other community settings where they can make social connections.

For further recommendations and analysis, please see *Lonely Nation Part 4: Loneliness and food banks*.<sup>64</sup>

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63 The Labour Party, Change: Labour Party Manifesto 2024, June 2024, p 78.

64 See: [https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/CSJ-Lonely\\_Nation\\_4.pdf](https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/CSJ-Lonely_Nation_4.pdf).



The Centre for Social Justice  
Kings Buildings  
16 Smith Square  
Westminster, SW1P 3HQ

[www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk](http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk)  
@csjthinktank