



A Menu to End Hunger in the UK

For more information and campaign resources, see www.endhungeruk.org

Foreword

Like many people who read this report, I am both amazed and shocked by the growth of food banks in the UK – amazed by the generosity of so many volunteers and donors, but shocked that this is necessary in a country as wealthy as ours.

In the Diocese of Gloucester, Stroud Foodbank alone has distributed around 1,860 food parcels in the past year from five centres, with the help of 50 churches and 130 volunteers – just one of at least nine food banks doing similar work across Gloucestershire and the surrounding areas. And this is only the tip of the iceberg. We know that many more people are living on cheap food, much of it unhealthy, or skipping meals, because they are too ashamed to visit a food bank.

Whilst celebrating the work that churches and other voluntary groups are doing to respond to this urgent need, it is clear to me that government and businesses could and should be doing more to reduce the need for food banks in the first place.

The 'menu' of recommendations contained in this report is extremely practical. Many of them could be implemented at relatively little cost, but would make a real and immediate difference – for example, funding local schemes so that children do not go hungry during the school holidays. Other recommendations will require more concerted and longer-term action to ensure that people are paid a decent wage and that there is an adequate safety net to support people during difficult times in their life, such as an illness or the breakdown of a relationship. If we are to eradicate food insecurity, then we must commit to these shared goals - and we need to start measuring the scale of the problem, so we can see the progress that is being made.

I am delighted that the Church of England is supporting the End Hunger UK campaign, alongside a diverse coalition of voluntary sector organisations and faith groups. My first action will be to write to the local MPs in my diocese, asking them to support this campaign, starting with the School Holidays (Meals & Activities) Bill. Will you join us?

Right Revd Rachel Treweek, Bishop of Gloucester



Introduction

End Hunger UK brings together a wide range of national charities, faith groups, frontline organisations, academics and individuals working to tackle food poverty in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Whilst a significant amount has been achieved over the past few years in raising the public and political profile of hunger in the UK, we believe that by working together to build a broad 'food justice movement' across the UK, and by mobilising thousands of people engaged in tackling food poverty in its many forms, we can build a powerful movement for change.

Some members of our coalition work directly and indirectly with those experiencing food insecurity. For example:

- FareShare, a charity which saves good food destined for waste and sends it to other charities and community groups, redistributes enough food to support 400,000 people a week.¹
- Magic Breakfast provides over 31,000 breakfasts to malnourished and vulnerable children before they start the school day.²
- Between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2017, The Trussell Trust's Foodbank Network

A Menu for Ending Hunger in the UK

A coordinated governmental strategy to tackle household food insecurity

- 1 A dedicated minister to mobilise action on household food security in coordination with devolved governments
- 2 An annual government-led measurement, and ongoing monitoring of household food insecurity, across the UK

Giving children the best start in life by avoiding the damaging impact of food insecurity on health, attainment and opportunity

- 3 A commitment to increase the voucher value and uptake of the UK's Healthy Start Scheme
- 4 A commitment to safeguarding child nutrition, every day of the year

Ensuring everyone is able to afford good food on a regular basis through an appropriate combination of decent work and social security payments.

- 5 A commitment to reduce the unjust Poverty Premium for people on low incomes
- 6 A commitment to incentivise employers to pay the 'real' Living Wage and to provide decent work
- 7 A commitment to make sure welfare reform does not leave people hungry
- 8 A review of sanctions to ensure that they do not cause undue harm or destitution
- 9 A commitment to ensuring that there is effective financial assistance in times of crisis

provided 1,182,954 three-day emergency food supplies to people in crisis. Of this number, 436,938 went to children.³

- 9 out of 10 Church of England parishes are involved in food provision in some way, mostly through helping to manage food banks or by providing venues, volunteers and donations in support of local food banks.⁴
- Trussell Trust and independent food bank volunteers are giving at least £30 million a year in unpaid work – the equivalent of 4 million hours.⁵

There is still much to be done – the United Nations found that between 2014 and 2016, 4.2% of the UK population – that is almost 3 million people – were severely food insecure.⁶ Severe food insecurity is defined as people skipping meals, reducing the amount they eat or even going without food at all. Statistics of this magnitude can sometimes detract from the human story, so throughout this report we feature the words of those who experience food poverty to highlight what being too poor to eat in the UK is really like.

The amazing work is being conducted by charities, community groups and individuals – as well as businesses and local authorities – will not end hunger in the UK. All members of the campaign coalition are united in the belief that to really tackle the root causes of household food insecurity we require a concerted effort by the UK and devolved governments. Only action at this level will ensure that everyone has enough money in their pocket to feed themselves and their families with good quality, healthy food.

**Step up to
the plate,
we can't do
it alone!**

One: A dedicated minister to coordinate and mobilise action on household food security in coordination with devolved governments

The kind of leadership required to address the crisis of food insecurity can only be provided by government – no other actors on their own have the ability to develop the level of coordinated action needed to end household food insecurity across the whole of the UK.

