A route map to ending hunger as we know it in the United Kingdom

Feeding Britain in 2015-16

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Contents

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger – p. 3

Foreword from The Most Revd. and Rt Hon Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury – p. 5

Summary – p. 6

Introduction – p. 24

Chapter 1 – Hungry Britain in 2015

- How many people are relying on emergency food parcels and other charitable food supplies? – p. 29
- Who is relying on emergency food parcels and other charitable food supplies? – p. 32
- How many times do people require help from food banks and other charitable food providers? – p. 34
- Are we any closer to knowing how many people in Britain are hungry? – p. 35
- How much hunger in Britain is hidden? – p. 38

Chapter 2 – Feeding Britain in 2015

- How many food banks and other charitable food providers are feeding hungry Britain? – p. 41
- How have food banks and other charitable food providers developed and innovated to feed hungry Britain? – p. 43
- From where have food banks and other charitable food providers sourced their emergency food supplies? – p. 49

Chapter 3 – The causes of hunger in 2015

- The operation of the social security system – p. 54
- Awareness of emergency benefit payments – p. 56
- The delayed payment of benefit – p. 58
- The loss of benefit through sanctioning – p. 61
- Changes to an existing benefit claim – p. 66
- Moving from welfare into work – p. 69
- Tax credits – p. 70
- Universal Credit – p. 72
- The local welfare safety net – p. 74
- A continuation of the long term trends disadvantaging Britain's poor – p. 76
- The struggle to make ends meet on a low income – p. 78
- A shortage of budgeting skills – p. 80
- A lack of money with which to budget – p. 82
- The costs of gas and electricity – p. 84
- The battle to stay up to date with rent payments – p. 88
- A lack of facilities with which to cook – p. 90
- Low and inadequate earnings – p. 91
- The burden of household debt – p. 94
- Attempting to establish an income upon leaving prison – p. 96
- Child hunger in the school holidays – p. 97

- Under-registration for free school meals – p. 100
- Breakfast clubs – p. 102
- The absence of free school meals for children of low earners – p. 104
- Healthy Start – p. 105

Chapter 4 – Rescuing Britain's wasted food

- Social supermarkets – Improving access to affordable food – p. 106
- Using good quality surplus food to reconnect with our most vulnerable citizens – p. 108

Chapter 5 – Feeding Britain in 2016 – p. 116

Appendix One – An audit of the recommendations made in Feeding Britain: A strategy for zero hunger in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (December 2014) – p. 117

Appendix Two – An audit of the recommendations made in Feeding Britain: Six Months On – A progress report on the work of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom (June 2015) – p .132

Submissions – p. 135

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger

This report has been signed off by the officers of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger:

The Rt Hon Frank Field MP

Frank Field is the Labour Member of Parliament for Birkenhead. He served as Minister for Welfare Reform between 1997 and 1998 and led an independent review into poverty and life chances in 2010. Frank was Director of the Child Poverty Action Group between 1969 and 1979, and he worked as Director of the Low Pay Unit between 1974 and 1980. Frank chairs the House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee.

John Glen MP

John Glen is the Conservative Member of Parliament for Salisbury, home of the Trussell Trust. He grew up in rural Wiltshire as the son of a small businessman and was the first person in his family to go to university. Prior to becoming a Member of Parliament, he worked in management consultancy and as a Director of Research for the Conservative Party. As well as being a Member of Parliament, he now serves as a Governor at a local secondary school and sat as a Magistrate until 2012. John is Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills. He is also a member of the House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee.

Baroness Jenkin

Baroness Jenkin is a Conservative Peer, who was appointed to the House of Lords in 2011 in recognition of her charity work. She is the chairwoman of both the Conservative Friends of International Development and the Sustainable Resource APPG. Baroness Jenkin is a Board Member of Unicef and has worked for the Prince's Trust.

Emma Lewell-Buck MP

Emma Lewell-Buck is the Labour Member of Parliament for South Shields. Before entering the House of Commons, Emma worked as a child protection social worker. She also served as Councillor for Primrose Ward in South Tyneside, and was the lead member for adult social care. Emma is the first woman, and the first person to have been born within South Shields, to represent her constituency. She is a member of the House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee, and is Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Shadow Home Secretary.

The Rt Revd Tim Thornton, Bishop of Truro

Tim Thornton was made Bishop of Truro in 2008. Prior to that he was Bishop of Sherborne for seven years. Tim has been ordained for over 30 years and has served in several dioceses. He was Principal of the North Thames Ministerial Training Course and served as Chaplain to David Hope both in Wakefield and London. He is Trustee of a number of organisations, including the Bishop's Forum, Transformation Cornwall and Volunteer Cornwall. He is Chairman of The Children's Society – a national charity working to help the most deprived children and disadvantaged young people.

Dr Philippa Whitford MP

Philippa Whitford is the Scottish National Party Member of Parliament for Central Ayrshire. Before entering the House of Commons, Philippa worked as a Consultant Breast Surgeon at Crosshouse Hospital in Kilmarnock. She previously served as a medical volunteer by working as a consultant in a United Nations

hospital in Gaza between 1991 and 1992. Philippa currently serves on the House of Commons Health Select Committee and is the Scottish National Party's Westminster Group Leader on Health.

Foreword from The Most Revd. and Rt Hon Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

I am saddened to be writing this Foreword because this document demonstrates clearly that there are still many people going hungry in our country today. It is a tragedy that such a reality still exists in our country.

I welcomed the **Feeding Britain** report when it was published a year ago and I applaud the work done over this last year. However I remain saddened because there is clear evidence here that there are far too many people continuing to struggle to feed themselves and their families in Britain in the twenty first century.

It is encouraging to read how much work has been done to meet the many recommendations in the **Feeding Britain** report and I congratulate those many people up and down the country who work so hard to alleviate hunger. They contribute enormously to the network of community groups and charitable organisations that are striving to make life bearable for people who are going hungry.

There are clear priorities set out here and much work still to be done. It is shocking to read both of the scale of food waste and also of the large amount of evidence that sanctions and delays in connection with the benefits system are still causing what would appear to be unnecessary problems.

The most important feature highlighted by the evidence in this document and the work focussed by the **Feeding Britain** process is that bringing people together in each area of the country enables progress to be made and real value to be added in and to our society. There is always a temptation to fall into the blame game and point fingers and demonise other groups rather than discern ways to make a difference and provide solutions and make the most of opportunities.

Language is also a crucial part of all that is written here. To speak of people going hungry may in itself sound strange to most people living in Britain today. Perhaps more strange should be the use of the word 'welfare' when it is attributed to a small section of our society who are then all too easily pilloried or marginalised. Is it not time to start a much broader conversation to focus again on the need for all members of our society to be secure and to have the opportunity to flourish?

We should be concerned about the welfare of all, not simply the specific mechanics of those who need to make sure they have what is needed to live their lives. Welfare is about much more than that. From the time of Beveridge and Temple onwards it has existed to demonstrate that we are one people with care for all.

My experience of visiting food banks and other community schemes is that those who volunteer in them understand the crucial importance of seeing each individual as a human being and want to engage in their support and wellbeing. They all learn the vital lesson that lies behind this report – that the welfare of one other person is intimately linked to the welfare of every other person.

Although it is, as I have said, sad to have to write this Foreword, there is also cause for gratitude to all those who seek to meet the needs the report describes. Far more than either of those points, I encourage all of us to consider not only what we can do to help alleviate the immediate situation, but also how can we take part in the wider debate about the nature of our society and add our weight to the demand for us to ensure we are truly interdependent.

The Most Revd. and Rt Hon Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

President, Feeding Britain

Summary

1. Five key reforms outlined in this report are being pursued by a new charitable organisation called **Feeding Britain**. The organisation's objective is to enact a comprehensive blueprint for relieving and then preventing hunger in the United Kingdom. Its mission is to ensure everybody in the United Kingdom has the resources and opportunities to obtain sufficient food.

   Feeding Britain will act on five priorities for 2016:

   - A most immediate intervention to counter hunger will be to encourage all of Britain's food banks – regardless of their affiliation to any wider organisation – to host trained welfare rights officers, and other appropriate professionals, at each food bank session. Our hope is that the food bank movement should set itself an objective within this model, which we have called Food Bank Plus, of addressing the crises that have led people to be hungry. **Feeding Britain** will seek to co-ordinate the ongoing expansion and development of a national Food Bank Plus model to cut short the duration of hunger experienced by those individuals and families who have had to ask their local food bank for help. 65% of those helped by a welfare rights officer during their first visit to Birkenhead's main food bank are able to resolve their problem there and then, meaning they no longer have to rely on emergency food parcels.
   - We will work with all those groups who aim to eliminate the destruction of edible food while some of our fellow citizens go hungry.
   - A longer term intervention to counter Britain's vulnerability to hunger is the social supermarket. Britain's first two social supermarkets, operated by Community Shop, opened in 2013 and 2014. A third is due very shortly to open in Grimsby. As a first step, **Feeding Britain** is committed to supporting the establishment of at least one social supermarket in each of the 12 regions of the United Kingdom. **Feeding Britain** has, to date, been unable to secure funding to support this development. We will continue to progress this over the coming year.
   - Immediate action is required to abolish hunger amongst children during the school holidays. **Feeding Britain** will seek ways of building on the work that has been piloted in different parts of the country, to establish year-round School Holiday Food and Fun provision in each region of the United Kingdom. This will enable us to demonstrate the value of programmes with national coverage, but firmly embedded in and driven by local communities, to tackle school holiday hunger.
   - A fifth strand of **Feeding Britain**'s plan of action will be to build up the series of pilot projects that have been working to address hunger in local communities.

Hungry Britain in 2015

How many people are relying on emergency food parcels and other charitable food supplies?

There was no single picture provided to us on the number of people going hungry in this country. Many food banks reported to us an increase in demand for emergency food parcels in 2015. Others thankfully reported a decline and, in some areas, demand for emergency food parcels might have begun to level off over the course of the past year. The reasons may include, but are not limited to a significant fall in the numbers of benefit claimants being sanctioned; demand being spread more thinly between different food banks; the effectiveness of Food Bank Plus in limiting the number of times people need to visit a food bank; more efficient delivery of benefit; stricter eligibility criteria attached to food bank vouchers; a reduction in need following recent economic growth and significant rise in employment; and a reduction in the number of agencies that are able to issue food bank vouchers. There was no singular consistent reason driving a rise or fall in demand, it varied considerably across the country.

We must stress however that a levelling off in some areas, although most welcome, is a huge distance from abolishing hunger as we now know it in our country. The truth remains that we do not have, and have never had, accurate data on the extent of hunger in this country. The only data that is published comes from the food bank movement and this is patchy. All we know is that still there are too many people in this country who are having to rely on their local food bank in order to stave off hunger. Indeed, in many towns and cities, the number of our fellow citizens drawing upon this emergency support remains unprecedented.

Each recommendation in this report is made with the intention of stemming and then reducing the numbers of people in this country needing to rely on their local food bank, or who are otherwise hungry.

Who is relying on emergency food parcels and other charitable food supplies?

Food banks are helping predominantly single, unemployed adults and families with children who are struggling to survive on a low income. Almost all of those relying on emergency food parcels are below retirement age. Single, unemployed adults are more likely to have experienced a mental illness, a recent family breakdown or an otherwise sudden change of circumstances. While some families simply do not possess the skills needed to cope, many parents trying to survive on a low income often will have sacrificed their own wellbeing to try and feed their children. Our evidence suggests that a large proportion of these families are struggling to stay afloat without help from a food bank. Limitations on data mean we do not know precisely how many, nor the exact reasons why.

How many times do people require help from food banks and other charitable providers?

We received only limited evidence on the number of times people require help from their local food bank. Across the Trussell Trust network, on average, people need no more than two emergency food parcels in a year. This would suggest that food banks deal primarily with a one-off crisis that has interrupted a household's cash flow for a short period of time, but that a smaller number of our fellow citizens require longer term or more persistent support.

Are we any closer to knowing how many people in Britain are hungry?

An effective anti-hunger strategy must be guided by a robust set of data. Ideally this data would give the public some idea of the numbers of people on a daily basis who are at risk of going without food. Britain's record on this front is dismal.

While the Trussell Trust is able to produce data on the numbers of food parcels it has given to those in crisis, it is only just beginning to record the numbers of people each year actually relying on its food banks. Likewise there is no data

produced on the numbers of people relying on independent food banks, nor do we know how many people suffer hunger in silence.

2. We warmly welcome the news that the Trussell Trust's data system is beginning to capture the number of unique food bank users on a national scale. The publication of this data would mark a hugely important step forward. We recommend that the Trussell Trust includes this data within its next annual publication.

3. We reiterate our call to the Trussell Trust to include within its data collection method and database a way of breaking down in detail the different benefit-related problems, and other factors, which have resulted in people being referred to a Trussell Trust food bank. We call on independent food banks to do likewise, following West Cheshire Food Bank's detailed study released earlier this year which provided a comprehensive breakdown of individual problems that had led people to be hungry.

4. We recommend that each Citizens Advice Bureau conducts an annual survey of its food voucher allocations, and the reasons behind each allocation, based on the excellent model produced by Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau.

5. We recommend that each Archbishop and Bishop in the United Kingdom attempts to compile data from within their own Dioceses on the number of food banks run by the Trussell Trust, the number that are run on an independent basis, the number of other charitable providers of food, and the numbers of people relying on their assistance.

How much hunger in Britain is hidden?

Even if we were able to estimate from a national data gathering exercise the overall number of people relying on food banks, we still would not know for sure how many people in this country are hungry.

We were confronted in our evidence with some considerable concern around those individuals who suffer in silence without food.

6. We recommend that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in partnership with the Department of Health, allocates a small sum of money from its research budget to monitoring vulnerability to hunger in the United Kingdom.

We encourage those voluntary organisations and research bodies who have undertaken some initial activity on this front to pursue some joint lines of inquiry and we would welcome reports of progress on this vitally important measurement.

Feeding Britain in 2015

How many food banks and other charitable food providers are feeding hungry Britain?

A fitting account of Britain's food bank landscape was given by the Bishop of Sheffield, who described in his Diocese's submission 'a large number of food banks of different kinds in an ever evolving kaleidoscope of provision'.

Again the most advanced source of data stems from the Trussell Trust. There are currently 420 Trussell Trust food banks – the same number as this time last year. 40,000 people volunteered for Trussell Trust food banks in 2014-15.

7. We reiterate our call to food banks and other voluntary organisations in each village, town and city to make contact with one another, come together to meet as a single entity, and build on this initial contact by mapping the provision on offer within each locality. We believe this approach is most likely to facilitate the pooling of limited resources, resulting in a more effective local support system for people in need, and bring improvements in data collection.

How have food banks and other charitable food providers developed and innovated to feed hungry Britain?

Last year we encouraged food banks to build on their emergency response by embracing a Food Bank Plus model, in which they would host specialists who are trained to address the problems that have led people to be hungry.

In an ideal world the Food Bank Plus intervention would not be necessary, but for the time being it remains essential.

The effectiveness of Food Bank Plus is clear; the more support made available to people during their first visit to a food bank, the shorter the period of time they are likely to be hungry.

8. We strongly recommend where feasible that food banks host trained specialists who are capable of addressing the problems that have led people to be hungry. This Food Bank Plus approach might take the form of benefits advice and advocacy, debt management and help with budgeting, or courses on how to cook decent meals on a shoestring budget. This approach is proven to reduce the duration and severity of hunger experienced by those individuals who have been referred to a food bank. We are pleased that the Trussell Trust is piloting this recommendation which we issued in our first report.

9. The Department for Work and Pensions must proceed with caution in its early moves to station members of staff in food banks. While we welcome the Department's willingness to engage with individual food banks and seek ways of addressing some of the root causes of hunger, we have reservations over the potential effectiveness of this policy compared with, say, the support given by those welfare rights officers in the voluntary sector who have proven themselves capable of restricting to a bare minimum the number of visits people need to make to their local food bank. However, this should be a decision for individual food banks to make, based on their local circumstances, and we would not wish to discourage such partnerships where they can be helpful. As the Trussell Trust noted, 'we need to look at the most helpful ways for local jobcentres and food banks to work together'. Our primary concern here is that people exposed to hunger should not be put off seeking help from their local food bank because of concerns around the presence of members of staff from the Department.

10. We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions publishes a short evaluation of its early moves to station members of staff in food banks. No further moves should be taken on this front until the evaluation has been published and debated. This evaluation should detail, amongst other things, the destinations of those people who were signposted to each member of staff.

11. We recommend that the Federation of Small Businesses, British Chambers of Commerce and British Hospitality Association encourage their members to offer their services to their nearest food bank. Such support might include, but need not be limited to, short employment courses for the long-term unemployed.

12. We recommend that each airport makes contact with its local food bank to offer them unopened non-alcoholic drinks, toothpaste, shower gels and other hygiene products that are confiscated during security checks. Such supplies will play a crucial role in alleviating at least some of the pressure on household budgets when individuals and families cannot afford to buy food.

13. We recommend that Local Authorities top slice a small sum from their Public Health budgets to contribute to the training by the Children's Food Trust of volunteers in food banks and other charitable providers of food, so they are equipped to provide one or more elements of the Food Bank Plus model.

From where have food banks and other charitable food providers sourced their emergency food supplies?

The vast majority of food banks and other charitable food providers receive the bulk of their food supplies from the public. These supplies most often take the form of donations through supermarket collections, church congregations and school Harvest Festival activities.

All of us must redouble our efforts to minimise the numbers of people having to rely on food banks. Alongside this, we must try to ensure that food banks and other voluntary providers of food do not run short of supplies and face the prospect of having to limit the support they can give to the hungry.

14. We recommend that supermarkets, on top of their incredibly important partnerships with the Trussell Trust and FareShare, allow both national organisations as well as independent groups operating at a local level to collect locally based surplus food from their stores.

15. We recommend that Local Authorities offer surplus storage space to food banks and other charitable providers of food before it can be sold, so as to house chillers and other refrigeration equipment.

16. We recommend that food banks and other charitable providers of food form networks that can negotiate a local collective membership scheme with FareShare. This could enable each group to receive fresh food at a time that suits them. The benefits are twofold; more resources would be freed up to invest in Food Bank Plus and other support services, and the nutrition of the food on offer would be improved.

17. In those areas where a local collective membership scheme with FareShare might not be feasible, we recommend that networks of food banks and other charitable providers of food approach their Local Authority with a request to establish a central food storage point along the lines pioneered by The Oxford Food Bank, and that whoever is given the responsibility for this central storage point is then able to build partnerships with individual stores that allow them to collect and store fresh surplus food each day before it is redistributed.

18. Where this is not forthcoming, we call on Local Authorities to identify those members of the community who are able to spare the time and a reliable vehicle to replicate models such as The Oxford Food Bank, by providing them with a central storage point and a small start-up grant. The Big Lottery Fund might wish to consider what help it can extend to such models – particularly in areas where provision is currently limited or absent.

19. Regardless of whether each network of food banks and other charitable providers of food pursues a partnership with FareShare, or decides to operate independently, we recommend that each regional manager of Britain's major food retailers and manufacturers should arrange for chillers and other refrigeration equipment to be donated to them following a store refit, for the purpose of collecting, storing and distributing fresh food.

20. We recommend that all food banks and other charitable providers of food apply to become members of FareShare's FoodCloud so that, if time and space

allow them, they can top up their stock several times a week with small amounts of locally sourced fresh food.

The causes of hunger in 2015

The operation of the social security system

Our evidence suggests that the prompt delivery of benefit and tax credit payments in full, coupled with a fair and effective sanctions regime, would more than halve the numbers of people relying on emergency food parcels.

We would welcome confirmation from the Department for Work and Pensions that all Jobcentre Plus staff are able to access and process information on a benefit claim through one single computer system on a single screen, so as to prevent complications and delays.

21. We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions should guarantee within each Jobcentre Plus the means through which claimants can speak to a member of staff, either via telephone or in person, about a new or existing benefit claim.

22. We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions should establish a dedicated telephone line for representatives from nominated charities to call on behalf of a claimant, in the event they have an enquiry regarding a new or existing benefit claim.

Awareness of emergency benefit payments

A system processing millions of benefit claims will not get every claim right, all of the time. Hence the importance we and many others attach to the system of emergency payments; namely Short Term Benefit Advances and Hardship Payments.

23. We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions builds on its existing efforts, undertaken in response to **Feeding Britain**, to make new claimants aware of their option to apply for a Short Term Benefit Advance while their claim is being processed. We understand this option is now contained within the standard script issued to Jobcentre Plus staff. In those parts of the country where it is presented with evidence that claimants are not being made aware of this option, we recommend that the Department obliges Jobcentre Plus staff to apply the best practice that is evident in other Jobcentres that have most effectively helped claimants through this period.

We have written to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions asking him to undertake a short review of the reformed Hardship Payments system, in particular its ability to prevent hunger among those claimants who have had a sanction applied to their benefit claim.

The delayed payment of benefit

When somebody puts in a new claim for benefit the chances are they are in a desperate state and, in all likelihood, have exhausted all other avenues of support. Any delay in the processing of their claim, therefore, brings into play the need for emergency food parcels to help stave off hunger.

We very much welcome the progress made by the Government to shorten the length of time it takes to process and pay new benefit claims.

Despite this progress, 205,457 people making a new claim for Jobseeker's Allowance waited more than ten days in 2014-15 for a decision on their case, and nearly half of them (95,561 people) waited more than 16 days. We do not assign blame to either side for this: there are circumstances where the Department for Work and Pensions is chasing for additional information from new claimants, and times when administrative error results in a delay. Nonetheless, our evidence suggests that the delayed payment of benefit remains the most common event triggering the need for an emergency food parcel.

The Department for Work and Pensions has accepted in principle the need for a secure online

format through which important documents required to support a benefit claim can be scanned and submitted. However, we have yet to see any evidence of this being put into practice and we continue to receive evidence of these documents being lost. We recognise that there are important security implications for personal data, and appreciate that the Department has an obligation to ensure any system is fit for purpose. Nevertheless, we encourage it to progress the development of this as swiftly as possible.

24. We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions sets itself a target for reducing and then eliminating the likelihood of delays in the processing and payment of new benefit claims. An initial step in pursuit of this target must be to make available as soon as possible an online channel through which claimants can submit scanned copies of important documents required to support a benefit claim.

25. We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions should automatically offer new claimants a Short Term Benefit Advance if their benefit claim has not been processed and paid within five days.

The loss of benefit through sanctioning

We believe the evidence on the application of benefit sanctions demonstrates a link; if fewer sanctions are applied, fewer people find themselves in need of an emergency food parcel. This is inherently difficult to prove, but our cumulative evidence suggests there may be a link.

The Government announced in October 2015 that it will trial arrangements whereby claimants are given a Yellow Card warning of its intention to apply a sanction, and a 14-day period to provide a justifiable reason for failing to meet the terms of their Claimant Commitment, before the decision to sanction is made. The Department for Work and Pensions will then review this information before deciding whether a sanction remains appropriate. We very much welcome this development and we expect the Department to publish the results of this trial early in 2017.

We believe it is those claimants who should be able to prove with ease that they have a justifiable reason for missing an appointment at Jobcentre Plus, for example, who are most likely to be protected by the introduction of a Yellow Card early warning system.

26. The Department for Work and Pensions may wish to consider building into the Yellow Card early warning system the option for Jobcentre Plus staff to issue a non-financial sanction for a claimant's first failure to meet the terms of their Claimant Commitment.

27. We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions introduces a 'grace period' for vulnerable claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance, during which the requirements placed upon them are eased at times of transition or acute difficulty. It might wish to focus this pilot initially on homeless claimants.

28. We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions pilots a monitoring exercise in which it tracks and records the destinations of claimants who have been sanctioned. The results of this exercise should be laid before both Houses of Parliament so we can discover how many claimants find work, for example, and how many others run the risk of being exposed to destitution.

29. We recommend that 'disentitled' as well as 'sanctioned' claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance should retain their entitlement to Housing Benefit, so as to avoid a total loss of income and possible homelessness.

Changes to an existing benefit claim

We support the policy of moving onto Jobseeker's Allowance those claimants of Employment and Support Allowance who are found fit for work. But this transfer from one benefit to another must not be allowed to open up a gap in household income for weeks on end.

The Government does not know how many claimants are left stranded with no income during a transfer between Employment and Support Allowance and Jobseeker's Allowance. Of utmost importance here is to ensure these claimants are identified and then offered a continuous form of income.

30. We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions records how many claimants are left stranded with no income, and for how long, during a transfer between Employment and Support Allowance and Jobseeker's Allowance, while continuing the payment of a minimum rate of Employment and Support Allowance right up until eligibility for Jobseeker's Allowance has been established and a new claim has been set in train.

We would welcome confirmation from the Department for Work and Pensions on the level of the formal time limit, due to be implemented from April 2016, on the Mandatory Reconsideration period during which Employment and Support Allowance claimants may challenge their fit for work decision.

31. We reiterate our call for claimants to be paid a minimum rate of Employment and Support Allowance for the duration of their Mandatory Reconsideration period, again so as to avoid a total loss of income.

Moving from welfare into work

The transition from Jobseeker's Allowance into work brings with it a barrage of extra costs that must be met before a first month's wages are paid. These additional costs, according to our evidence, can restrict new employees' ability to afford food.

32. We strongly recommend the pursuit within Jobcentre Plus of a reformed welfare contract, in which claimants' duties are properly buttressed by a package of support to which they might be entitled. As a first reform, the Department for Work and Pensions should roll over the £64 million that was unspent from last year's Flexible Support Fund and allocate it to a ring-fenced 'First Month In Work' pot. Jobcentre Plus officials should automatically offer weekly payments from this pot to all claimants entering work, or to cover the costs of all journeys over a certain distance to their new place of work.

Tax credits

Among those food banks forecasting an increase in need in the year ahead, the standalone contributory factor was the proposal in the 2015 Summer Budget for a series of cuts to the generosity of tax credits that top-up the wages of lower paid workers to a more adequate minimum.

We very much welcome the Government's decision to reverse its proposed cuts to tax credits for people in low-paid work. The proposed cuts emerged as a persistent source of anxiety among those individuals and organisations who submitted evidence to us. However, we believe that there is scope to improve the administration of tax credits in order to reduce avoidable errors and delays which may result in people being unable to afford food.

The cessation of tax credit payments for existing claimants who are alleged to have failed to submit the necessary paperwork required to process a renewal, or a change of household circumstances, needs to be addressed.

33. We recommend that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs establishes a reliable mechanism which makes clear the

whereabouts of important documentation relating to tax credit claims, acknowledges the submission of online renewals, and does not suspend payments until it can be proved that claimants have received and then failed to respond appropriately to the necessary paperwork. A first step should be to initiate a phone call to claimants if the receipt of a claim renewal form has not been acknowledged within a reasonable period of time.

34. We reiterate our call for Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to guarantee continuity of income for those existing claimants who report a change in household circumstances, by implementing a minimum tax credit payment while it recalculates their entitlement.

Universal Credit

The early signs from the rollout of Universal Credit – a new working-age benefit which is intended to replace tax credits, Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit and Income Support, by 2020 – suggest that two of its main features already have impacted on the need for emergency food parcels.

35. We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions reviews the impact on claimants' financial circumstances of the six-week wait for a first Universal Credit payment.

36. We recommend that food banks and other charitable providers of food follow the practice employed by the Leeds Food Aid Network, in continually promoting their local credit union's Budget Account. This account will allocate Universal Credit to particular items of household expenditure. Crucially, it will make sure people's rent is paid.

37. We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions immediately revokes the requirement that new Universal Credit claimants may only apply for an emergency payment within the first 21 days of what might be a 42-day wait for their first Universal Credit payment. We believe claimants should be entitled to apply for emergency support at any point while they are waiting for their claim to be processed and then paid.

The local welfare safety net

Our evidence on the practical delivery of local welfare has revealed a mixed picture. Some Local Authorities have clearly stepped up to the mark and are finding innovative ways to deliver better services in partnership with local charities and groups. Others, we were disappointed to learn, are viewed as 'non-existent'. There is a clear need in some areas for the local welfare safety net to be strengthened.

We encountered concerns in evidence around the Government's move to subsume funding for the local welfare safety net into Local Authorities' overall funding allocation. In its first years of operation this pot of funding was ring-fenced. The removal of this ring-fence, in some cases, may have resulted in Local Authorities using the funds to fill financial holes in other vitally important frontline services. The net effect is that Local Authorities might have no other option than to refer people to their local food bank, rather than offer them direct emergency help.

38. We recommend that the Government sets out a provisional funding settlement for the local welfare safety net for each year until 2020, and given the evidence of some vulnerable people falling through the net, consider whether this funding should be ring-fenced.

39. We recommend that the standard script given to Jobcentre Plus advisers be updated so new and existing claimants are told that they can seek temporary

advances towards emergency costs from the local welfare safety net.

40. We recommend that Local Authorities should not restrict eligibility to the local welfare safety net to people in receipt of means-tested benefits, for some people in desperate need may actually find themselves waiting for a decision on a new benefit claim, and working families in persistently low-paid work must not be barred from assistance in a crisis.

41. We recommend that each Local Authority consults every year with local voluntary organisations who work with our very poorest citizens, on the types of costs that should be covered by the local welfare safety net and from whom claims should be invited. This criteria should reflect the size of the funds available as well as the diverse and changing needs of the very poorest in each community. Equally, we would emphasise that where local welfare is not operating properly, local voluntary organisations should enter into a dialogue with Local Authorities on how it might be enhanced.

A continuation of the long term trends disadvantaging Britain's poor

According to the House of Commons Library, in the eight years to August 2015:

- Consumer prices increased by 23% in the United Kingdom; compared with 15% in the United States, 14% in Canada, 12% in France and 12% in Germany.

- The price of food and non-alcoholic drinks increased by 31% in the United Kingdom; compared with 28% in Canada, 20% in the United States, 18% in Germany and 12% in France.

- The price of domestic energy increased by 63% in the United Kingdom; compared with 34% in France, 23% in Germany, 14% in Canada and 2% in the United States.

- The cost of renting increased by 22% in the United Kingdom; compared with 15% in France, 15% in the United States, 12% in Canada and 10% in Germany.

- And yet in the seven years to 2014 annual earnings increased by just 13% in the United Kingdom; compared with 14% in France, 15% in the United States, 17% in Germany and 21% in Canada.

Market prices are working against the diets of Britain's poor. We believe these trends have contributed significantly to the struggles many families in this country face when seeking to balance their income against the monies required to cover their food, rent and utility bills. It is these struggles which have played a most important role in sustaining the need for food banks in 2015.

The struggle to make ends meet on a low income

A most striking finding from our evidence is the large number of people citing an extended period of low income, or no income at all, from work or benefit as the main reason for their hunger.

2015 saw a significant increase in the proportion of food bank referrals resulting from insufficient income over a sustained period of time. This sizeable group of people, termed 'once a monthers' by ReadiFood, consists of those who cannot make ends meet through to the end of each month and for whom a food bank becomes a necessary tool for survival.

Our evidence brings up two possible explanations for this constant vulnerability to hunger, both of which we emphasised in our report last year: first, most families who find themselves struggling to balance the books simply do not have enough money to make ends meet, despite attempting to live within limited means; second, some families simply do not possess the skills needed to cope. It is important to stress that this is the

regrettable continuation of a longer term trend, and not simply a phenomenon that has emerged in the last year.

A shortage of budgeting skills

Our evidence suggests that some people relying on food banks tend to have a low level of financial cushioning, so that benefit delays, or unexpected outgoings, can trigger the need for an emergency food parcel. On the one hand, this demands that the Government improves the timely delivery of benefits, reduces error, and improves the processes of Mandatory Reconsideration and appeal, so that individuals do not experience unexpected drops in income. However, it is also important that people are helped to build up their financial resilience for when disaster may strike, and the Department for Work and Pensions should consider ways in which this can be encouraged.

One such way might be for Budgeting Advisors in Jobcentre Plus to identify a strategy with claimants for building up a savings pot, however modest, by helping them to open an account which gives them a clear idea of their disposable income, less their essential bills. Such an account could give people a better chance of being able to budget and, where appropriate, save in order to build up resilience.

42. We recommend that long-term resilience should be the main aim of budgeting support offered to benefit claimants, and as a first step the Treasury should ask National Savings and Investments to create accounts that are tailored for individuals who might otherwise struggle to budget, let alone save.

Even if wages and benefits were high enough to provide a subsistence minimum, we fear some of our citizens would remain below this minimum because of the havoc wreaked on their budgets by addictions to drink, smoking and gambling. A recent study suggests over 432,000 children are made poor because their parents smoke.

Action is required to help parents quit smoking, both for the sake of their children's immediate and long-term health and also to free up some vital monies with which they can buy food.

43. We recommend that Local Authorities trial an intervention to help women quit smoking during pregnancy. Based on an ongoing piece of work in Merseyside, such trials should encompass stress management support sessions to help pregnant women cope with the stresses associated with quitting smoking while pregnant, a "quit buddy" to support them on this journey, and a financial incentive to encourage them to stop smoking.

A lack of money with which to budget

These observations, which must be part of any serious discussion on hunger, must also be balanced by the overwhelming issue of low income. In most cases families' vulnerability to hunger boils down simply to a lack of money with which to buy food, pay rent, keep up to date with utility bills and sometimes have a little over for a small treat.

44. We recommend that suppliers of gas, electricity, water, communications, and credit introduce a 'breathing space' mechanism. This would allow pre-existing contractual commitments to be suspended or at least eased for a fixed period and without charge, to allow households experiencing a sudden loss of income to reorganise their finances, particularly in compassionate circumstances or where households have an exemplary track record with payments.

45. As a second part of a reformed welfare contract, each local network of food banks and other charitable providers of food should seek permission from their Regional Jobcentre Plus Director to share information through Jobcentre Plus from gas, electricity, water, and

communications providers outlining 'help to make your money go further'. This information should be distributed to new claimants when they sign their Claimant Commitment.

The costs of gas and electricity

While the cost of a basket of food has fallen and remains low, gas and electricity bills, in particular for poor households, remain high. Our concern on this matter is shared among those food banks who gave evidence to us.