Changes in UK government policy over recent years mean that responsibility for household food security and public health is increasingly being handed over to individuals, businesses and charities.⁷ The hallmark of this transition of responsibility is the new role of charitable food in welfare provision – charities taking on the responsibility for providing food for those who cannot afford it themselves. However, ensuring that people have enough to eat should not be the role of the charitable sector – this complex issue should be dealt with by government at all levels.

The Prime Minister should appoint a new cross-departmental 'Household Food Security' minister with a responsibility for understanding, addressing and eliminating household food insecurity across the UK. Their purpose and remit must be informed by international instruments such as the Sustainable Development Goals.

Where issues are devolved, such as the implementation of the welfare system or on the National Health Service, ministers across the nations should work together to ensure a coordinated approach is established and maintained.

I started volunteering at North Paddington Food Bank (NPFB) after being made redundant. Any preconceptions I might have had about who would use a food bank were overturned on my first day – there was a smartly dressed, articulate man with a PhD who was living in a Tesco car park and a 50-something woman who looked like she had just walked in from the boardroom. There is no one type – just a range of people being penalised for being down on their luck – whether through illness, accident, low wages, zero-hours contracts, bereavement or redundancy. All lives can change in a heartbeat and without reserves of privilege or money to draw on, the safety net that used to be called social 'security' no longer appears to exist. The benefits system appears to exist to penalise and bully people, and we see the fallout from this at the foodbank.

I always say NPFB is a symbol of all that is insanely wrong with the world but also what is insanely good about people (clients, donors, trustees and volunteers): their resilience, empathy, generosity, and gratitude. It can be emotionally draining. Listening to people tell you they haven't eaten for days; have walked miles to pick up a food parcel when they have terminal cancer or have been without any money and fuel for months is heart-rending (and certainly puts any problems I might be having into perspective). People are not just being starved of food but also of dignity.

Jane Collins, 53, has been volunteering regularly at NPFB for two years since being made redundant

Two: An annual government-led measurement, and ongoing monitoring of household food insecurity, across the UK

This will give baseline data and allow for ongoing monitoring of the extent of food insecurity in the UK, something that the Scottish government has already committed to do, and which the Northern Ireland Executive was doing until recently.

Whilst the UK does not currently routinely monitor household food insecurity, the Food Standards Agency conducted stand-alone research in 2016 using the Food and You survey, which found 21% of adults in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to be marginally, moderately or severely food insecure.⁸ United Nations data has shown that an estimated 8.4 million people, the equivalent of the entire population of London, were living in moderate to severely food insecure households in the UK in 2014.⁹ The United Nations also found that 4.2% of the population between 2014 and 2016, almost 3 million people, were classed as being severely food insecure in the UK.¹⁰

Severe food insecurity is defined as people either skipping meals, reducing the amount they eat or even going without food at all. In the same UN survey, the only country in Europe which had a higher figure for severe food insecurity was Albania. In 2015–16, 4% of the population of Northern Ireland had at least one day in a fortnight when they did not have a substantial meal.¹¹ For the 2016–17 financial year 1,182,954 three-day emergency food supplies were given to people in crisis by Trussell Trust foodbanks.¹²

These government and UN surveys have significant drawbacks: they are now out of date, used a small sample size,¹³ or have only been conducted once so they do not allow for comparison. Previously the survey used to collect data in Northern Ireland was robust, but in 2016–17 this was changed to a model which does not specify duration of exposure to food insecurity, or capture multiple dimensions such as hunger or insecure access to sufficient quantities of food.¹⁴

Food bank use is also a poor measure of food insecurity because users will only represent a small subset of people experiencing severe food insecurity. Food bank statistics have been shown to be

“We recommend that the government collect objective and statistically robust data on the scale of household food insecurity, including through the use of questions in the food costs sections of the UK’s Living Costs and Food Survey. It should also monitor trends over time so that the effectiveness of policies can be accurately gauged and any necessary changes made in response to evidence of need”

Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2015

the tip of the iceberg. UN data collected in 2014 suggests that as many as 17 times the number of people using Trussell Trust foodbanks are food insecure.¹⁵ The end result is that we still do not have the full picture of household food insecurity in the UK.

There are easy and validated tools for collecting data on food insecurity which are already in use. In the United States the Department of Agriculture (USDA) Household Food Insecurity Survey Module is included within national household surveys. This is also used in Canada. The Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) advocates their Food Insecurity Experience Scale. The Scottish government has adopted three of the FAO questions in its 2017 Health Survey and is including the full set of eight questions in 2018.

UK governmental instruments already exist, within which either the FAO or USDA questions could be added. These are:

- Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA); Annual Cost of Living Survey
- Office of National Statistics (ONS); Annual Population Survey or the Survey of Living Conditions
- Department of Work and Pensions (DWP); Family Resource Survey
- Public Health England and Wales; Health Survey

A globally standardised question module could be incorporated into a UK-wide survey, potentially at no cost or for a marginal cost of £50,000–75,000 per year (estimate based on correspondence with DEFRA).