A most prominent source of concern is the reliance of many poorer households on prepayment meters, which by and large charge a higher tariff on each unit of energy over and above the costs paid by mainly more fortunate Direct Debit customers.

We welcome the steps Ofgem has taken to improve the availability of a wider range of tariffs for households relying on a prepayment meter, as well as their ability to switch providers if they are repaying debt on their fuel bills, and to review the charges levied on the installation and removal of a meter. We hope it will build on these initial steps.

Based on the evidence of hardship experienced by a sizeable number of mainly poor households who pay for their gas and electricity using a prepayment meter, earlier this year we submitted to Ofgem a proposal for a New Deal on Prepayment Meters. This proposal, which has received the support of 112 Members of Parliament,[1] called on energy suppliers to:

- Proceed as soon as possible with 'Smart Pay As You Go Meters' for their poorest customers, on the understanding that they eliminate the premium charged over and above the costs incurred by other customers
- Publish the additional costs incurred on supplying and maintaining each prepayment meter, to enable a comparison with the premiums charged to households who rely on a prepayment meter
- Abolish fees for the installation and termination of a prepayment meter
- Provide two-week credit tokens to households relying on emergency food parcels and who cannot afford to top up their prepayment meter
- Offer rebates to prepayment customers caught out by the standing charge on their meter over the Summer months

We wish to add a sixth strand to this proposal, in light of concerns around the potential incorporation of 'peak tariffs' into 'Smart Pay As You Go Meters'.

46. We would welcome a firm guarantee from energy supplies that households who currently rely on a prepayment meter will not be charged more for their gas and electricity once they are transferred to a 'Smart Pay As You Go Meter'.

47. We recommend that Ofgem, with the support of the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, should set energy suppliers a target of phasing in the New Deal on Prepayment Meters by 2020, so as to eliminate the additional costs incurred by this group of mainly poor households and to ensure emergency support is available when they find themselves unable to afford gas and electricity. The Secretary of State should convene a summit with energy suppliers to negotiate a timetable for its implementation.

48. We very much welcome the acceptance by the Department of Energy and Climate Change of our recommendation in

[1] Early Day Motion 236, Prepayment Meters, tabled by The Rt Hon Frank Field MP in July 2015, can be found at http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2015-16/236

Feeding Britain to extend the Warm Home Discount to low-income families. We recommend further that families with young children who are struggling to make ends meet – regardless of whether they are in, or out, of work – should be included within the Core Eligibility Group for the Warm Home Discount. This would mean they automatically receive a discount of £140 on their gas and electricity bills during the winter months.

The battle to stay up to date with rent payments

Over and beyond the struggle to afford food and pay the utility bills, we were told of the financial pressure placed upon some tenants who rent either in the private or social housing sector.

49. We recommend that Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords should take it upon themselves not to evict tenants who have built up arrears and are at risk of hunger or homelessness. They should instead establish a manageable repayment plan.

50. We recommend that Local Authorities consult with local voluntary groups on whether their criteria for Council Tax support is most effectively protecting the poorest households who may be exposed to hunger, and if necessary, seek further local insight on how these criteria might be amended.

51. We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions communicates with each new Universal Credit claimant's landlord to inform them when the claimant is expected to receive their first housing component of Universal Credit, so the landlord can plan accordingly. Alternatively, the Department might consider awarding an interim claim consisting only of the housing component while the remainder of the claim is calculated. The objective here is to avoid the accumulation of rent arrears that could potentially leave claimants with little or no money for food.

A lack of facilities with which to cook

The food storage and cooking facilities offered to tenants in return for their rent monies are sometimes unbelievably inadequate.

52. We reiterate our call to the Department for Communities and Local Government for a new regulation requiring landlords to provide their tenants with basic cooking facilities.

Low and inadequate earnings

It seems as though a growing number of people working for low wages are relying on emergency food parcels.

While this growth was not quantified in our evidence, it was said to have increased due to low and irregular hours of work, problems arising from the tax credit system and the absence of free school meals for children of low earners.

53. We welcome the recent steps that have been taken to tackle abuse in zero-hours contracts, including banning exclusivity clauses, and recognise they offer some employers and employees flexibility that is appreciated by both parties. However, we received evidence suggesting that zero-hours contracts are not operating effectively in all circumstances. We therefore recommend that the Government consults broadly on whether further legislative action is required to protect the wellbeing of those people who are employed on a zero-hours contract and wish to work more hours than they are being offered by their employer.

The National Living Wage could potentially be a revolutionary move and we applaud the

Government for taking the initiative on eradicating low pay as we have known it. [2]

We nonetheless believe that more of the nation's largest and most profitable organisations should pay their workers a voluntary Living Wage rate which is calculated to cover the costs of life's essentials.

54. We reiterate our call to the Government to lead by example in the campaign to eradicate low pay. The Cabinet Office should require each government department to become a Living Wage Employer by paying its own employees a Living Wage (as defined by the Living Wage Foundation[3]) and extending this commitment to agency, outsourced and contract workers.

The burden of household debt

Although, with one or two exceptions, debt is not a common trigger for food bank usage, it is difficult to state with any certainty the number of cases in which debt has been a major contributing factor. Our evidence suggests families who are carrying large sums of debt when they seek help from a food bank are more likely to remain dependent on food parcels for a very long period of time.

We hope that our proposal for the creation of accounts that are tailored for individuals who might otherwise struggle to budget and save, in combination with the introduction of a 'breathing space' mechanism and the growth and development of Food Bank Plus, might address at an early stage the burden of household debt which limits some households' ability to buy food, thereby reducing the number of times they need to rely on help from a food bank.

We welcome the steps taken by the Financial Conduct Authority to regulate the payday loan industry. It has shone a bright light upon some of the industry's most predatory aspects and then followed this up with swift action.

Child hunger in the school holidays

The queue for help from Britain's food banks tends to grow once the school bells ring to mark the beginning of the holidays. For those children who usually receive a daily free school meal during term time, these bells often usher in a period of going day after day without a substantial meal.

It comes as no surprise that voluntary projects in different parts of the country have put themselves forward to stem the concerns around the unmet need among poorer families during the school holidays. Communal projects have been set up in some areas to provide free food and fun. Not only do they afford poorer children the same opportunities as their more fortunate peers to have fun in the holidays, but they also ensure that all children can receive a good meal each day. Moreover, our early evidence suggests they effectively reduce the numbers of people having to rely on food banks.

55. We recommend that voluntary projects delivering school holiday provision offer parents a 'benefit health check' to ensure they are not going without vital additional monies to which they might be entitled.

56. We recommend that Local Authorities learn and apply lessons from a national leader in providing free food and fun for hungry children during the school holidays. East Renfrewshire Council has for the past ten years offered two holiday schools. At a cost of £88,000 a year from the Local Authority's Education Budget, with food prepared in-house, the holiday schools ensure that:

- Up to 200 children each day who are entitled to free school meals continue to

[2] The National Living Wage will be set at £7.20 an hour from April 2016 as a minimum rate of hourly pay for all employees aged 25 and over. It is forecast to rise to over £9 an hour by 2020.

[3] The Living Wage is set to increase in April 2016 to £9.40 an hour in London and £8.25 an hour elsewhere, as a voluntary benchmark that is calculated to cover the costs of living.

have access to a free healthy meal outside of the school term.

- These children participate in sport, physical activity and creative activities which promote health and wellbeing during the school holidays.

- School buildings are used for the year-round benefit of their communities.

A national programme backed by £200 million could all but eliminate child hunger during the school holidays, and thereby reduce considerably the number of families relying on emergency food parcels.

57. We recommend that the Government gives serious consideration to the Health Select Committee's recommendation to introduce a small levy of 20p per litre on drinks that are high in sugar content. It should consider also top slicing 4p per litre of this levy to fund a national programme of school holiday provision. Not only could such a levy encourage people to make healthier choices, but even a fraction of the revenue raised could reduce substantially the need for food banks in this country.

Registration for free school meals

The problems stemming from the under-registration of children who are eligible for free school meals are twofold: first, each of these poor children risks going without a decent meal every day; second, their school misses out on up to £1,320 each year in Pupil Premium funding to support their education.

Fortunately, we have encountered and encouraged a small but growing number of Local Authorities who are using their Housing Benefit records to identify such families whose children are eligible, but not registered to receive free school meals. Once identified, each family is informed by the Local Authority that their child has automatically been signed up to receive free school meals, with no need to fill in any forms unless they wish to opt out of entitlement.

This innovative work delivers a win-win situation, at no extra cost to Local Authorities, in that children need not suffer hunger and their schools receive vital additional funding towards their education.

58. We recommend that the Secretary of State for Education issues guidance and writes to all Local Authorities bestowing upon them the duty to automatically register all eligible children for free school meals.

Over 100 Members of Parliament have pledged to support the Free School Meals (Automatic Registration of Eligible Children) Bill which, if enacted, would implement this recommendation in full. The Bill has been drawn up by The Rt Hon Frank Field MP and it will receive its first reading in the House of Commons on Tuesday 15 December 2015.

Breakfast clubs

We were confronted in our evidence with hunger amongst some children when they arrive for school each morning. Some of these children may have gone without food because their parents failed to get them ready for school and either could not, or would not get them to school in time to attend a breakfast club.

We therefore welcome the carrying out of our recommendation for the Troubled Families programme to be extended in an attempt to 'turn around' those families who send their children to school hungry. We believe nonetheless that all too many children going without food before school do so because of a lack of money, for reasons covered elsewhere in this report, with which their parents can buy food. Indeed, many parents themselves will have sacrificed a meal to try and abate their child's hunger. These parents are simply terrified that any admission of poverty will result in their children being taken into care.

59. We recommend that the Department for Education, with help from the Troubled Families programme, begins collecting data on the numbers of children who

begin the school day hungry, and the reasons why.

60. We recommend where possible that all schools offer free breakfast facilities for their pupils and refer to the Troubled Families programme those families who fail repeatedly to ensure their child is fed, either at home or using the free breakfast facility, before the beginning of the school day.

61. We ask that Magic Breakfast provides the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger with a list of its partner schools in each parliamentary constituency, so we as Members of Parliament can encourage those schools who are not on the list to begin providing free breakfast facilities.

The absence of free school meals for children of low earners

62. We recommend that the Department for Education consults on the most effective use of its free school meals budget to ensure all poor children are guaranteed a free school meal each day, and that it clarifies as a matter of urgency the entitlement to this support of children whose parents are in receipt of different components of Universal Credit. Action on both fronts could help to cement work as the best route out of poverty.

Healthy Start

We applaud the Government for supporting the provision of Healthy Start vouchers. These vouchers entitle parents living on low incomes, with young children, to free milk, fresh and frozen fruit and vegetables, and infant formula milk. As with any benefit, or benefit in-kind which relies on a household means test, though, we encountered concerns around parents failing to take up their entitlement to Healthy Start vouchers.

63. We recommend Local Authorities make it a key responsibility of Health Visitors to register parents living on low incomes, with young children, for Healthy Start vouchers. This registration should take place automatically, with parents given the choice to opt-out.

Rescuing Britain's wasted food

Social supermarkets – Improving access to affordable food

A next phase in Britain's fightback against hunger must include the growth and evolution of social supermarkets. Here we have an accessible source of affordable food that also comes with so much more in the way of practical and emotional support, and which has the potential to catch families before they descend into a crisis situation that necessitates help from a food bank.

64. We believe social supermarkets must play an increasingly significant role in countering the vulnerability of so many families in this country to hunger. We recommend that Local Authorities make available the appropriate facilities to host social supermarkets. We also seek as a matter of urgency a one-off start-up grant to establish a social supermarket in each of the 12 regions in the United Kingdom.

Using good quality surplus food to reconnect with our most vulnerable citizens

As things stand, most voluntary groups do not have the capacity to collect, sort and store fresh food that becomes surplus. Likewise it can prove costly and burdensome for some retailers and manufacturers to rescue and then divert this food for human consumption.

At a cost of £150 million a year the Government could bring to an end the scandal of perfectly good food being thrown to waste or converted into energy while some of our fellow citizens are hungry. In doing so it would equip Britain's charities with enough food to provide two meals a day for one million people.

65. We recommend that the Government should consult on a series of moves to

reorder existing subsidies, at nil extra cost, in favour of rescuing edible surplus food for human consumption. As part of this consultation the Government should seek views on whether a small amount of expenditure currently allocated towards incentivising anaerobic digestion should be diverted towards establishing a start-up fund for local communities wishing to rescue more fresh food that has become surplus so it can be diverted to the hungry.

66. We recommend that the Government should consult also on a series of targeted tax incentives to encourage supermarkets and manufacturers to transport their surplus stock of fresh food to charities.

67. In the meantime, we recommend that each of Britain's major supermarkets should consider using the proceeds from their plastic bag charges to support the diversion to the hungry of fresh food that has become surplus.

68. Each of Britain's major supermarkets should appoint a 'Food Rescue Champion' in each store to take responsibility for the diversion of surplus stock to the hungry. Such a role would necessarily entail building relationships with local voluntary groups working with our most vulnerable citizens, so that a local timetable can be agreed. This innovation of course would be in addition the existing arrangements that have been established by national commitments. It should not seek to replace them.

We emphasise here that rescuing surplus food and diverting it towards those voluntary organisations working with Britain's most vulnerable citizens must form only part, albeit an important one, of a national anti-hunger strategy.

Abolishing hunger in Britain is not yet totally within our grasp. But the moves advocated here would reduce significantly the numbers of hungry citizens and go a very long way to abolishing hunger amongst children.

A full implementation of our recommendations would signify that we were as a society now clearly making progress along the path to abolish hunger as we know it in the United Kingdom by 2020.

Feeding Britain in 2016

As part of the evidence gathering exercise which led to this report we invited views on how **Feeding Britain** might most effectively contribute to the fightback against hunger.

It was suggested that **Feeding Britain** should:

- Be the radical voice challenging the status quo.
- Commit to halting and, and ultimately putting an end to the need for charitable food assistance in the United Kingdom.
- Improve and extend the delivery of anti-hunger projects and identify barriers to progress, but not to become a direct provider of services.
- Collate data on the numbers of hungry people in the United Kingdom.
- Facilitate a more co-ordinated and joined up approach across private, public and voluntary sectors.
- Encourage the development of Food Bank Plus and social supermarkets.
- Lobby for funding to support a national programme of school holiday provision.
- Continue pushing for the end of utility bills discriminating against the poor.
- Value local provision, celebrate local success stories and encourage local projects.
- Create an online template for local **Feeding Britain** steering groups wishing to implement an anti-hunger strategy.
- Highlight some of the unintended consequences of reforms to the social security system.

The Trussell Trust and FareShare stressed the importance of **Feeding Britain** enabling collaboration between the various players in the field to avoid duplication of efforts and to ensure that efforts are focused to where the need is greatest. We would add to this that gaps in provision must be filled or existing provision be supplemented by local expertise and enthusiasm.

Feeding Britain will strive to put these suggestions into action and it will report regularly to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger. Together they will pursue:

- A co-ordinated strategy to tackle hunger, including a national programme providing year-round protection against child hunger.
- The development of Food Bank Plus.
- A more efficient food system that puts human needs first.
- The expansion of social supermarkets giving comprehensive help on jobs and skills.
- A new deal on the costs of household essentials.
- A repaired social safety net.
- The enshrining of paid work, built around the new National Living Wage, as a safeguard against hunger.

Introduction

It is almost a year to the day since **Feeding Britain** documented an unprecedented tide of hunger in post-war Britain.[4] Our report was published following an eight-month inquiry in which we heard from 401 individuals and organisations on the extent and causes of hunger in this country.[5]

One year on, and looking ahead to 2016, this report carries encouragement from its evidence that the nation might just be witnessing a turn in the tide signifying the first inroads that are so necessary to abolish hunger as we know it by 2020. Over the past three months 123 individuals and organisations have contributed written evidence to us on the changing dynamics of hunger in this country.

The volunteers who man our food banks, the utilities regulators, certain government departments and several Local Authorities, have responded in such an impressive way to the visible signs of hunger in our communities. In particular, we are pleased to report from our evidence that:

- The Food Bank Plus model we recommended that addresses some of the root causes of hunger during a first food bank visit is popular, spreading, and beginning to cut down the length of time for which individuals are hungry.
- Progress has been made to speed up the time taken to process new benefit claims.
- The Government is to pilot our proposal for a Yellow Card early warning system before a sanction is applied to existing benefit claims. Where the level of sanctioning has fallen generally so has the level of food bank use.
- There is growing momentum behind our proposal for a New Deal on Prepayment Meters that will protect mainly poorer households from being ripped off when paying for gas and electricity.
- Supermarkets are seeking ways of rescuing more good food that might otherwise go to waste or be turned into energy, and diverting it to groups who throw a lifeline to some of our most vulnerable citizens.
- A growing number of Local Authorities are implementing a policy of automatically registering all eligible children for free school meals, and some, although we do not know how many, are contributing to inspirational projects in an attempt to tackle child hunger in the school holidays.
- We had reports that the demand for emergency food parcels from some food banks seems to have reached a plateau and, in a few cases fell in 2015. The reasons may include, but are not limited to fewer sanctions being applied to benefit claims; fewer agencies that are able to issue food bank vouchers; stricter eligibility criteria attached to food bank vouchers; demand being spread more thinly between different food banks; the effectiveness of Food Bank Plus in limiting the number of times people have to visit a food bank; and a reduction in need following the recent economic upturn.

Moreover the cost of food has plummeted over the past year and, crucially, a new National Living Wage for low-paid workers comes into force in April 2016. A growing number of employers are bringing the new rate into force already. But we cannot stress more strongly that this hint of optimism must be heavily qualified. We have four main grounds for concern:

- There has been an increase in need for emergency food parcels over the past year from families – both in, and out, of work – with children for whom a weekly,

[4] All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom, *Feeding Britain: A strategy for zero hunger in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland* (London: The Children's society, 2014)

[5] Forsey, A., *An Evidence Review for the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom* (London: The Children's Society, 2014)

fortnightly or monthly income simply does not meet the financial demands being placed upon them. Long-term low income, coupled with the burden of household debt, is restricting some families' ability to escape dependence on charitable food supplies. The fundamental problem remains the same: an unreliable or inconsistent income that is insufficient to meet essential outgoings.

- In some cases, this long-term low income is exacerbated by zero-hours contracts under which workers are not guaranteed a minimum number of hours from week to week. There was clearer evidence this year to suggest that an irregular income from zero-hours contracts is making it difficult for some of those households reliant on this form of work to budget.
- Problems arising from new and existing claims for benefits and tax credits remain most likely to trigger the need for an emergency food parcel. A key concern from our evidence is the sudden cessation of benefit or tax credit income once a claimant reports a change in circumstances to the Department for Work and Pensions or Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, or if they are being transferred from one benefit to another.
- The local welfare safety net in some cases is failing to catch those of our fellow citizens who are at risk of falling below the national minimum and into the clutches of hunger.

The dangerous combination of these four factors – unreliable income from wages and benefits and the inability to pay the bills from this income – has in many parts of the country brought with it a sense of defeat. Widespread vulnerability to hunger in these communities is now accepted as a permanent fact of life. It has been woven into the lives of people for whom going without food on a daily basis is now almost inevitable. Middlesbrough Food Bank, for example, told us that families 'go hungry as part of a pattern of life, e.g. mums not eating for a day or two, or only one meal a day'. Similarly one school governor from Birkenhead reported how 'we feel we are holding back a tidal wave […] of hunger and despair. Although we are doing this we do not see an improvement in real terms and if we were not able to continue [our feeding activities] then situations for these families would rapidly deteriorate. Circumstances for the most disadvantaged have become worse in the past twelve months'. Elsewhere Tameside General Hospital is to begin offering emergency food parcels to patients who are vulnerable to hunger once they have been discharged, and one supermarket in Glasgow is placing security tags on packets of mince as some desperate families resort to shoplifting. Some time ago one Tesco store reported that shoplifting among young people had changed fundamentally, from sweets to sandwiches and new underwear.

Anyone reading this report need only look at the variety of food banks – including Kensington and Chelsea – who took the time to submit evidence, to realise that the struggle to survive long periods of time without sufficient food is a fact of life for some households in all parts of the United Kingdom.

This struggle is not confined to those of our fellow citizens existing for months or years on end below the poverty line. The problems tipping families over the edge are those that can affect any one of us, as summed up by one Oxfordshire food bank: 'domestic violence, bills coming at once (cash flow rather than actual costs), family issues, illness (and therefore the cost of hospital trips), debt, lost wallet, asylum seekers, housing issues, money stolen, wages disputes, moving house costs'. Many of us can survive one of these factors, perhaps two, but few of us can cope if these factors coincide. This proves just how complicated and vulnerable lives can be, and even more so when one is poor.

While we seek in this report to celebrate those initiatives and reforms that have both relieved and then prevented hunger since we published **Feeding Britain**, we also wish to draw attention to those instances where hunger all too often

acts like the thief in the night, sneaking up and overpowering all too many families in this country. Also included in this report is an audit of the 77 recommendations we made in **Feeding Britain**, showing that more than half (43) have been put into action over the past year.

Some commentators perceive **Feeding Britain** to have focused disproportionately on dealing with the symptoms of hunger rather than its causes. They refer to those sections of the report which looked at the services being offered by food banks, for example, and other sections which proposed ways of making better use of the food this nation produces. Our immediate reaction to this millenarian school of thought is that winning significant reform is a long, hard bargaining process. We cannot transform society in one fell swoop. Meanwhile people are hungry and in desperate need of food. Hence our desire for these fellow citizens to be able to receive decent food and, where possible, immediate help to resolve the crises that have led them to be hungry. We also wish to remind those commentators who share our concern on both relieving and preventing hunger in this country, that in **Feeding Britain** we made a whole series of proposals seeking to address low pay, problems in the benefits system, disproportionately high utility costs and other deep-rooted problems that leave people vulnerable to hunger, and that a large number of these proposals have since been acted on. Moreover in this report we outline the work we have undertaken in our local communities in 2015 to address the causes of hunger before they have had the chance to take hold of individuals and their families.

Nonetheless, it may take years for some of the deep-seated causes of hunger to be addressed. Large numbers of people in the meantime will face the risk of going hungry, and we wish for them to be fed decent food. We therefore write this report, as we did our previous one, from where the hungry find themselves now rather than where we would like them to be. We cannot wish away the need for food banks, nor the hundreds of thousands of people relying on their services. Whilst we agree with Glasgow South West Food Bank, that 'in the longer term we don't believe that food banks can or should be part of the welfare state', the need for them now and beyond remains painfully obvious. Part of our focus therefore is geared towards maintaining and improving the physical health and mental wellbeing of people who, at some stage in the months and years ahead, may find themselves having to rely on emergency food parcels. One example here is our wish to divert to Britain's poorest citizens a larger quantity of fresh food of good nutritional value that would otherwise go to waste. Contrary to the belief of some commentators, our focus is not limited to this one move alone.

For we are equally committed to addressing those factors we have identified as the root causes of hunger. Hence our proposals for enshrining paid work at the National Living Wage as an effective safeguard against hunger, delivering benefits and tax credits promptly and in full, repairing the holes in the safety net for those citizens who are at risk of falling below the national minimum, and securing a fairer deal for households who struggle to pay disproportionately large bills for basic utilities. We will continue lobbying as Officers and Members of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger for this reform programme to be enacted, but in 2016 we will open up five further fronts.

1. **Five key reforms outlined in this report are being pursued by a new charitable organisation called Feeding Britain. The organisation's objective is to enact a comprehensive blueprint for relieving and then preventing hunger in the United Kingdom. Its mission is to ensure everybody in the United Kingdom has the resources and opportunities to obtain sufficient food.**

   Feeding Britain will act on five priorities for 2016:

- **A most immediate intervention to counter hunger will be to encourage all of Britain's food banks – regardless of their affiliation to any wider organisation – to host trained welfare rights officers, and other appropriate professionals, at each food bank session. Our hope is that the food bank movement should set itself an objective within this model, which we have called Food Bank Plus, of addressing the crises that have led people to be hungry. Feeding Britain will seek to co-ordinate the ongoing expansion and development of a national Food Bank Plus model to cut short the duration of hunger experienced by those individuals and families who have had to ask their local food bank for help. 65% of those helped by a welfare rights worker during their first visit to Birkenhead's main food bank are able to resolve their problem there and then, meaning they no longer have to rely on emergency food parcels.**
- **We will work with all those groups who aim to eliminate the destruction of edible food while some of our fellow citizens go hungry.**
- **A longer term intervention to counter Britain's vulnerability to hunger is the social supermarket. Britain's first two social supermarkets, operated by Community Shop, opened in 2013 and 2014. A third is due very shortly to open in Grimsby. As a first step, Feeding Britain is committed to supporting the establishment of at least one social supermarket in each of the 12 regions of the United Kingdom. Feeding Britain has, to date, been unable to secure funding to support this development. We will continue to progress this over the coming year.**
- **Immediate action is required to abolish hunger amongst children during the school holidays. Feeding Britain will seek ways of building on the work that has been piloted in different parts of the country, to establish year-round School Holiday Food and Fun provision in each region of the United Kingdom. This will enable us to demonstrate the value of programmes with national coverage, but firmly embedded in and driven by local communities, to tackle school holiday hunger.**
- **A fifth strand of Feeding Britain's plan of action will be to build up the series of pilot projects that have been working to address hunger in local communities.**

We are pleased to report that progress has been made in 2015 through **Feeding Birkenhead, Feeding Devon and Cornwall**, **Feeding Derbyshire**, **Feeding South Shields**, and **Feeding Salisbury**.

Initial discussions have taken place to establish **Feeding Bristol** and **Feeding Liverpool**, while similar projects are also in the pipeline in

Brighton, Greenwich and Woolwich, and **Suffolk**.

We return later in the report to the work being undertaken at a local level. But, first, what does our evidence tell us about the changes that took place in 2015, in respect of the extent and causes of hunger in Britain?

Chapter 1 - Hungry Britain in 2015

How many people are relying on emergency food parcels and other charitable food supplies?

The number of people relying on food banks remains at a level previously unseen in post-war Britain. However, our evidence suggests that following a decade of rapid growth the demand for emergency food parcels may have begun to stabilise in 2015. We welcome this development.

A minority of food banks nonetheless reported that the need for emergency food parcels has continued growing at an alarming rate. 822 people relied on support from Chichester District Food Bank between April and August 2015; 227 more than in the same period in 2014. Kensington and Chelsea Food Bank reported an ongoing increase in demand of around 25% over the last two years and most food banks (67%) in Brighton and Hove reported an increase in demand over the past year, with only one reporting a reduction. Moreover Glasgow South West Food Bank stated that '[The numbers relying on our food bank] have grown in the past year and every indication is that they will continue to grow, probably at an accelerating rate'. The Children's Society's Practitioners in Bradford and Dorset reported that food bank use increased by 20% in the three months to October 2015.

A second group of food banks reported to us that the numbers of people relying on their services continued growing in 2015, but at a slower rate than in previous years. Demand at Burgess Hill Community Food Bank, for example, continued 'growing slowly' and the Leeds Food Aid Network, part of Unity in Poverty Action, reported that 'in terms of food bank and food parcel provision we are still hearing of a steady increase in demand but not as sudden an increase as in previous years'. West Cheshire Food Bank similarly reported that it received 2,697 household referrals in 2013-14. This increased slightly to 2,911 referrals in 2014-15. It provided emergency food to 5,044 people in 2013-14 and again increased only slightly to 5,199 people in 2014-15.

Where there has been an increase in demand, this might be attributable in some small way to the expansion of existing food banks that have chosen to operate at additional sites and at more frequent intervals. Manchester Central Food Bank, for example, was 'originally open two days a week [and] now it runs five days a week from two sites. There has been a 50% increase in clients this year'. But increased availability alone is way short of presenting a complete picture of why, in some parts of the country, the numbers of people relying on food banks has continued rising.

A combination of increased need, a larger group of organisations distributing vouchers and greater awareness of its services, according to King's Lynn Food Bank, saw its numbers increase by 27.5% in 2014 compared to 2013 (from 3,063 in 2013 to 3,905 to 2014). Moreover, the answer we received from Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau was emphatic: 'Demand has not been diverted from elsewhere. The need has grown'. We return in later chapters to the factors which have driven this need.

A third group of food banks meanwhile reported an unexpected fall in the numbers of people turning up for help. The Clevedon and District Food Bank fed 798 people in its first year of 2012-13; in 2013-14 it fed 1,639; and in 2014-15 this fell to 1,313. Likewise the Community Emergency Food Bank in Oxford saw 'a steady increase in numbers of people coming to the food bank from 2008 up to the end of 2013. In 2014 the numbers remained fairly constant but there has been a slight decline in numbers over the past four months of 2015'. After an initial increase in the volume of work in 2013, Dunstable Food Bank told us it is 'running at 20% less than at the same time last year', and Norwich Food Bank expects it will feed around 1,000 fewer people in 2015 than it did in 2014. Reports such as these were not forthcoming in last year's inquiry. Their emergence this year offers some encouragement.

Among a fourth group of food banks, demand proved incredibly volatile in 2015. Demand overall at Ely Food Bank fell some 30% comparing

2015 with 2014 – although recently it had started to rise again. While the number of people relying on County Durham Food Bank levelled off in 2014 and declined in the first four months of 2015, it increased thereafter 'almost back to the average levels seen during 2014'. A similar tale was forthcoming from Whitchurch Food Bank: 'Locally we cannot report any significant trends over the last year. Demand is unpredictable and varies from week to week. If we were to think it might be slowing up we get a sudden surge of demand. Demand may have risen because we have more referrers'.

Elsewhere three food banks within the Sheffield Diocese reported stable demand, one reported a drop in demand, and two indicated a 'significant increase' in demand. One reported a change in referral patterns linked to a Local Authority restructuring which had affected referral agencies. Sheffield's Parson Cross Initiative which in 2014 provided 1,186 emergency food parcels, gave out 1,045 between January and September 2015 and it expected soon to surpass last year's total.

Most food banks this year reported similar levels of demand to 2014. The Penzance Area Food Bank, for example, had 'not noted any change in numbers attending over the last six months'. Stoke-on-Trent Food Bank reported likewise that 'the trends in demand for our service have remained fairly constant, i.e. May 2012 to March 2014 – average 81 food vouchers per week redeemed; April 2013 to March 2014 – average 88 food vouchers per week redeemed; April 2014 to March 2015 – average 86 food vouchers per week redeemed; April 2015- October 2015 – average 81 food vouchers per week redeemed'.

Demand had also plateaued at the Tameside South and Longdendale Food Bank, which told us that 'there was significant growth in food bank usage from 2012 to 2014 with the number of people fed rising from 400 to 1,200. This growth has levelled off since September 2014 […]'. The submission we received from Cambridge City Food Bank was typical of our wider evidence base: 'The Food Bank was started in 2010 and the number of people fed grew steadily as the organisation expanded reaching a total of 4,000 individuals in 2014 [but] the use of our service has remained fairly stable over the past year, neither increasing nor decreasing'.

From where has this development emerged?

We cannot say for sure, and we wish to investigate further, but among the possibilities raised in evidence were:

- Effective interventions through Food Bank Plus to reduce the number of times some people had to rely on emergency food parcels.
- A reduction in the number of statutory agencies who were able to refer people to food banks, and stricter criteria applied to the referral process.
- People in need seeking help from different food banks within the same town or city.
- Fewer people needing emergency food parcels, perhaps as a result of the recent economic recovery or fewer benefit sanctions being applied, for example.

The first possibility, covering the impact of the Food Bank Plus intervention, was raised by Clay Cross Food Bank:

'For the first year or so since the start of Clay Cross Food Bank we saw our client numbers increase as we added more referral agencies, however, we have seen a reduction in our food bank use since we began interceding at the first visit to determine the root cause of lack of money and to address that need rather than just feed. We are forecasting a 20% drop in client numbers by the end of December 2015 over the previous year [due to getting money back into the family]'.

Turning to the second possibility, the Black Country Food Bank, the demand for which plateaued in 2015, noted in its submission the 'stricter guidelines for our voucher holders' and 'reduced funding for partnering agencies that have now closed, allowing clients to "fall through the

gaps'", and the Wantage and Grove Food Bank stated:

'2013: 300 parcels; 2014: 200 parcels; 2015: looking like less. Caveat: one of the family centres is no longer functioning fully, and so it is very possible that fewer people in need are being referred. We have yet to work out how to resolve this'.

While pointing to the effectiveness of its Food Bank Plus approach, the submission from Sparkhill Food Bank in Birmingham also brought into play a third possibility of people in need obtaining emergency food supplies from elsewhere:

'Since we opened late 2011, we have seen a rapid increase in numbers of referrals to us. Particularly 2013-14, after which it has stabilised [but] we cannot pinpoint the exact reasons for this – it could be a mixture of dealing with the root cause of the crisis and the fact that a number of other food banks have opened up in other parts of Birmingham supporting clients who would otherwise be sent there (including a local mosque)'.

A fourth possibility, in particular the impact of fewer sanctions being applied to benefit claims, was raised in a submission from High Peak Food Bank, which said that 'last year we were supporting 117 people a month with emergency food. This continued up until March 2015 when the amount of support we provided appeared to drop. The number of people coming to us with a sanction has reduced considerably…'

A more general and unexpected upturn in fortunes was contemplated within the Sheffield Diocese's submission, in which one food bank organiser said '[…] currently we do not understand why use of the food bank has decreased this year – this was not anticipated, so maybe things are improving …'

There was no single picture provided to us on the number of people going hungry in this country. Many food banks reported to us an increase in demand for emergency food parcels in 2015. Others thankfully reported a decline and, in some areas, demand for emergency food parcels might have begun to level off over the course of the past year. The reasons may include, but are not limited to a significant fall in the numbers of claimants being sanctioned; demand being spread more thinly between different food banks; the effectiveness of Food Bank Plus in limiting the number of times people need to visit a food bank; more efficient delivery of benefit; stricter eligibility criteria attached to food bank vouchers; a reduction in need following recent economic growth and significant rise in employment; and a reduction in the number of agencies that are able to issue food bank vouchers. There was no singular consistent reason driving a rise or fall in demand, it varied considerably across the country.