By committing to measure household food insecurity in the UK, the government would also be working towards meeting its obligations under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals – especially Goal Two, which calls for an end to hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture.¹⁶

If the government consistently collected statistics on food insecurity, a full picture of the problem could be determined. Only if the scale of the problem is known do we stand a chance of knowing how to respond to the need.

“The Salvation Army, they give you a food parcel once a month if you need it...if they weren’t there I would struggle a hell of a lot more, and I know there is certainly a power of people in the town that would”

David, ex-serviceman, 50s, West of Scotland (Oxfam Scotland, ‘A Menu for Change’)

Not only is David’s experience of food insecurity not being recorded or monitored in official government statistics, but it is likely he is also missed from Trussell Trust data as he goes to a Salvation Army food bank.

Three: A commitment to increase the uptake and voucher value of the UK's Healthy Start scheme

Healthy Start supports young and low-income pregnant women and families with children under four years of age who are in receipt of one of the main means-tested social security payments. It provides a nutritional safety net by issuing free vitamins for pregnant and breastfeeding women and one to four-year-olds, and food vouchers which can be spent on fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables, cows' milk and infant formula. Currently pregnant women and children over one and under four years old can get one £3.10 voucher per week. Children under one year old can get two £3.10 vouchers (£6.20) per week.¹⁷

The national average uptake is 64%¹⁸ meaning that a third of eligible participants do not receive the benefit. An estimated average of 25,000 eligible households in London are not claiming their Healthy Start vouchers. An additional £6,170,000 would be claimed if there was 100% uptake, or over £2,413,000 if there was an 80% uptake.¹⁹

Although child poverty rates have risen²⁰, Healthy Start uptake has decreased possibly due to problems with service delivery, lack of training of health professionals and lack of awareness about the benefit.²¹ The amount of money allocated to and spent on this scheme has also decreased since its inception. In 2006, it was estimated that it would cost around £140 million to run, but from 2015 to 2016 only approximately £60 million was spent.²²

The UK and Scottish governments, now that Healthy Start powers have been devolved in Scotland, should commit to increase the uptake of the UK's Healthy Start Scheme to at least 80% and ensure that eligible families are also supported to use the vouchers to eat well.

Healthy Start has the potential to make a real difference to the purchasing power of low-income families. However, the food voucher value has remained constant for nearly 10 years, so the value has fallen in real terms, and now needs to increase. Vouchers should be ring-fenced for fruit and vegetables, and cows' milk during pregnancy, to support eating well during this time, and after age one, to promote healthy eating for the whole family. Consideration should also be given to increasing the diversity of outlets accepting vouchers, particularly outlets selling local food.

Governments should also commit to regularly reviewing and increasing the food voucher value, and consider increasing eligibility – using the scheme better to meet its aims of promoting breastfeeding and offering a nutritional safety net to vulnerable pregnant women and their young families.

“The vouchers actually provoke you to be a bit more healthy as well, because it pushes me to buy more fruit and vegetables. I think it's really good.”

Mother of four children (11 months, 6, 15 and 16 years old), living in Leicester, using Healthy Start vouchers

Four: A commitment to safeguarding child nutrition, every day of the year

Governments must recognise the problem of holiday hunger – and address the root causes, alongside providing funding for local authorities to provide free meals and activities for children during the school holidays.

A YouGov survey of low-income parents by Kellogg's in 2015 found one third of parents have skipped a meal so their children can eat during the school holidays²³

Up to an estimated three million children in the UK risk being hungry in the school holidays. This group comprises over a million children growing up in poverty who receive free school meals during term time, as well as an estimated two million who are disqualified from free school meals because their parents work.²⁴ Throughout these periods parents have the challenges of managing increased childcare demands alongside the cost of providing extra meals. Children living in these circumstances can experience multiple difficulties including hunger, low-cost poor-quality diet, social isolation, learning loss,²⁵ and family tension.²⁶

The best solution for families experiencing these levels of poverty would be to ensure they have adequate money available, either through decent work or via the social security system, to buy food for their children. However, all governments and local authorities can also play a role in ending holiday hunger by directly providing food and activities for children.

Governments should fund and help implement holiday provision programmes. These programmes should be open to all, to avoid creating an environment where only children from less well-off families are targeted. These schemes could offer access to good food, enrichment activities such as sport, cookery, arts, play and family support in a trusted setting (such as a school or known community venue). This could also contribute to existing government policy on reducing childhood obesity rates and improving children's life chances.

The 2017 Hungry Holidays report by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger, which was the result of a UK wide inquiry into the issue, confirmed that while some community groups are doing remarkable work, the cover across the country is inconsistent and resources unpredictable. It outlined six recommendations (see right). The UK and devolved governments should work to meet all six of these recommendations.

Hungry Holidays: recommendations

1. A statutory requirement for local authorities to facilitate and coordinate the delivery of free meals and fun for children during school holidays, with utmost flexibility granted over the actual delivery methods used.
2. An adequate funding base, combined with an invitation to businesses to add to this base, to enable local authorities to meet their statutory duties.
3. National minimum standards laid down by the Department for Education, in respect of the safe and effective delivery of free meals and fun for children during school holidays.
4. A national portal which enables those individuals and organisations delivering free meals and fun for children during school holidays to receive the training, information, advice and guidance they need to at least meet the national minimum standards.
5. A robust research base to guide the ongoing development of projects.
6. The measurement of hunger amongst children during school holidays.