We must stress however that a levelling off in some areas, although most welcome, is a huge distance from abolishing hunger as we now know it in our country. The truth remains that we do not have, and have never had, accurate data on the extent of hunger in this country. The only data that is published comes from the food bank movement and this is patchy. All we know is that still there are too many people in this country who are having to rely on their local food bank in order to stave off hunger. Indeed, in many towns and cities, the number of our fellow citizens drawing upon this emergency support remains unprecedented.

Each recommendation in this report is made with the intention of stemming and then reducing the numbers of people in this country needing to rely on their local food bank, or who are otherwise hungry.

Who is relying on emergency food parcels and other charitable food supplies?

The need for emergency food parcels stems almost exclusively from families and single adults below retirement age. Almost no pensioners rely on food banks. The key question, therefore, is from where in the working-age population does the need stem?

A major group of people at risk of going hungry is those who are single and live alone. An extraordinary 80% of people relying on Belfast's smaller independent food bank are single and unemployed. Elsewhere the majority (65%) of vouchers issued on behalf of the West Cheshire Food Bank are to single people. Among the remaining 35% single-parent families account for 14% of referrals, two-parent families account for 12% and households with multiple adults 9%. 47% of referrals to York Food Bank are single adults. A similar tale was forthcoming in evidence from Wantage and Grove Food Bank in Oxfordshire. We received distressing evidence from Hastings Furniture Service of one such route to the food bank for those who are single and unemployed:

'Community Learning providers in our area […] who help unemployed adults to gain the skills, qualifications and confidence to get into work, are now providing emergency food parcels, food bank vouchers or running cookery courses at which meals and groceries are provided, because so many of their adult learners are living in food poverty to the extent that they arrive for classes too hungry and weak to concentrate'.

In some cases food banks reported a noticeable shift in demand towards this group of individuals. Clay Cross Food Bank, for example, said:

'We are seeing a major shift from feeding families to feeding singles. Last year (from 1 April 2014 to 26 October 2014) 39% of those we fed came from families whereas for the same period this year it is 28%. Last year 29% were singles and this year it's 43%. We are noting that most singles are single men and these are also likely to fall back into poverty in the future and need feeding again'.

Some of these individuals may only have become single following a recent divorce or family separation, as detailed by the First Love Foundation:

'Family breakdown is also an underlying issue for many of our clients, this can range from marriage breakdown, young people estranged from their parents right through to those fleeing domestic violence. This group of people are often very vulnerable and find themselves either without benefits or with an unanticipated loss of income'.

When single adults seek help from a food bank they nearly always do so following a whole series of complex problems in their lives. One submission from Advice Nottingham stated that 'the complexity of clients' problems over the last year has increased. Many clients have multifaceted issues which take much more time to resolve'.

We are concerned that this complexity has overwhelmed large numbers of single adults who are vulnerable to mental illness, for example, and find themselves unable to cope with some of the official processes that are demanded of them by statutory bodies. The following evidence from the First Love Foundation typified this concern:

'Over the past year [Tower Hamlets Food Bank] has seen an increase in clients suffering with mental health issues as well as those affected by family breakdown. Whilst there has always been a percentage of clients who have encountered these issues, there has been a noticeable increase over the past year – especially with more severe mental health issues. Whilst these clients are generally receiving some level of specialist mental health intervention; we have observed that they are finding it difficult to navigate the benefits system and can often find themselves without benefits and very little support'.

Again, illustrating a major theme of our report, there is a variation between areas and in who is helped. For a second major group at risk of hunger is families with children. Stoke-on-Trent food bank reported an even split in demand between single adults (45%) and families with children (43%). Indeed, in some areas the

pendulum of demand had swung towards this group. In 2015, Southampton City Mission saw 'an apparent increase in the number of families, as opposed to the traditional single male, accessing emergency food'. Similarly at Manchester Central Food Bank, 'originally a lot of young single people caught in the credit crunch and in debt came, then we notice a trend of people emerging from the criminal justice system and now it's more families coming'.

Although the evidence was not overwhelming, some submissions suggested the risk of hunger had become disproportionately large among younger people. Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau, for example, told us in evidence that 76% of food voucher recipients were under 46 years of age.

In some of Britain's larger cities hunger has also affected asylum seekers and refugees who are struggling to establish themselves in this country. The British Red Cross, which focused its submission on this group, said that 'in attempting to satisfy their need for food and shelter, destitute asylum seekers without statutory support must rely on informal resources such as support networks and charities'.

Only a small proportion of those accessing food banks, however, are homeless. 3.8% of people referred to King's Lynn Food Bank, for example, are homeless.

Food banks are helping predominantly single, unemployed adults and families with children who are struggling to survive on a low income. Almost all of those relying on emergency food parcels are below retirement age. Single, unemployed adults are more likely to have experienced a mental illness, a recent family breakdown or an otherwise sudden change of circumstances. While some people simply do not possess the skills needed to cope, many parents trying to survive on a low income often will have sacrificed their own wellbeing to try and feed their children. Our evidence suggests that a large proportion of these families are struggling to stay afloat without help from a food bank. Limitations on data mean we do not know precisely how many, nor the exact reasons why.

How many times do people require help from food banks and other charitable providers?

We received only limited evidence on the number of times people require help from their local food bank. Across the Trussell Trust network, on average, people need no more than two emergency food parcels in a year.

46% of those relying on a Trussell Trust food bank are referred only once a year. A further 15% need help more than three times a year. This would suggest that food banks deal primarily with a one-off crisis that has interrupted a household's cash flow for a short period of time, but that a smaller number of our fellow citizens require longer term or more persistent support.

The most detailed breakdown we received in evidence was from the Parson Cross Initiative in Sheffield. 58% of family units referred here during 2014 and 2015 visited only once, and a further 24% visited either twice or three times. Among the 5% visiting more than eight times, problems stemmed from mental illness or debt problems.

Are we any closer to knowing how many people in Britain are hungry?

An effective anti-hunger strategy must be guided by a robust set of data. Ideally this data would give the public some idea of the numbers of people on a daily basis who are at risk of going without food. Britain's record on this front is dismal.

While the Trussell Trust is able to produce data on the numbers of food parcels it has given to those in crisis, it is only just beginning to record the numbers of people each year actually relying on its food banks. Likewise there is no data produced on the numbers of people relying on independent food banks, nor do we know how many people suffer hunger in silence.

Most of the onus for collecting data rests on the strenuous work of volunteers who administer emergency food parcels and referral vouchers. As was outlined in the submission from Food Plymouth CIC, 'the trouble with stats is we are not really drilling down sufficiently to get a real picture because often there is really more than one reason, we are very busy during sessions, we rely on referrers filling in forms right, and we don't want to interrogate people who may be very unhappy being in a food bank anyway'.

Britain badly needs to find ways of measuring, or even estimating, how many of its citizens are hungry.

In seeking an overall estimate of the numbers of people in this country who are hungry, or incredibly vulnerable to hunger at some point in the near future, there are three pressing issues: the data recorded and published by the Trussell Trust; the urgent need for a national data gathering exercise among independent food banks; and the difficulty of coming to terms with how much hunger is hidden amongst the elderly population who do not use food banks, people refusing to take up the offer of an emergency food voucher, and people in work who cannot access food banks. We take on the first two points in this section.

The most advanced set of national data in 2015, as with last year, came from the Trussell Trust. Its food banks gave people 1,094,003 emergency food parcels between April 2014 and March 2015. This is a 19% increase on the previous year. Between April and September 2015 the Trust administered 506,369 parcels; a 3% increase on the same period in 2014.

Behind these headline figures there is a multitude of journeys that have brought people to rely on their local food bank. Glasgow South West Food Bank noted in its submission that, 'we know anecdotally that many people are hungry for a long time before they come to us. Some may never come to us because they rely on family or friends who are in a position to help them. So our figures understate, if anything. And Trussell is very far from being the whole story in Glasgow, far less nationally'. One food bank was concerned that 'overall figures do not reflect the number of unique cases. If someone is referred three times the current Trussell Trust system counts their family three times […] set against this overstatement there are some people in need who do not seek a referral and this represents an unknown quantity of additional need'.

The Trussell Trust currently does not publish data on the numbers of unique individuals receiving emergency food parcels. We believe the Trust could play a vitally important role in enhancing the political and public debate on hunger if it were able to address this aspect of its data collection, and in November 2015 it confirmed that it was beginning to do so.

2. **We warmly welcome the news that the Trussell Trust's data system is beginning to capture the number of unique food bank users on a national scale. The publication of this data would mark a hugely important step forward. We recommend that the Trussell Trust includes this data within its next annual publication.**

Several submissions sought further to enhance the effectiveness of the Trussell Trust's data

collection. Glasgow South West Food Bank, for example, noted that 'The Trussell designed forms do not provide details of benefit types'. Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau, which in its evidence provided an incredibly helpful and detailed breakdown of the factors bringing about the need for a food bank, said:

'With employment, housing, credit and benefits environments subject to more change in the short and medium term, there is a need to review and redesign the data gathering process on which future food vouchers are constructed. These reports are key, if proxy, indicators of the effects of changes 'in the way society works'. It is crucial that they reflect accurately how such changes are impacting on the most vulnerable'.

A detailed breakdown of this nature was forthcoming in evidence from West Cheshire Food Bank, a member of the Trussell Trust network, however it remains lacking elsewhere. One food bank said in evidence that '… current tickboxes do not determine [various benefit-related causes]. Also can be tricky for referral agencies to determine proper root cause, since the causes are often inter-woven and complex', and another noted that 'our vouchers only record 'benefit changes' and 'benefit delays' and often these can be seen as the same thing so the stats are not always 100% accurate'.

The Trussell Trust acknowledged these concerns in its submission, and it is 'looking further to develop our voucher system and research over the next 12 months to ensure further granular detail can be captured on the type of benefit and type of problem clients are facing and wider underlying drivers beyond the primary referral reasons'.

3. **We reiterate our call to the Trussell Trust to include within its data collection method and database a way of breaking down in detail the different benefit-related problems, and other factors, which have resulted in people being referred to a Trussell Trust food bank. We call on independent food banks to do likewise, following West Cheshire Food Bank's detailed study released earlier this year which provided a comprehensive breakdown of individual problems that had led people to be hungry.**

4. **We recommend that each Citizens Advice Bureau conducts an annual survey of its food voucher allocations, and the reasons behind each allocation, based on the excellent model produced by Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau.**

Given that around half the nation's food banks are run on an independent basis, we believe a next major advance must come through a national data gathering exercise among independent food banks.

Dr Bryce Evans identified in his submission a 'shortcoming at the national level where there is reliance on the Trussell Trust as the one voice on this issue', and Clay Cross Food Bank lamented that 'until all food banks and other food providers collect and pool data we won't [be any closer to knowing how many people in this country are hungry]'. Dave Beck, Bangor University, explained further in his submission:

'[…] we are not any closer to knowing the true extent of hunger. The Trussell Trust are very good at providing a wealth of very well collected data about who is hungry and why. But this is only a small percentage of the picture. The Trussell Trust have a network of food banks, however, the independent sector are also mobilised into tackling the hunger epidemic'.

The submission from Sheffield City Council provided a helpful snapshot that could be applied to the nation as a whole: 'We have few extra food banks in place, these have stabilised at around 15, there are probably a similar number of unofficial food banks […] it is difficult for us to measure if attendance is greater at these as not all food banks routinely collect data'.

Given that a large majority of food banks and other voluntary groups providing food have close links with their local churches, we believe the nation's clergy are best placed to lead on this front.

5. **We recommend that each Archbishop and Bishop in the United Kingdom attempts to compile data from within their own Dioceses on the number of food banks run by the Trussell Trust, the number that are run on an independent basis, the number of other charitable providers of food, and the numbers of people relying on their assistance.**

How much hunger in Britain is hidden?

Even if we were able to estimate from a national data gathering exercise the overall number of people relying on food banks, we still would not know for sure how many people in this country are hungry.

We were confronted in our evidence with some considerable concern around those individuals who suffer in silence without food.

Wirral Food Bank put it in stark terms:

'How many families are there where the children are fed but mum and dad go without food? What of the elderly in society, who may not access food banks? We are only dealing with the tip of the iceberg'.

Wantage and Grove Food Bank noted in its submission that 'if the data from all food banks (and similar organisations) were aggregated, we would be "closer". How close is hard to say, as there is a reasonable reason to conclude that there are an unquantified number of people who are hungry and who aren't accessing the food bank'.

As did FoodCycle:

'Just as we have in this country people who are 'hidden homeless', we also have the 'hidden hungry' – those who are skipping meals on a regular basis, who do not have proper cooking facilities or who have no access to affordable fresh produce'.

The situation regarding pensioners may be acute, in particular given their understandable reluctance to seek charitable help. We also note with concern the discontinuation in some parts of the country of Meals On Wheels services. As Sustain noted in its submission, this service had previously guaranteed a large group of pensioners a proper meal each day:

'Nationally, a third of all UK Local Authorities have abandoned Meals On Wheels provision to their elderly and vulnerable older residents in the face of funding cuts. Among members of the Sustainable Food Cities network, 21 cities have discontinued direct Local Authority provision or support for Meals on Wheels. This is particularly alarming, considering that more than 1.3 million people over 65 suffer from malnutrition and many end up in care homes or hospital as a result'.

Added to isolated pensioners and selfless parents are those people in low-paid work whose shifts might coincide with the opening hours of their local food bank, and those vulnerable people who have been referred to their food bank, but then fail to take up the offer because, if they did, they would feel ashamed of themselves. Tower Hamlets Food Bank estimated that up to five people each week in the borough are referred, but do not take up their entitlement to an emergency food parcel. Elsewhere, of those people no longer drawing benefit following a sanction, the Belfast Food Network reported that '36% had skipped meals or visited a food bank (only 15% have used a food bank). Respondents were considerably more likely to skip meals, go without heating or borrow money from friends and family than to visit a food bank'. We simply do not know how many people across the United Kingdom are having to live like this.

Our concern for all four groups – the isolated elderly, parents putting their children's needs before their own, the working poor and those who would feel ashamed to take up the offer of charitable help – is great, as is our desire to find out who is suffering hunger in silence and to intervene in a way which meets their needs without stigma.

The evidence from Canada, set out in a submission from Dr Rachel Loopstra, suggests that this gap in data extends beyond the United Kingdom:

'Food bank users in Canada make up only a fraction of people who experience insecure access to food. This disconnect highlights that despite an immense amount of effort to expand and refine the charitable food system over the past 30 years in Canada, charitable food

assistance only reaches a fraction of food insecure people'.

Some volunteers in this country have responded by going out of their way to identify and feed such individuals. St Peter's Church in Rock Ferry, for example, told us that 'one of the reasons for going door to door is to pick up needs which sometimes remain hidden as most are too proud to admit the need for food and advice'. We applaud this approach and we encourage other voluntary groups, where possible, to replicate it in their own communities.

On a wider scale, however, and on the back of a detailed study taking place in Scotland, Bill Gray of NHS Scotland noted:

'There are currently more people affected by Household Food Insecurity in communities throughout the country than food bank use statistics suggest. The research also indicated that there is good reason to believe that there are an unspecified number of people trying to manage and cope with varying degrees of Household Food Insecurity in our communities at the present time. Consequently, there is an urgent need to gain a much more detailed and better understanding of this public health issue to inform responses whether at community or government level'.

A large number of submissions, including Dr Loopstra's were in favour of developing a set of indicators to measure the nation's vulnerability to hunger. The City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council stated that 'the only way to explore whether people are food insecure [unsure where the next meal is coming from] is through a population level survey using a tool such as the household food security scale. Focusing on demand for food aid is unreliable. It is likely that there is a large hidden component and this can be masked further by food aid'.

The Welsh Government is leading the way on this score. The National Survey for Wales 2016-17 will include specific food poverty questions for the first time, covering: households' ability to afford a meal with meat or vegetarian equivalent at least every other day; whether during the last fortnight there was at least one day when households did not have a substantial meal due to lack of money; and household use of food banks. We applaud the Welsh Government for taking the initiative and we hope other devolved institutions, as well as the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in partnership with the Department of Health, will follow its lead.

Dr Loopstra went on to set out a case for rolling out this model, or something similar across the United Kingdom:

'We strongly recommend that a validated measure of food insecurity, either the USDA Food Security Survey Module or Food and Agriculture Organisations Food Experience Scale (FIES) be added to a routine survey in the UK. Both of these scales emphasise problems of insecure access to enough food to meet household food needs, the problem that underpins food bank use in the UK. Regular monitoring will enable detailed examination of who is vulnerable to household food insecurity and how the problem changes in relation to changes in welfare policy, employment, and other macroeconomic changes. Importantly, these data are needed to understand both short-term intervention to mitigate hunger and longer-term interventions to prevent households from reaching this state of deprivation'.

6. **We recommend that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in partnership with the Department of Health, allocates a small sum of money from its research budget to monitoring vulnerability to hunger in the United Kingdom.**

In the meantime, we took some encouragement from those submissions which alluded to some initial activity on this front within the voluntary sector. The Food Foundation told us that it is currently progressing talks on the measurement of food insecurity, and Sustain informed us that:

'We are currently working with Oxfam, the Food Foundation and others to plan a meeting of researchers, policy makers and third sector organisations to carry forward the recommendation that household food insecurity in the UK be monitored and used to determine the impact of policy decisions'.

During our visit to France in December 2015 we encountered a similar desire for detailed data on hunger to be produced by each nation across Europe. The French have experienced similar difficulties in trying to come up with an overall figure on the numbers of people who are hungry, and it was suggested during our visit to the British Embassy in Paris that a wider data gathering exercise might be co-ordinated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

We encourage those voluntary organisations and research bodies who have undertaken some initial activity on this front to pursue some joint lines of inquiry and we would welcome reports of progress on this vitally important measurement.

Chapter 2 - Feeding Britain in 2015

How many food banks and other charitable food providers are feeding hungry Britain?

A fitting account of Britain's food bank landscape was given by the Bishop of Sheffield, who described in his Diocese's submission 'a large number of food banks of different kinds in an ever evolving kaleidoscope of provision'.

Again the most advanced source of data stems from the Trussell Trust. There are currently 420 Trussell Trust food banks – the same number as this time last year. 40,000 people volunteered for Trussell Trust food banks in 2014-15.

Aside from this, in our evidence we were able to pick up only that:

- Within Wales there are 157 food banks, according to the Cathedral Food Bank, Bangor, Gwynedd.
- Within Aberdeen and across Aberdeenshire there are 65 food banks, and there are only a few Trussell Trust food banks, according to the Aberdeen Food Bank Partnership.
- Between Sheffield, Rotherham, Doncaster and Barnsley there are 51 food banks, according to the Sheffield Diocese.
- Within Brighton and Hove there are 15 food banks, according to the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership.

We documented last year in **Feeding Britain** the evidence which suggested there are at least as many independent food banks as Trussell Trust ones. Praise is due to the Sheffield Diocese for attempting to map its food bank landscape, and we hope the lessons learnt from this exercise, while not without difficulty, will be applied elsewhere. Jane Perry, who wrote the Diocese's submission, reported that:

'[…] any exercise which attempted to rigorously count food banks or track trends in food bank numbers would be fraught with difficulty. The main finding however is that, Trussell Trust food banks represent only a small proportion of emergency food provision (4/15 in Sheffield, 1/24 in Rotherham, 3/11 in Doncaster). The only exception to this being Barnsley, where the development of Council supported provision had led to dominance of one large Trussell Trust food bank'.

One potential way of gathering data at a local level could come through the formation of food bank networks. Within the Sheffield Diocese, for example, food banks have begun to form networks across town and city areas. The Diocese noted in its submission that 'in each the driver for this development was a recognition of the need for increased communication, information sharing, co-ordination and joined up working between food banks […] in several cases, networking was also linked to (or had facilitated) access to council funding and/or contracts with FareShare […] networks are the main source of information and communication for food banks. Any initiatives seeking to map or work with food banks need to be working with them'.

The Diocese's submission went on to outline three barriers that need to be overcome when trying to map provision:

'[1] Definition – food banks and other forms of emergency food provision are not as easy to define as might first appear; [2] constant change – the picture of emergency food provision which emerged is one which is constantly changing, during the course of our mapping we identified several food banks which appear to no longer be operating and otherwise which are being set up. Any list will be out of date as soon as it was finalised; [3] partial knowledge – although we attempted to reach out ecumenically, the information presented comes primarily from existing food bank network organisations, checked against the knowledge of local Anglican clergy. We are aware that emergency food provision among minority ethnic communities is under-represented in our list […]'.

The Brighton and Hove Food Partnership pointed in its submission to the benefits of food bank networks at a town or city level, one of which is

the practicality of mapping the local landscape of provision:

'As a city we have been addressing this for the last two years via individual food banks and collectively through the food banks network, which has strengthened links between food banks and advice services, with half of food banks saying that as a direct result of the network they have advisers visiting food banks, and even more (78.6%) saying they had a better understanding of advice services across the city'.

7. **We reiterate our call to food banks and other voluntary organisations in each village, town and city to make contact with one another, come together to meet as a single entity, and build on this initial contact by mapping the provision on offer within each locality. We believe this approach is most likely to facilitate the pooling of limited resources, resulting in a more effective local support system for people in need, and bring improvements in data collection.**

One such entity has come about in Oxford. As we reported last year, The Oxford Food Bank operates a unique method of collecting fresh produce that has become surplus to requirements from each of the city's supermarkets. The food is collected at a time that works for each supermarket and it is then stored in a central warehouse that has been fitted with the necessary refrigeration equipment. The Food Bank then distributes this food to food banks and other voluntary organisations across the city, at no cost.

We were pleased to note from its submission that The Oxford Food Bank reports 'greater awareness of our existence amongst suppliers, supermarkets in Oxfordshire. An increase in volunteers, permitting us to add another collection run to our already busy schedule. A greater understanding amongst charities in Oxfordshire that what we distribute is not "rubbish waste food" but perfectly edible, nutritious food. This had led to more requests from charities'.

Again it is important to note that the work of feeding Britain's hungry goes beyond the nation's food banks. Nugent Care, for example, despite not being a known food bank, distributed over 380 food parcels between March 2014 and June 2015. The organisation also registered an increase in demand for household furniture and white goods.

Although most of our evidence came from food banks, we wish to salute those voluntary organisations who were not set up to administer emergency food parcels, but who have found themselves in recent years being called upon to form a rear-guard action against hunger.

How have food banks and other charitable food providers developed and innovated to feed hungry Britain?

A most basic feature present in all food banks and other voluntary organisations helping to feed the hungry, in the words of the submission contributed by the Bill Sargent Trust, is the 'listening ear and a generous and compassionate response. This is sometimes in stark contrast to users' experiences of [bureaucratic] statutory services. Food bank users are often surprised and pleased to be treated with respect and sensitivity'.

Once they have identified the cause of hunger and administered an initial emergency food parcel, most food banks suggest to people the other services in the community they might wish to contact for help. This process of 'signposting' people to other support services is a laudable reaction to the unbelievably wide range of circumstances found among those seeking help from food banks.

Last year we encouraged food banks to build on this emergency response by embracing a Food Bank Plus model, in which they would host specialists who are trained to address the problems that have led people to be hungry. This might involve seeking a resolution to a particular benefit problem, for example, or arranging access to other forms of discretionary support of which people previously were unaware. Likewise people might sign up for sessions in which they learn how to cook a range of good meals on a basic budget. An adviser might also be present to help some people begin to overcome the ruinous amounts of debt which have led them to be hungry. A Food Bank Plus model is one that delivers not just food to resolve immediate hunger, but wider support to deal with the whole spectrum of underlying issues that converge when someone finds themselves turning to a food bank.

In an ideal world the Food Bank Plus intervention would not be necessary, but for the time being it remains essential.

Until the Government is able to administer benefit and tax credit claims in a way that does not leave a worryingly large minority of claimants with no money for long periods of time, the continued development and evolution of Food Bank Plus will remain indispensable. We recognise that no social security system can ever be perfect, and eliminating human error altogether is impossible, but there is a clear need to improve the current administration of benefit and tax credit claims, as well as the accessibility of hardship funds. As The Matthew Tree Project noted in its submission, 'we find ourselves more often than not picking up the pieces, i.e. why is there a delay or change? Is the delay or change warranted? What is the procedure? How long should it/will it take? Why are all benefit payments suspended whilst this is happening?'

We of course understand there are limited resources at the disposal not only of food banks themselves, but of the many voluntary agencies that specialise in providing advocacy and advice which can shorten the period of hunger experienced by many individuals.

Nonetheless, we heard this year of some excellent initiatives in which food banks have evolved into a Food Bank Plus. In doing so, they have sought to turn a necessity into a virtue by engaging so positively with people relying on their help. We wish where feasible for this to expand to a larger number of food banks.

The Matthew Tree Project, a pioneer in this field, described in evidence the rationale behind what it calls a 'Food Plus' approach:

'We know that most people signposted to services don't get there or get sent to the wrong place at least three times. We also know many brilliant services that struggle to connect with those who need them the most, or some groups so overrun with desperate clients that they don't have time to research who does what. Very poor linkage exists between statutory, voluntary and other agencies. We plan to change this. By acting as the local trusted intermediary, we build up trust with the client, meet their basic needs, and

ensure they receive appropriate support, by working hard on referrals'.

The Matthew Tree Project also runs Cook Smart, a nutrition and cookery based course which helps people to eat more healthily, cook their own meals, use ingredients from their food parcel that they were unfamiliar with before, reduce their household waste, and shop on a budget. Sue Baic, who runs this particular intervention, said in evidence that 'often clients do not know how to use the fruit and vegetables donated even if we have them. Cooking courses and recipe leaflets are very useful here.' The effectiveness of this approach shone through in a testimony from one individual who enrolled on the course:

'Before going on the Cook Smart Eat Well course I was spending about £10 per day on takeaways. Now I am not spending as much as I am cooking at home with the food from The Matthew Tree Project Food Plus Centre. I spent £6.71 this week! I am now motivated to cook and there was a small group and we all got on really well'.

Another provider to have picked up the Food Bank Plus baton is Tower Hamlets Food Bank. Its evolution was explained in evidence from the First Love Foundation:

'Having observed early on that signposting food bank attendees onto other services was not effective and resulted in return visits to the food bank, [Tower Hamlets Food Bank] pioneered the concept of Food Bank Plus, which is essentially an advisory service that runs alongside the food bank service […] it was launched in 2013, led by our Project Worker, working in partnership with welfare rights advisers from the Child Poverty Action Group and the wider Tower Hamlets Council Housing Benefit department. As a result, every person referred to our service has the ability to access welfare rights advice, Housing and Council Tax benefit support, Discretionary Housing Payments and a crisis grant from the Local Welfare Assistance scheme.

'This has had a significant impact on our ability to assist clients to resolve their benefit delays or issues, meaning that many clients do not need to make repeat visits for emergency food donations, as their issue is resolved quickly. This does not have an impact preceding clients' referral to our service – delays and changes to benefits are still leaving people hungry; we have, however, been able to lessen the time that people are hungry in many cases'.

Clevedon and District Food Bank went through a similar process, having 'began life as a straightforward Trussell Trust Food Bank, focussing on food parcels and signposting. We want to offer more than food, however, and we are now beginning to run a budgeting course, led by a trained Christians Against Poverty counsellor'. Likewise Birmingham's Sparkhill Food Bank developed its work, 'from just providing emergency food parcels and signposting to a wide package of support to our clients that is shared amongst the wider team within our charity; job search, benefit form filling, debt and money management advice; support for victims of domestic abuse, trafficking, slavery and forced marriage; and carer support […] this has in many cases dealt with the root causes of their crisis'.

The effectiveness of Food Bank Plus is clear; the more support made available to people during their first visit to a food bank, the shorter the period of time they are likely to be hungry.

- Involve North West, which has stationed a welfare rights officer in two food bank sessions each week as part of the **Feeding Birkenhead** pilot project, reported that, 'since June 2015, our intervention has supported approximately 65% of clients to not return back to the food bank in Birkenhead. [All] of the five families that we supported with the tax credit issues did not return after their first visits. This was due to our reactive response to their welfare problems and immediate help and support in resolving their money issues and maintaining their benefit entitlement'.
- Glasgow South West Food Bank made clear in its submission that, 'we have had

a welfare rights advisor embedded at two of our branches for the past few months and this has proved very successful with a number of problems resolved during the food bank visit'.

- Clay Cross Food Bank reported that, 'a worker from CAB attends our busiest food bank centre every other week. Providing this additional level of support is reducing the need for second and third client visits to our food bank'.
- County Durham Food Bank 'has been providing debt advice and other advisers have been attending food bank sessions. The "instant referral" definitely shortens the time that people remain in crisis though it doesn't necessarily prevent the crisis in the first place'.
- Atherton and Leigh Food Bank has developed links with a group of local solicitors to provide legal advice services. It has won every appeal against benefit decisions and sanctions.
- HOPE+ Food Bank in Liverpool has 'always used what is now being called 'Food Bank Plus' as our model […] we are usually able to ensure that guests experiencing food poverty crisis, are able to move out of crisis more quickly'.
- High Peak Food Bank has 'been providing [Food Bank Plus] since April 2014 and it has helped people to resolve the issues that caused them to need a food bank quicker. We have facilities for the public to use to sort out their problems: laptop, phone and staff support but also a way into work through our Zink Project so that people reach financial independence […] our staff [also speak] to DWP on the client's behalf […]'.

We wish to celebrate the unique Zink Project that has been established by the High Peak Food Bank. The Project offers tailored work experience within the food bank alongside other services to prepare people for a job. It has helped 45% of its long-term unemployed participants into work within eight weeks. Other food banks might wish to incorporate similar support within their operations.

The availability of a Food Bank Plus might also save people having to pay for successive journeys to one service after another. This can be crucial, particularly in rural areas. As Pershore Food Bank noted in its submission, there are 'inherent problems of a rural community with agencies at a distance and infrequent public transport'.

There are limitations, of course, and we do not pretend that Food Bank Plus can ever be a silver bullet in the fightback against hunger. The imposition of a sanction can necessitate numerous visits to a food bank, even if those sanctioned can speak with a welfare rights worker. According to Involve North West, 'some of the clients that we have advised with sanctioning have returned for a second and on occasion a third time due to the time taken to resolve their problems'.

Nonetheless, the success of Food Bank Plus is catching: Sheffield City Council has allocated Public Health funding towards Sheffield Citizens Advice providing outreach into four food banks for three years; Tameside South and Longdendale Food Bank is striving to 'offer IT and Advice services covering benefit claims, budgeting, jobsearch and CV preparation […] we need to address the underlying problems and co-ordinate the activity and support provided'; and London's Cardinal Hume Centre is currently developing a 'hub' of combined services, based in Pimlico, provided by advice agencies and local faith groups wishing to provide practical support and relief to those in immediate need. By offering advice and information alongside the provision of food, Caritas Social Action Network hopes that people in need will be able to access a range of services in one place.

Elsewhere, Blackburn Food Bank has begun assisting the unemployed by offering them access to a computer and working on their IT skills and job applications. Cambridge City Food Bank is another to have embraced Food Bank Plus. Its strategy is 'to try to place food bank distribution centres in locations that can also host other

organisations providing advice and advocacy. We feel that there are competent organisations in these areas and it is not the role of the food bank to duplicate existing services. However, we feel that the ability to co-locate and co-ordinate opening times is needed'.

The Trussell Trust has piloted this approach through its 'More Than Food' initiative. Over the past year eight Trussell Trust food banks have run debt and money advice pilots, four have run an npower Fuel Bank pilot – a project to which we return later in this report – and 29 food banks have been trained to run an 'Eat Well Spend Less' course. The latter intervention is a cooking and budgeting course run over six sessions of two and a half hours in order to assist those who need extra support to manage the cost of food and household budgeting. The course covers topics such as menu planning and food preparation, nutritional food advice, household budgeting, and supermarket psychology. The idea is 'to make a positive intervention to encourage healthy eating, less reliance on expensive forms of food and fiscal responsibility and resilience'.

The Trussell Trust will expand its More Than Food initiative in January 2016 following a generous donation of £500,000 from Money Saving Expert's Martin Lewis. We very much support the Trussell Trust in this venture and we wish for the intervention to be piloted in as many of its food banks as possible, so that more people's crises can be addressed the first time they set foot in their local food bank. We make a plea too to the nation's independent food banks to reach out to voluntary and legal services in their area. Our evidence suggests that where the Food Bank Plus intervention works effectively, people are much less likely to need to set foot again in the food bank after their first visit has concluded.

8. **We strongly recommend where feasible that food banks host trained specialists who are capable of addressing the problems that have led people to be hungry. This Food Bank Plus approach might take the form of benefits advice and advocacy, debt management and help with budgeting, or courses on how to cook decent meals on a shoestring budget. This approach is proved to reduce the duration and severity of hunger experienced by those individuals who have been referred to a food bank. We are pleased that the Trussell Trust is piloting this recommendation which we issued in our first report.**

The Department for Work and Pensions has begun piloting a scheme whereby a member of staff from its Jobcentre Plus network is stationed in a food bank to provide advice on benefit-related matters and the process of looking for work. We welcome the Secretary of State's enthusiasm in seeking to address with food banks some of the problems that have led people to be hungry. However, he should proceed with caution. The advantage of stationing advocacy workers from the voluntary sector in food banks is that they tend to have the unqualified trust of vulnerable people. Those who, for one reason or another, have been left scarred by their experience with Jobcentre Plus might be less willing to share their difficulties with a Jobcentre Plus representative in a food bank. There is also a danger in that this move might entrench food banks as part of the welfare state.

The policy received a lukewarm reception amongst those food banks contributing evidence to us:

'I would not want the Government to have any direct input into food banks. [Perhaps provide] funding for impartial advisors in food banks rather than DWP staff?'

'The recent suggestion of embedding Jobcentre employees at food banks seems to suggest an acceptance by government of the need for food banks which is both encouraging – as a suggestion that the government acknowledges the work done by food banks – and deeply worrying in the

suggestion that the government sees us as being a long-term fixture and part of the welfare state'.