Five: A commitment to reduce the unjust Poverty Premium for people on low incomes

Whilst many people on low incomes are undoubtedly struggling to make ends meet, this does not mean – for the most part – that they do not purchase essential goods and services. What it does mean is that they can ill afford to pay over the odds for them. Yet people on the lowest incomes frequently end up paying more for many goods and services, including healthy food, fuel, finance services, furniture and white goods.²⁷

It is estimated that the average cost of the 'Poverty Premium' – the extra cost the people on low incomes pay – is £490 per annum. But those who are hit hardest by this premium can pay up to £750 per year.²⁸

Fuel

Low-income households pay higher-than-average prices for gas and electricity tariffs, or pay more per unit of consumption. 16% of households pay for energy by prepayment meters, which cost on average £250 more per year than paying by direct debit.²⁹

Location

Those people living in poverty often also live in the most deprived areas – this pushes premiums up on products such as car or household insurance. Living in these locations also places an extra burden on people when it comes to accessing good quality shops for food and groceries. It is estimated that the poverty premium attributed to where people live is around £84 a year.³⁰

Healthy food

Those who live in poverty may not have access to a car or be able to afford public transport – meaning they are not able to visit larger out of town supermarkets which can have cheaper healthy food. For example, a study of deprived areas in Greenwich, London found that the price of a healthy food basket consisting of 15 items in a local shop is double that of the cost of the same items from a supermarket – this can even go up to triple for the most expensive shops.³¹

“Anyone who has struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor.”

James Baldwin, American novelist, essayist, playwright, poet, and social critic

Household items

Unable to cover large one-off expenses, people on low incomes who need appliances or items of furniture may have no option other than to purchase via rent-to-own companies. 45% of people who use rent-to-own shops are in the bottom 20% of earners.³² The goods they buy from rent-to-own companies are already often more expensive than the same product in a high-street shop. For example, one company was selling a fridge freezer, with a suggested retail price of £254.99, for £309.99.³³ So, poorer people can end up paying significantly more than they would if they bought the items outright through other channels.

Inevitably, higher costs across the household budget mean there is less money available for healthy food, exacerbating food insecurity and increasing the risk of hunger.

Governments must work together, alongside businesses and co-operative enterprises such as credit unions, to find ways of reducing the excess costs of healthy food, fuel, finance and furniture (and other essential household goods) for people on low incomes.

“The government, together with regulators, consumer bodies and people in poverty, should launch an inquiry into the poverty premium, and work with businesses to remove poverty premiums for key living costs including food as well as utilities, housing, household appliances, and transport.”

Fabian Commission on Food and Poverty³⁴

Six: A commitment to incentivise employers to pay the 'real' Living Wage and to provide decent work

Six in ten people in poverty live in households where someone is in work,³⁵ showing that for many people work is not yet a route out of poverty. A longitudinal study of 400 families who use Trussell Trust foodbanks found that one in six households had someone in work or receiving income from employment. In most of these households the person in employment was either working part-time or self-employed.³⁶

People need to be able to earn a wage which allows them to be able to afford to eat healthy food. Governments should help encourage businesses to pay a real Living Wage, an independently calculated rate that is based on the cost of living. This would ensure that all their staff could afford to meet their basic living costs. Paying the real Living Wage does more than lift people out of poverty, it allows them to participate in social and cultural life, spend more quality time with their children and look after their own physical and mental health – it's better for them, for their families and for society.^{37 38}

Research with more than 1,500 people also showed that decent work involves paying the living wage alongside other factors. Participants from low-paid sectors such as social care, hospitality and cleaning, were asked to prioritise a number of factors that are important for decent work. Top of the list was a decent hourly rate to cover basic needs; job security; paid holidays and sick leave; a safe working environment; and a supportive line manager. Yet for too many people, these priorities are not being met. The research shows that while the living wage is important, decent work also involves a degree of security, safety and support.³⁹

More must be done by governments to encourage employers to pay the real Living Wage and provide decent work. Governments should lead by example by adopting the real Living Wage and feeding this into their procurement contracts.

“Before Christmas I was on Jobseeker’s Allowance. I then took a small job at Christmas and after that contract ended, I was switched to Universal Credit without warning. I had to wait 6 weeks, which led to rent arrears. It was not backdated. I wish I never took the job at Christmas. I now get paid every 4 weeks. In that first 10 weeks, I had £200 for rent, so of course I was behind with my rent.”

A Trussell Trust foodbank user⁴²

At the same time, the government should adapt its policies to ensure that the incentive to work is not undermined in the social security system. The new system of Universal Credit social security payments is projected to impact working families the hardest, who will be on average £625 a year worse off.⁴⁰ The government should look to raise work allowances (the amount claimants can earn before their Universal Credit starts to be reduced) to ensure that work offers a genuine route out of poverty for people claiming Universal Credit. Single parents need a higher work allowance, as it is especially difficult for them to take on extra hours and to earn enough to lift their family out of poverty⁴¹.