9. **The Department for Work and Pensions must proceed with caution in its early moves to station its members of staff in food banks. While we welcome the Department's willingness to engage with individual food banks and seek ways of addressing some of the root causes of hunger, we have reservations over the potential effectiveness of this policy compared with, say, the support given by those welfare rights officers in the voluntary sector who have proven themselves capable of restricting to a bare minimum the number of visits people need to make to their local food bank. However, this should be a decision for individual food banks to make, based on their local circumstances, and we would not wish to discourage such partnerships where they can be helpful. As the Trussell Trust noted, 'we need to look at the most helpful ways for local jobcentres and food banks to work together'. Our primary concern here is that people exposed to hunger should not be put off seeking help from their local food bank because of concerns around the presence of members of staff from the Department.**

10. **We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions publishes a short evaluation of its early moves to station members of staff in food banks. No further moves should be taken on this front until the evaluation has been published and debated. This evaluation should detail, amongst other things, the destinations of those people who were signposted to each member of staff.**

One alternative source of help for the unemployed within food banks could come from the private sector. Writing on behalf of the First Love Foundation, Denise Bentley shared her experience of the 'huge untapped resources within the corporate sector, i.e. employees with skills that can be harnessed for the benefit of those who have been away from employment for quite some time. This has mainly been in the form of skilled volunteering (which aligns with their Corporate Social Responsibility strategies). The skills on offer range from CV writing, interviewing skills, mentoring, right through to financial and digital inclusion'.

It might be worth emphasising here that we do not wish for food banks to become entrenched within the welfare state, nor the welfare-to-work process. Our objective is to prevent the hunger which leads to the need for food banks. In advocating therefore a broader range of support within food banks over the course of 2016, we wish for the often complex problems in people's lives to be confronted so that, in future, the need will not arise for an emergency food parcel.

11. **We recommend that the Federation of Small Businesses, British Chambers of Commerce and British Hospitality Association encourage their members to offer their services to their nearest food bank. Such support might include, but need not be limited to, short employment courses for the long-term unemployed.**

A large minority of food banks offer people toothpaste, shower gels and other hygiene products, in a noble attempt to meet a series of basic needs at no additional cost. Councillor Matthew Patrick argued in his submission that an arrangement should be reached with Britain's airports whereby such products confiscated during security checks are offered to local food banks. Upon enquiring, we learnt that Liverpool's

John Lennon Airport already has such an arrangement in place with one local food bank.

12. We recommend that each airport makes contact with its local food bank to offer them unopened non-alcoholic drinks, toothpaste, shower gels and other hygiene products that are confiscated during security checks. Such supplies will play a crucial role in alleviating at least some of the pressure on household budgets when individuals and families cannot afford to buy food.

What of those food banks whose limited resources prohibit them from being able to offer a more comprehensive programme of support? We received an incredibly helpful submission from the Children's Food Trust which might offer one way of addressing this gap in provision. The Trust wrote:

'Our role in a 'Food Bank Plus' approach has been in training volunteers and staff at community organisations providing food aid to use that contact [with the hungry] to spread practical cooking skills, recipe ideas and skills for eating better on a low income to families […]

'Evaluation shows that the staff and volunteers we trained found they could work with families in a new way – preparing food together was a way to build trust and open up important conversations. And families reported that they enjoyed the cooking sessions – which helped them make friends, feel useful and relax. But most importantly, it helped them eat better on a tight budget.

'Around a third of families we followed up with cooked from scratch more often, ate more vegetables and used takeaways less often after learning to cook through the organisations we trained. Around half of families cooked more often with their children as a result'.

'As an example, there are at least 450 food banks in Britain today […] We estimate that to deliver our training programme to just one volunteer at all of them would cost less than £135,000. That's not a lot to help families help themselves; to support the Food Bank Plus model, and to address some of the factors which can contribute to food poverty'.

13. We recommend that Local Authorities top slice a small sum from their Public Health budgets to contribute to the training by the Children's Food Trust of volunteers in food banks and other charitable providers of food, so they are equipped to provide one or more elements of the Food Bank Plus model.

From where have food banks and other charitable food providers sourced their emergency food supplies?

The vast majority of food banks and other charitable food providers receive the bulk of their food supplies from the public. These supplies most often take the form of donations through supermarket collections, church congregations and school Harvest Festival activities.

Most food banks contributing evidence to us expressed enormous gratitude towards people in their communities who so generously donate what they can to support their activities. Thanks to this tide of good will, most food banks are well stocked. Dunstable Food Bank, for example, said 'our donations remain high and we have no current concerns about supply of food,' and Glasgow South West Food Bank noted how 'the people of Glasgow have been fantastic […] many of our donations come from people who are close to the breadline themselves […]'. Similar submissions were forthcoming from Chichester Food Bank, Clay Cross Food Bank, Tower Hamlets Food Bank, North Oxfordshire Community Food Bank, and Wirral Food Bank.

But we did encounter anxiety among some food banks and other organisations delivering emergency food supplies to the hungry. A minority are struggling to maintain supplies throughout certain times of the year, while others are fine. Two out of ten providers in the Sheffield Diocese cautioned that supply was not keeping up with demand. The Parson Cross Initiative, for example, said that 'although local people have been extremely generous, particularly during the Harvest Festival period, we have experienced periods where food stocks have been at very low levels'. Likewise Stoke-on-Trent Food Bank identified its main challenge to be 'maintaining the supply of food to give out in the food parcels – we rely on the Harvest donations of food to supplement the time between January and August when demand tends to outweigh supply'.

The Trussell Trust reported from its network a pattern of 'geographical variations across the country with a small number of food banks anecdotally reporting 'giving fatigue' over the past six to twelve months'. In some cases this has led to demand outweighing supply. This was the case at Manchester Central Food Bank, which also reported having to spend money on buying in food to keep up with demand.

Other food banks expressed concerns around the quality and sustainability of food supplies, as well as the limits facing a movement that is manned largely by volunteers.

All of us must redouble our efforts to minimise the numbers of people having to rely on food banks. Alongside this, we must try to ensure that food banks and other voluntary providers of food do not run short of supplies and face the prospect of having to limit the support they can give to the hungry.

It was argued in some submissions that in order to maintain a reliable supply of food for all food banks, supermarkets and other food retailers should allow both independent and Trussell Trust food banks to collect food from their stores. One submission noted that, 'as an independent food bank we have very poor access to large scale sources of food […] Our monthly expenditure on basic foods is large and growing. Shopping is done by volunteers'. Another independent food bank concurred that 'we come across lots of barriers to partnering with large supermarkets because everything has to be decided or sanctioned corporately. The Tesco/Trussell partnership was an example of this. Food collected in local Tesco branches goes out of the area, but shoppers assume it's coming to us'.

14. **We recommend that supermarkets, on top of their incredibly important partnerships with the Trussell Trust and FareShare, allow both national organisations as well as independent groups operating at a local level to collect locally based surplus food from their stores.**

For those food banks maintaining a healthy supply of donated food, we believe a next logical step is to diversify their offer with more fresh and nutritious food. Cambridge City Food Bank said in its submission that its main problem is 'not obtaining food donations but obtaining the right balance of different foods to enable a useful selection to be provided'. Many other food banks described themselves as being in a similar position:

- Whitchurch Food Bank reported 'difficulty here with perishable food as we have nowhere to store it […] we have attempted to distribute surplus food but transport and storage can be an obstacle'.
- Penzance Area Food Bank told us that, 'local Co-op stores have recently offered us near-dated fresh fruit and vegetables but as we only open once a week and have limited space these items would not keep […] we only have one small deep freezer so cannot accept frozen items'.
- Birmingham's Sparkhill Food Bank wrote that 'our food bank is not set up to distribute and store large quantities of fresh food so unless we have appropriate facilities we are limited to accepting this. Grants to enable this and appropriate training would help enable us to do this'.
- Ely Food Bank lamented a 'lack of suitable warehouse space. We are now searching a new warehouse facility, though we are concerned that we cannot afford commercial rental rates'.

A key barrier to taking on more fresh food, it seems, is a shortage of warehouse space in which food banks could receive, store and distribute these supplies.

The availability of affordable storage space, coupled with a regular supply of fresh food could save food banks crucial resources, time, and effort, while most importantly improving the nutritional value of the food they are able to supply to the hungry.

The benefits of being able to supply fresh food were outlined by Wirral Food Bank and High Peak Food Bank. The former reported that 'subject to having sufficient resources to manage such a scheme the provision of fresh food would have a positive impact on feeding and supporting the hungry', while the latter added that 'by redistributing especially fresh fruit and vegetables through food banks and similar organisations we can improve the health and wellbeing of recipients. Healthy food is more likely to have a positive effect on emotional wellbeing and lead to better life outcomes'.

HOPE+ Food Bank in Liverpool has had to spend £250 each week on buying in provisions; £75-80 of which has been spent on fresh fruit and vegetables. It noted with regret that 'the need to become ever more creative in securing donations is both time consuming and inefficient'. We ask in such a context, how much edible surplus food in Liverpool is thrown to waste or turned into energy each week?

A most significant source of help here would be affordable storage space, although our evidence suggests it is becoming increasingly restricted. The Matthew Tree Project warned that 'many local councils are selling off publicly owned assets, land and buildings, rather than asset transferring them to charities and social enterprises. This is very short-term thinking and it is getting harder to gain access to resources we need to deliver our work'.

The Trussell Trust set out the consequences of this thinking and expressed its wish for an alternative land strategy: 'Space for non-perishable food often comes at a cost, with some food banks having to hire premises for varying lengths of time. Others have limited, or no access to cold storage which means efforts to augment the three-day emergency food parcel with fresh or surplus produce are not easily scalable for all food banks. Many food banks would benefit from greater storage space or logistical (transportation) support from local businesses or communities'.

15. We recommend that Local Authorities offer surplus storage space to food banks and other

charitable providers of food before it can be sold, so as to house chillers and other refrigeration equipment.

Through our local **Feeding Britain** pilots we have seen the value of linking collectively food banks and other voluntary projects with FareShare. In those parts of the country served by FareShare, we wish for as much good food as possible to be rescued and then diverted to those projects working with the nation's hungry.

16. **We recommend that food banks and other charitable providers of food form networks that can negotiate a local collective membership scheme with FareShare. This could enable each group to receive fresh food at a time that suits them. The benefits are twofold; more resources would be freed up to invest in Food Bank Plus and other support services, and the nutrition of the food on offer would be improved.**

We understand that not all food banks and voluntary groups will be able or willing to adopt this approach. We hope they will therefore take encouragement from The Oxford Food Bank. In its own words:

'We currently collect from 13 suppliers and supermarkets. Our volume has now increased to approximately 9 tonnes per week. There remain many sources that we have not yet tapped into. When the Oxford Food Bank started we picked up in our own cars from one supermarket and redistributed this to five charities. We did not have a base and it probably took about two hours, five days a week. We were delivering the equivalent of about 25,000 pounds of food at that time […] as we do not levy any charges for what we do, we have found a willingness amongst suppliers to donate their surplus. They often comment that we basically adopt a low profile "service" attitude, which demands very little effort on their behalf, they feel comfortable working with us.

'We have found that by taking supplies from so many different sources ensures a consistency and variety of produce in sufficient quantities for us to meet our commitments to our recipient charities. By storing them in our walk in chillers, we probably extend their "shelf life" by an average of 2 days – hence giving us more time to redistribute'.

A similar model has been established in Devon and Cornwall: 'Launched in 2010, the Devon and Cornwall Food Association's three local 'food hubs' redistribute surplus food supplies from over 40 retailers and producers to over 90 local charities and support organisations. In doing so, [the Association] contributes a vital service to vulnerable community members across the South West and prevents perfectly edible food from ending up in landfills or incinerators. To date, [the Association] has recycled over 150 tonnes of surplus food with a retail value of over £500,000'.

Elsewhere, in July 2015, Derbyshire County Council's Public Health department approved £528,550 to support a **Feeding Derbyshire** pilot. The funding is to support:

- One year's collective FareShare membership for Derbyshire's food banks
- A Food Depot, stocked by FareShare, from which food banks can draw fresh food when required
- Breakfast clubs in 24 schools
- Two 'Super' Community Kitchens in Children's Centres, churches and schools in each ward, with volunteers preparing meals out of food donated by FareShare which are then purchased for £1 or £2
- A home delivery scheme for residents who have difficulty accessing communal meals
- The mapping of food provision in Derbyshire so that new projects can be developed in those areas that currently lack provision
- Toiletries, clothes and non-perishable food from His Church, which negotiates donations from Trading Standards following seizures of counterfeit goods

According to Clay Cross Food Bank, 'one of **Feeding Derbyshire**'s strategies is to supply affordable food trays containing good quality fresh, chilled and inert food to last 3-5 days. These will be delivered through FareShare to food banks and other points of contact in order to sell them to those in low income at, say, £5 rather than at £30-£50 retail. The agencies would refer clients who are not yet in crisis, but are likely to be. Such clients would be those with rent arrears, Bedroom Tax arrears and other personal loans. Also part of the **Feeding Derbyshire** strategy is the inclusion of community cafes such as Super Kitchen that provide social eating space for an affordable charge (£2-£2.50 for a meal, £1 for children). This is good food at less than the cost price. This can be sustainable when food is provided by FareShare'.

17. **In those areas where a local collective membership scheme with FareShare might not be feasible, we recommend that networks of food banks and other charitable providers of food approach their Local Authority with a request to establish a central food storage point along the lines pioneered by The Oxford Food Bank, and that whoever is given the responsibility for this central storage point is then able to build partnerships with individual stores that allow them to collect and store fresh surplus food each day before it is redistributed.**

18. **Where this is not forthcoming, we call on Local Authorities to identify those members of the community who are able to spare the time and a reliable vehicle to replicate models such as The Oxford Food Bank, by providing them with a central storage point and a small start-up grant. The Big Lottery Fund might wish to consider what help it can extend to such models – particularly in areas where provision is currently limited or absent.**

19. **Regardless of whether each network of food banks and other charitable providers of food pursues a partnership with FareShare, or decides to operate independently, we recommend that each regional manager of Britain's major food retailers and manufacturers should arrange for chillers and other refrigeration equipment to be donated to them following a store refit, for the purpose of collecting, storing and distributing fresh food.**

A further method of diverting more fresh food to food banks and other voluntary groups could come in the FoodCloud being pioneered by Tesco and FareShare.

FoodCloud is a smartphone application which alerts its members at the end of each day to any surplus stock arising in their local Tesco, and enables them to arrange for its collection.

Since Liverpool's HOPE+ Food Bank joined the FoodCloud pilot scheme it has received on average 30 kilograms of bread and 10-15 kilograms of fruit and vegetables twice a week. We encountered support within our evidence for the FoodCloud to be accessed as widely as possible.

20. **We recommend that all food banks and other charitable providers of food apply to become members of FareShare's FoodCloud so that, if time and space allow them, they can top up their stock several times a week with small amounts of fresh food.**

We have covered in some detail in these opening sections the heroic action that has been taken by Britain's voluntary sector to relieve hunger in this country. We have also outlined a series of steps they could take in 2016 which, if enacted, could

more effectively address the needs of Britain's hungry once they are referred for help.

We are clear, though, that the heavy lifting of tackling hunger must not be left only to the voluntary sector.

We therefore turn now to those factors which have contributed to the need for this heroic voluntary action and, on the back of this, we make a series of recommendations designed to reduce as swiftly as possible the numbers of people having to rely on the voluntary sector for food.

Chapter 3 - The causes of hunger in 2015

The operation of the social security system

In the majority of cases, a period of hunger in the United Kingdom is triggered by a problem with a benefit or tax credit claim.

Our evidence suggests such problems have accounted for:

- 'Around half' of referrals to Glasgow South West Food Bank
- 62.5% of referrals to King's Lynn Food Bank
- 60% of referrals to Black Country Food Bank
- Over half of referrals to Tower Hamlets Food Bank
- 55% of referrals to County Durham Food Bank
- 55% of referrals to Clay Cross Food Bank which reports that, combined with immediate financial support for new claimants, 'if transition between benefits was seamless and [there were] no more than three days' delay in new claims then we would see a reduction in the need by more than half'.
- 49% of referrals to Norwich Food Bank
- 47% of referrals to West Cheshire Food Bank
- 'Hundreds of thousands' of referrals to Trussell Trust food banks

The Feeding Britain Working Party on Benefit Administration, spearheaded by Child Poverty Action Group, identified five major problems in the operation of the social security system: '[staff] wrongly advising individuals regarding whether they should be claiming Employment and Support Allowance or Jobseeker's Allowance; sending standard template letters with errors, such as missing or incorrect dates and figures; lost forms; erroneous sanctions; and a failure to notify claimants of their right to apply for hardship payments'.

Any of these problems can prove damaging enough to trigger a period of hunger. As the Black Country Food Bank stressed in its submission, 'many people on low income rely on benefits, so when there's a cut/stop or delay their safety buffer is gone'. In what it described as 'the obvious' way to prevent hunger, Clevedon and District Food Bank recommended 'cut down delays in assessing entitlement to benefits or swapping from one form to another, pay benefits quickly, and don't be heavy-handed with sanctions'. We agree.

Our evidence suggests that the prompt delivery of benefit and tax credit payments in full, coupled with a fair and effective sanctions regime, would more than halve the numbers of people relying on emergency food parcels.