Paying the real Living Wage does more than lift people out of poverty, it allows them to participate in social and cultural life, spend more quality time with their children, and look after their own physical and mental health

Seven: A commitment to make sure welfare reform does not leave people hungry

In a world of growing insecurity, a compassionate society is one that provides a bedrock of social security: the security of knowing that becoming sick, disabled or unemployed, or suffering a financial shock or crisis, will not leave anyone penniless, hungry or at risk of destitution.

For those who find themselves unemployed or unable to work – whether through sickness, disability, caring responsibilities or insecure work, the social security system should provide a safety net; an essential guarantee of a minimum income, and enable people to live free from household food insecurity.

A study of 400 households who used Trussell Trust foodbanks found that approximately two fifths of their clients were receiving Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), a payment for people who are unable to work due to illness or disability. Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants were also over-represented.⁴⁴ This demonstrates that for these people their payments were not sufficient to allow them to purchase food alongside meeting their other living costs.

In the same study, over one-third of households were currently waiting on an application decision or social security payment they had recently applied for. While some had only recently filed their applications (20% had made their application within the past two weeks), for the majority, it had been two to six weeks since their initial application.⁴⁵ Again, for these people, being enrolled in the social security system was no guarantee of being able to afford to eat.

It has also been found that difficulty in navigating the social security system was a common feature of food bank users' experiences. The system was found to be complicated, remote and, at times, intimidating, especially for those trying to resolve problems that had occurred with a claim.⁴⁶

One of the largest changes to social security in recent years is the introduction of Universal Credit to replace several other existing payments, with all claimants projected to be on the system by 2021–22. Universal Credit could have significant positive benefits: replacing a previously complicated system, and ensuring for example, that claimants have one place to go to apply for the majority of their social security payments.

“We believe it is time to look again at the state of our country and to review the fundamental values that led to the creation of our welfare state. We propose in Feeding Britain a strategy for renewing the welfare state so it can better reflect and encourage the relationships which contribute to the wellbeing of our citizens, including the poorest. We think such a rationale is needed at a time when, sadly, we appear to be drifting towards more and more atomisation and less and less sharing of common values.”⁴³

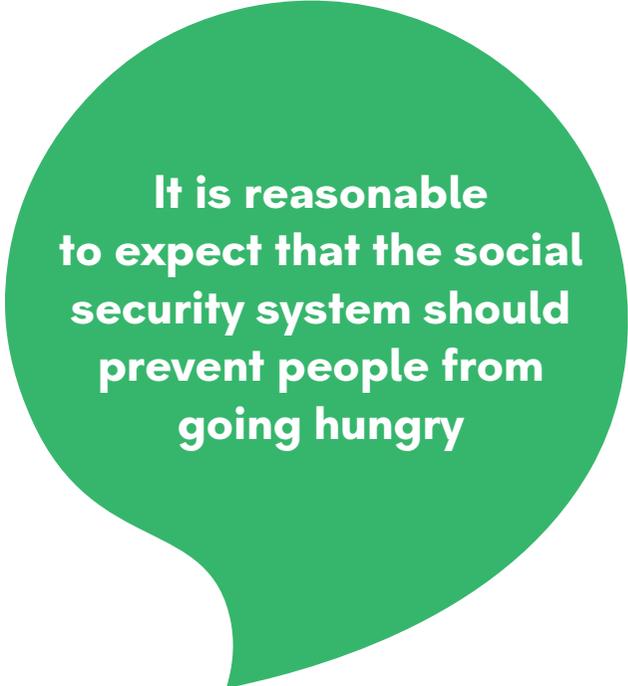
Right Revd Tim Thornton, then Bishop of Truro (now Bishop of Lambeth), Co-Chair, Feeding Britain Inquiry (2014)

However, the Universal Credit scheme currently also has significant problems. For example, Trussell Trust foodbanks in areas of full Universal Credit rollout for six months or more have seen a 30% average increase six months after rollout, compared to a year before.⁴⁷ Statistics from the Department of Work and Pensions who administer the scheme show that 24% of people making a new claim for Universal Credit had to wait longer than six weeks to receive a payment.⁴⁸ Whilst a report by the Citizens Advice found that in pilot areas of Universal Credit 39% of claimants were waiting more than six weeks to receive their first payment and more than half (57%) were having to borrow money to get by during that time.⁴⁹ This evidence suggests that Universal Credit payments are not being administered in a way which allows people to meet their basic needs, including being able to afford to eat.

As the scheme progresses, there will be other challenges that need addressing to ensure payments received by claimants and their families are sufficient for them to purchase food. These could include, but are not limited to;

- **A review of the freeze in working-age social security payments:** social security payment levels do not seem to be preventing people from reaching crisis point. In line with the roll-out of Universal Credit the payment levels need to be sufficient for claimants to be able to afford to eat as well as meeting their other living costs.
- **Abolishing the two-child limit:** families are not entitled to tax credits for third or subsequent children born after April 2017. From February 2019, new claims for Universal Credit payments will only cover up to two children (even if they were born prior to April 2017), unless claimants meet a certain set of 'special circumstances' including where the mother was raped. This cap is likely to push families into poverty, and detrimentally impact children. For example, families that were once able to care for three children but can no longer do so due to unforeseen changes such as redundancy, ill-health, separation or even the death of a parent, will not receive adequate payments. The need for mothers who have been raped to report this could also constitute a breach of claimants' privacy.⁵⁰ By lifting this cap, families with more than two children should be able to afford to feed their whole family.
- **Reviewing in-work conditionality:** Claimants earning less than they would on the minimum wage at 35 hours a week will for the first time face pressure and possible sanctions to incentivise them to earn more. By 2020, in-work conditionality is expected to apply to some 1.3 million people who have never faced this before.⁵¹ This places an unfair burden on the worker to be responsible for their earnings – something which could be beyond their control. Sanctioning those who are already working could mean that they can no longer meet all their living costs, including the cost of food.

It is reasonable to expect that the social security system should prevent people from going hungry. We urge the government to reaffirm the centrality of the safety net principle. The Department for Work and Pensions must also take steps to ensure that the holes in the new safety net of Universal Credit are addressed.



It is reasonable to expect that the social security system should prevent people from going hungry

Eight: A review of sanctions to ensure that they do not cause undue harm or destitution

Sanctions have become an increasingly large part of the benefit system. Between October 2012 – when the new Jobseeker’s Allowance regime was introduced – and June 2016, just over two million sanctions were imposed on these claimants. Between December 2012 and June 2016, around 82,400 sanctions were imposed on Employment and Support Allowance claimants.⁵²

With sanctions starting at four weeks’ loss of payments and rising to up to three years, they can cause substantial hardship. It is estimated that 20% to 30% of foodbank users had their social security payments reduced due to a sanction.⁵³ Linking data from the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network with records on sanctioning rates across 259 local authorities, it was found that as the rate of sanctioning increased by 10 per 100,000 adults, the rate of adults fed by foodbanks increased by an additional 3.36 adults per 100,000.⁵⁴

Social security payments can have conditions of entitlement, and there is a role for sanctions for those who genuinely refuse to meet them. But we call for sanctions to be used only as a genuine last resort. A high rate of sanctioning is a sign of system failure as they push people even further from finding decent work, or being able to maintain a job.⁵⁵

Where sanctions are imposed, claimants should be clearly notified, with clear reasons given. Claimants should be given a period of time to explain their behaviour, and to provide evidence for the reasons for it. First sanctions should not be financial, and should operate via a true ‘yellow-card warning’ system, so that claimants have a chance to take action before being pushed into hardship or destitution. Information-sharing within governments and between Jobcentres and Work Programme contractors should be improved, so that information on claimants’ mental and physical health conditions is automatically considered when deciding whether to sanction.

The government should also strengthen exemptions for carers and people with childcare responsibilities to ensure sanctions will not be used to force people to increase their hours, to a level that would compromise their ability to meet their children’s needs, put those they care for at risk or downgrade the security of their employment.

Where claimants do suffer a financial sanction, they should be automatically considered for a hardship payment at the same time, to prevent destitution. The length of time sanctions are issued for should be flexible, so that claimants have the opportunity to have their sanction lifted if it spurs them on to engage with employment support – the stated goal of the policy.

The impact of sanctions: Kim

Kim was a single mother with two daughters, aged nine and eleven. She was not working due to depression and anxiety, and was receiving Jobseeker’s Allowance whilst she waited for the outcome of her Employment and Support Allowance appeal.

Kim had been sanctioned because she didn’t manage to reach her requirement to apply for 17 jobs between 24th and 31st December, the Christmas holiday period. Kim had no income whatsoever for herself and two children. She tearfully said how she had donated to the food bank before and that her kids go to the youth group in the church.

“I want what everybody else has. Weekends away with the kids, things like that. I want to earn my own money to get the luxuries I want, to feel I’ve earned it”.

Kim was particularly struggling with energy costs. Her kids switch the TV on all the time, leave lights on, have long baths, and plug their hair straighteners in. She doesn’t really nag them to stop as “kids shouldn’t have to worry about things like that”, she said.

From ‘Hunger Pains; Life Inside Foodbank Britain’
by Kayleigh Garthwaite

Nine: A commitment to ensuring that there is effective financial assistance in times of crisis

It has long been recognised that social security payments offer only a subsistence level of income, and so do not allow families to build up the financial buffer to withstand unexpected crises, like a sudden bereavement or a broken boiler. Because of this, there was, until 2013-14, a national system of crisis support in the form of the Social Fund which provided crisis loans and community care grants. However, the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2012 abolished this fund. In its place, the Scottish and Welsh governments and Northern Irish Executive created central schemes to administer payments. In England, limited funding was made available to local authorities for local welfare assistance schemes in 2013-14, but this was cut by more than 50% in 2015-16 and no further funding has been announced.⁵⁶

A study of around 70% of local authorities in England found that at least 26 have now closed their schemes altogether and 41 had cut back funding by 60%. 11 of these have cut spending

by over 80% and their schemes are now on the brink of collapse.⁵⁷

There is no statutory duty on local authorities in England to establish a local welfare scheme, no guidance on their operation, limited central monitoring, and funding is not ring-fenced. Local authorities have been given the freedom to decide how best to meet the needs of their residents in the context of unprecedented cuts to council funding and uncertainty over future funding levels.

Some English local authorities have responded by abolishing their schemes completely – for example in Rotherham the only help remaining is in the form of interest free loans from a local credit union. Loan amounts are capped at a maximum of just £120 for people who are “in urgent need, under pressure, or who need support to remain or settle in the community.” Similarly, Bradford did not provide any Community Care Grants or Crisis Awards in 2015, but the Council is supporting ‘Smarterbuys’ which provides loans at an interest rate of 24.19% APR.⁵⁸

Many English local authorities give in-kind support only, such as providing carpets, furniture, cooking equipment or pre-paid cards,⁵⁹ alongside restrictive eligibility criteria and minimal publicity which could then limit demand for these schemes. In some cases, local authorities could be relying on food banks and other local voluntary organisations to attempt to fill the gap.

Others have restricted support to long-term residents, leaving some vulnerable groups such as refugees unprotected. For example, to qualify for the Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme you have to have lived in the area for six months, or have moved there recently for safety reasons. If successful in applying, claimants receive recycled white goods, decorating vouchers and supermarket vouchers.⁶⁰

The social security system should be underpinned by provisions that allow all people to meet their basic needs wherever they live. This requires attention to the adequacy, consistency and accessibility of local authority Welfare Schemes across England – funding

should be ring-fenced with schemes becoming a statutory duty.

In 2016, the Northern Ireland Executive established a Discretionary Fund which issues loans or grants to people who are in crisis, or whose safety or wellbeing is at significant risk. Positively, this scheme is open to all people whose income is below the national living wage of £15,600 per annum.⁶¹ However, issuing of loans as opposed to grants may mean people experience a fall in their income in the coming months – as repayments are taken from future benefit payments.

In Scotland, the Scottish Welfare Fund provides access to community care grants and crisis grants, however there are still significant barriers to applying. A review of the scheme concluded that there was poor communication with applicants, misinterpretation of evidence

and not following official guidance in decision-making.⁶²

The Welsh government have established the Discretionary Assistance Fund for Wales which provides assistance in an emergency, when there is an immediate threat to health or wellbeing. Or to provide help for people to live independently. This can be in the form of money or in-kind support such as household items. Again, there are barriers to applying for this fund too, such as a complex application process. The amounts paid can also be low. For example, from April 2013 to March 2014, awards paid to vulnerable individuals ranged from £5 to £100 for emergencies.⁶³

The Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh administrations should ensure that their schemes are reviewed and maintained, meeting the needs of those who apply.

Conclusion

A Menu to End Hunger in the UK, as laid out in this report, has the power to help those facing the very bleak reality of having to choose between food and being able to keep a roof over their own and their families' heads. What it outlines are the very real problems faced by millions of people in the UK, and it lists solutions and suggestions that need to be listened to.

I work—two jobs—and my husband works full-time. We should be able to afford good, nutritious food. We **should** be able to afford **food**. The reality, though, is multiple days when dinner has been a tin of chopped tomatoes, some Tesco Value dried mixed herbs, and 20p pasta; we have to regularly feed our family on around £1.50 for the entire meal—not per head. By the time our rent is paid, money put on the gas and electric keys, the bills paid... there's nothing left. We drink water, we eat the cheapest food, but we struggle to afford even that.

A Menu to End Hunger has the power to advocate for those who cannot do it for themselves. There are millions of people living in the UK who suffer daily, both from hunger, fear of hunger, or the health effects a diet low in nutrition causes. A bad diet, the constant fear that comes with living in poverty, gets tiring. We don't always have the energy to fight, to advocate, for ourselves. There have

been so, so, many times when I've thought I've hit the bottom of a pit of despair. If I was less stubborn, I think I would have given up long before now. It seems, at times, utterly hopeless to continue fighting.

People have seen benefits cut, cut, and cut again. They live with the weight of their fear, wondering when the other boot will drop; they fear eviction; they fear losing their children—because the most basic of things we, as parents, want to do for our children is to give them the best start we can, and we know we're not able to.

To have another voice—one with the power and ability to make a real difference, such as a dedicated minister within the government—speaking for those living in poverty, would make such a difference to the perception of food insecurity. There has to be Government measurement of food poverty and insecurity: in this country, in the 21st century, we should not be living in a climate that sees millions driven to their local food bank.

Children need food to grow. They know when their parents are struggling. Mine have always known, however much I try to hide the grim realities from them. They see our cupboards devoid of snacks, fruit, fast food—all the things kids like to grab and eat throughout the day. I know they have friends whose only meal each day is the free one provided for them at

school, and I have always wondered what they do during the holidays. I struggle, and struggle badly, yet these parents who have a free meal entitlement for their child are always, without exception, getting by on under £16,500 a year (before tax). I can't imagine how much of a difference it would make to the children within these families to be able to continue receiving their one meal a day, through holidays as well as term time.



I do believe the benefits threshold needs to be raised, and raised substantially; a family earning even a single pound above the arbitrary cut-off line for free meals entitlement receives nothing in the way of free meals, vouchers, free prescriptions, eye tests, or dental care (for adults).

This 'Grey Area' is where I live, and the struggle can be soul-destroying. After years of facing poverty, evictions, hunger, cold and substandard living conditions, I can't do a huge food shop, even if I have the money. We've been so insecure, for so long, that if there is ample food in my kitchen, my children will eat it as though they need to store it—because they don't know when the cupboards will be full again.

With the current political climate seeing a fashion in cutting benefits—both in-work and unemployment benefits—a trend of increasing homelessness can be easily seen. The government has to realise that if people are being made homeless, there is little chance they have been able to eat well and healthily for some time.

People do not get referred to a food bank because they are feckless, stupid, or incapable of self-sufficiency. They are being pointed there in their droves because of sanctions, of benefit cuts; because of the roll-out of welfare reforms known to be broken. High rents, low wages, zero-hours contracts, they all blend into a perfect storm, and people are dying in the gales.

This must be addressed, and soon, which is why End Hunger have my respect for drafting this report. It's a start, a step in the right direction. I hope it makes the whispered pleas of all those struggling to become a shout. It has the power to make our voices heard, and to bring about real, lasting, change.

No child, young person, or adult should be hungry in the UK today. I hope this Menu to End Hunger in the UK is the first step onto a path that will see hunger eradicated in this country, forever.

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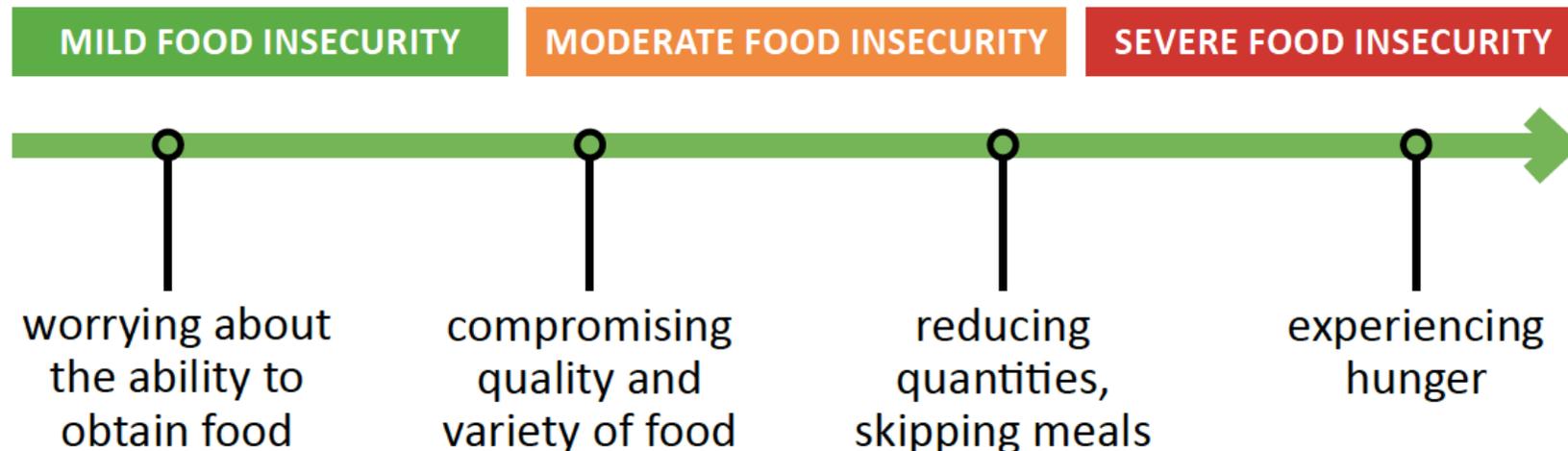
Terminology

Household food security - Households are food secure when they have year-round access to the amount and variety of safe and healthy food needed to lead active and healthy lives. At the household level, food security refers to the ability of the household to secure, either from its own production or through purchases, adequate food for meeting the dietary needs of all members of the household.⁶⁴

Household food insecurity - To be food insecure means having insufficient and insecure access to enough food because of a lack of money. Experiences of food insecurity can vary in severity, from worrying about being able to afford enough food, to going hungry. Essentially food insecurity is an important indicator of material deprivation – highlighting that people are struggling to afford to meet their basic needs.⁶⁵

Food poverty - is the inability of individuals and households to obtain an adequate and nutritious diet.⁶⁶ Importantly, unlike food insecurity this does not take into account people's thoughts in relation to food – such as worrying about how they will get their next meal.

WHAT IS FOOD INSECURITY?



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