We would welcome confirmation from the Department for Work and Pensions that all Jobcentre Plus staff are able to access and process information on a benefit claim through one single computer system on a single screen, so as to prevent complications and delays.

While we return shortly to the problems identified by the Feeding Britain Working Party on Benefit Administration, it is worth noting here those other faults picked up in evidence around the mechanics of the social security system, and their effect on claimants' wellbeing.

We are uncomfortable with the evidence of claimants being unable to talk to somebody about their benefit claim without incurring a large phone bill. Whilst we welcome the steps the Department for Work and Pensions has taken to phase out its use of higher rate telephone numbers, we remain concerned by the Department's policy of removing free telephone lines from Jobcentres.

Caritas Social Action Network reported to us that 'costs associated with communication, especially the cost of contacting the Department for Work and Pensions, remains a key issue for clients of Caritas Social Action Network charities. The removal of the free phones in Jobcentres for claimants to use has created

additional difficulties for those who wish to check on progress of a claim or appeal but cannot afford to call the expensive number [formerly beginning with 0845 and, now, in some cases, 0345] in order to do so. It is the view of the network that free phone lines and phone-banks in Jobcentres should be restored to enable claimants to receive an update on their application at no cost to themselves'.

We heard likewise from Liverpool's HOPE+ Food Bank that 'guests have been unable to buy food due to the need to purchase credit for phones in order to communicate with the Department for Work and Pensions and other agencies, whose use of automated telecommunication systems and 0845 [now 0345] numbers, can result in very significant expense. Recent phone calls made on behalf of a guest whose children's free school meal entitlement had been stopped, lasted a total of over 37 minutes, which would have been a significant expense on a Pay As You Go phone'.

The process through which some claimants, in particular the most vulnerable, must go through in order to enquire about a benefit claim is not always the most convenient, clear or helpful. The St Vincent de Paul society wrote in evidence that, 'those who need [the benefit system] are usually the least able to cope with its intricacies and often too ill to meet the bureaucratic demands it makes. Difficult journeys, a constant round of telephone calls, time consuming and often costly, with some staff not as helpful as they might be, leave clients exhausted, baffled, frustrated and disinclined to carry on the "fight"'.

We believe therefore that further action is required to guarantee a fair way for claimants or a representative of theirs to contact an official about their claim.

21. **We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions should guarantee within each Jobcentre Plus the means through which claimants can speak to a member of staff, either via telephone or in person, about a new or existing benefit claim.**

The Feeding Britain Working Party on Benefit Administration raised the idea of having a dedicated phone line through which welfare rights workers could contact the Department for Work and Pensions on behalf of vulnerable people who might otherwise struggle to sort out a new or existing benefit claim. The Working Party recorded the thoughts of one welfare rights worker, who said 'for any department where there is no advisers' help line, it is very difficult; we have the same problems as our clients, for example being kept waiting for long periods of time, then getting through to someone who is not equipped to deal with the query and, worse, [they] may not even realise this'.

22. **We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions should establish a dedicated telephone line for representatives from nominated charities to call on behalf of a claimant, in the event they have an enquiry regarding a new or existing benefit claim.**

Awareness of emergency benefit payments

A system processing millions of benefit claims will not get every claim right, all of the time. Hence the importance we and many others attach to the system of emergency payments; namely Short Term Benefit Advances and Hardship Payments.

The Government promised in response to **Feeding Britain** to make claimants aware of the emergency payments that can bridge the gap between a claim being registered and a first payment being made. However, we doubt from the submissions we have received whether this has been delivered across the board:

- West Cheshire Food Bank stated that 'a key issue appears to be that the existence of hardship payments and short-term advances is little known and minimal action is taken to ensure that people in crisis are able to access this support. Instead, the default position seems to be to refer people in need of support to either the local welfare assistance scheme or to the food bank'.
- Chichester Food Bank reported that 'emergency payments via the benefits system seem to have dried up. Claimants are rarely given advice about how to access these, or how to use the appeal system when sanctions are applied'.
- Parson Cross Initiative told us they 'have had some people who have needed our help who are unaware of the crisis payment they can apply for'.
- The Feeding Britain Working Party on Benefit Administration reported 'anecdotal evidence that many Jobcentres are not following the Department for Work and Pensions guidance for claimants waiting for a benefit to be processed, referring them directly to food banks or local welfare assistance schemes, rather than first considering their eligibility for a Short Term Benefit Advance […] suggesting that due processes are not being applied consistently across the country'.

How do these developments bear out in the data? Between October 2014 and September 2015 the Department for Work and Pensions received 228,039 requests for a Short Term Benefit Advance while a new benefit claim was being processed. In 52,517 cases the claim immediately was processed and paid. Decisions were made on 110,000 of the remaining requests, of which 87,534 led to a Short Term Benefit Advance being awarded. We have asked the Department to explain the mismatch between the numbers of requests and decisions made, as the data suggests worryingly that 65,522 claims remain unaccounted for.

The anti-hunger potential of emergency payments is clear; according to the Trussell Trust, 'in areas where awareness of Short Term Benefit Advances has improved, there have been positive results, with fewer people being referred to food banks because they had not been told about Short Term Benefit Advances'.

23. **We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions builds on its existing efforts to make new claimants aware of their option to apply for a Short Term Benefit Advance while their claim is being processed. We understand this option is now contained within Jobcentre Plus staff's script. In those parts of the country where it is presented with evidence that claimants are not being made aware of this option, we recommend that the Department obliges Jobcentre Plus staff to apply the best practice that is evident in those Jobcentres that have most effectively helped claimants through this period.**

We have written to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions asking him to undertake a short review of the reformed Hardship Payments system, in particular its ability to prevent hunger among those

claimants who have had a sanction applied to their benefit claim.

The delayed payment of benefit

When somebody puts in a new claim for benefit the chances are they are in a desperate state and, in all likelihood, have exhausted all other avenues of support. Any delay in the processing of their claim, therefore, brings into play the need for emergency food parcels to help stave off hunger.

We found last year that by far the most common scenario resulting in food bank use was people in dire straits not receiving benefit, promptly and in full, when their need is most urgent.

The Government has steadily increased the number of Jobseeker's Allowance claims processed within 16 days, from 85.8% in 2009-10 to 96.0% in 2014-15. It is now aiming to clear Jobseeker's Allowance claims within ten days. In 2009-10 it processed 70.8% in ten days and this increased to 91.4% in 2014-15.

It has steadily increased also the number of Employment and Support Allowance claims processed in 16 days, from 72.9% in 2009-10 to 93.6% in 2014-15. Again it aims now to clear Employment and Support Allowance claims within ten days. In 2009-10 it processed 54.9% in ten days and this increased to 87.5% in 2014-15.

We welcome the progress made by the Government to shorten the length of time it takes to process and pay new benefit claims.

The effects of the Government's efforts on this front were reflected in some of our submissions:

- Between the periods September 2013 to August 2014 and September 2014 to August 2015, Birmingham's Sparkhill Food Bank saw a slight decrease in referrals citing benefit delays as the cause – approximately 200 fewer referrals.
- The delayed receipt of benefit accounted for 29% of referrals to the Parson Cross Initiative in 2015, down by 14 percentage points from 43% in 2014.
- Cases involving 'benefit delays' handled by Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau reduced from 23% last year to 15% this year.
- Cambridge City Food Bank also noted how 'delays in benefits' have 'reduced as a reason for people visiting the food bank'.

Despite this progress, 205,457 people making a new claim for Jobseeker's Allowance waited more than ten days in 2014-15 for a decision on their case, and nearly half of them (95,561 people) waited more than 16 days. We do not assign blame to either side for this: there are circumstances where the Department for Work and Pensions is chasing for additional information from new claimants, and times when administrative error results in a delay. Nonetheless, our evidence suggests that the delayed payment of benefit remains the most common event triggering the need for an emergency food parcel.

Moreover, the Trussell Trust suggested in its submission that while, in some cases, the number of claimants enduring a delay had fallen, the length of the delay experienced by the remaining claimants had increased. North Oxfordshire Community Food Bank similarly noted that 'across the board anecdotally our users on benefits find they are taking longer to get their issues dealt with, they find it stressful and on occasion demeaning to go through the process'.

We estimate from the submissions we have received that between one fifth and one third of referrals to food banks result from administrative delays in the payment of benefit; in 2014-15 benefit delays accounted for 35% of referrals to Wirral Food Bank, 23% of referrals to West Cheshire Food Bank, and 19.3% of referrals to High Peak Food Bank, for example.

Such delays can last weeks and weeks and weeks. Chichester District Food Bank informed us that

'in this area people waiting for new claims to be processed endure an average of four weeks' wait although we have had cases where the wait is much longer, up to 12 weeks'. An all too familiar scenario was reported by Advice Nottingham, in which 'one client lost their job and subsequently signed on for Jobseeker's Allowance. There was a four-week delay in a decision from the Department for Work and Pensions and the client struggled to pay day-to-day living costs whilst they waited for the decision to be made. Ultimately they did not have any money to buy food'.

We read with horror some of the instances in which the delay in processing and paying new benefit claims had led people to be hungry. In one case, a single mother in Aylesham was made redundant from her catering job when she became ill. According to St Finbarr's Conference, 'the benefits were to take four weeks to come through, during which time we provided food for the family […] The family was also sitting in the dark wrapped in blankets as they had no gas or electricity. We arranged for money to be added to their electricity key. The mother was required to send in her P45, which she did, but when she phoned the benefits office, they denied ever receiving it. She therefore had to get another P45, all of which delayed the payment. In the end, it took about ten weeks for her to receive benefits'.

What are the reasons behind these delays? According to Caritas Social Action Network, 'delays often occur when additional information, such as medical forms, are requested. In these cases it is not uncommon for the Department for Work and Pensions' staff to be unable to locate clients' supporting information. This causes severe hardship and distress for clients who are awaiting an outcome of a claim and can often delay an application for many weeks'.

The Feeding Britain Working Party on Benefit Administration identified concerns amongst welfare rights workers alluding to 'the lack of email addresses for correspondence'. The Working Party reported further that being able to submit information through a secure online channel could be 'valuable […] in many situations'. If such a tool could minimise the occurrence of administrative delays in the processing and payment of benefit, it could contribute in no small way to countering hunger in this country.

The Department for Work and Pensions has accepted in principle the need for a secure online format through which important documents required to support a benefit claim can be scanned and submitted. However, we have yet to see any evidence of this in operation and we continue to receive evidence of these documents being lost. We recognise that there are important security implications for personal data, and appreciate that the Department has an obligation to ensure any system is fit for purpose. Nevertheless, we encourage it to progress the development of this as swiftly as possible.

24. We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions sets itself a target for reducing and then eliminating the likelihood of delays in the processing and payment of new benefit claims. An initial step in pursuit of this target must be to make available as soon as possible an online channel through which claimants can submit scanned copies of important documents required to support a benefit claim.

In some cases, though, even a new benefit claim that is processed and paid on time might prove too late to save a household from hunger. The Feeding Britain Working Party on Benefit Administration reported that 'even the "normal" waiting period for benefits may be too long for many people without a financial buffer'.

25. We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions should automatically offer new claimants a Short Term Benefit

Advance if their benefit claim has not been processed and paid within five days.

The loss of benefit through sanctioning

The decision to dock benefit from people deemed not to have fulfilled their duty of looking for work can result in prolonged periods of hunger. Much of our evidence suggests a broad degree of support for the logic underpinning the use of sanctions – that it is somebody's duty to look for work while they draw benefit – but the problems that bring the likelihood of hunger into play are to be found in their occasionally 'arbitrary' application.

In 2015, though, the number of people experiencing a total loss of income following a sanction fell; so too, according to our evidence, did the number of people relying on emergency food parcels following a sanction.

We believe the evidence on the application of benefit sanctions demonstrates a link; if fewer sanctions are applied, fewer people find themselves in need of an emergency food parcel. This is inherently difficult to prove, but our cumulative evidence suggests there may be a link.

The percentage of food voucher recipients arriving at Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau with difficulties caused by a benefit sanction has reduced significantly – from 15% to 4% – and volunteers at Liverpool's HOPE+ Food Bank reported a 'noticeable decline in the use of long sanctions'.

However, in those parts of the country in which large numbers of people continue to be sanctioned, food banks reported a higher proportion of sanctioned claimants relying on their help. Southampton City Mission, for example, told us that 'people having to turn to us when sanctioned has been a particular issue here with Southampton the third highest sanctioning area in the country earlier this year'. Dr Rachel Loopstra also presented us with evidence from her own research which found that 'over 2010 to 2013 […] above and beyond the changing availability of food banks, more people were using food banks in areas where more Jobseeker's Allowance claimants were sanctioned and where there had been greater reductions in welfare benefit spending'.

Again we were devastated to read of the circumstances which had led to some people losing their income following a sanction:

- Glasgow South West Food Bank informed us of someone 'being sanctioned for having a miscarriage on her way from dropping her children at school to her [Jobcentre] appointment – being rushed into hospital was not considered a good enough reason for non-attendance'.
- Advice Nottingham told us of 'a client who moved from Liverpool to Nottingham. The client was in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance and registered at the local Jobcentre Plus three days after moving. The client was sanctioned because they did not attend a work-related interview in Liverpool. They were unable to attend as they did not receive the letter inviting them to the interview as it was sent to their old address in Liverpool'.
- In July 2015 the Parson Cross Initiative helped 'Amanda'. She is a single mum with two children and is currently in receipt of Employment and Support Allowance. Parson Cross Initiative told us that 'due to childcare issues (she didn't feel it appropriate to take her children to her Employment and Support Allowance appointment and also had no one available to look after them), she cancelled her appointment and asked for it to be rearranged. She was later told that she was to have her benefits sanctioned because she "missed" her appointment. She needed help feeding herself and two young children'.
- Chichester District Food Bank told us that during one recent '4pm-6pm Friday opening of the distribution centre, we received a call from the local homeless charity 'Stonepillow'. They were distressed by a man to whom they had

just issued a voucher. He had no money, he was extremely ill. He had recently been discharged from hospital after treatment for a DVT in his leg with instructions to keep it elevated and not to walk too much. Unfortunately, when he returned home he found his Jobseeker's Allowance payment had been sanctioned because he had failed to attend an interview in Manchester while he was in hospital. He needed to come to the Jobcentre in Chichester to sort this out and had to walk from Bracklesham Bay, seven miles away: it took him three hours'.

- One claimant submitting evidence from the Isle of Wight, said 'I was instructed by the Jobcentre to apply for a specific job. Before I could apply for it my elderly mother (88 yrs), who lives 100 miles away on the mainland, collapsed and had to go to hospital for a pacemaker to be fitted. When I returned from visiting her, the job, which was on the Department for Work and Pensions' website Universal Jobmatch, had closed'. He was sanctioned for 13 weeks and the impact on his finances led to his landlord evicting him.
- West Cheshire Food Bank reported that 'participants were not informed of the decision to sanction them and were unsure why they had been sanctioned […] Furthermore, in a number of cases, people visiting the Foodbank were unwilling to appeal against sanctions for fear of retribution'.
- Dr David Webster drew our attention to the '47,239 Jobseeker's Allowance claimants who were sanctioned in 2014 [and] did not receive notification before the money failed to appear in their account. Applying this percentage to the whole period of the Coalition government, there will have been about 279,000 cases where claimants had their benefit stopped before being notified'.

We share The Matthew Tree Project's opinion that 'losing all and any means to support yourself for 3/6/9 weeks because the bus was late and an appointment was missed is not an effective or humane way for a society to work'. Nor is finding out about a sanction by checking one's bank account, rather than being told by Jobcentre Plus.

The Government announced in October 2015 that it will trial arrangements whereby claimants are given a Yellow Card warning of its intention to apply a sanction, and a 14-day period to provide a justifiable reason for failing to meet the terms of their Claimant Commitment, before the decision to sanction is made. The Department for Work and Pensions will then review this information before deciding whether a sanction remains appropriate. We very much welcome this development and we expect the Department to publish the results of this trial early in 2017.

We believe it is those claimants who should be able to prove with ease that they have a justifiable reason for missing an appointment at Jobcentre Plus, for example, who are most likely to be protected by the introduction of a Yellow Card early warning system.

In the case outlined by St Vincent de Paul, Whitstable, in which a man 'had his Jobseeker's Allowance benefit stopped as he did not attend an interview, despite the fact that he had informed them he had a hospital appointment', we hope the breathing space afforded by the Yellow Card early warning system will avoid necessary hardship.

26. The Department for Work and Pensions may wish to consider building into the Yellow Card early warning system the option for Jobcentre Plus staff to issue a non-financial sanction for a claimant's first failure to meet the terms of their Claimant Commitment.

Within this wider context, though, we are concerned that vulnerable claimants, in particular those suffering with a mental illness, or who are homeless, are most likely to suffer hunger following a sanction. One primary school governor in Birkenhead reported that 'if there is a sanction the situation becomes a nightmare and there have been cases of attempted suicide due to these occurrences and resulting despair'.

The Law Centres Network expanded on this point: 'The loss of all benefits due to a sanction presents a real risk of destitution, and this risk is increased for several vulnerable groups. Some of these are acknowledged by the Department for Work and Pensions, such as people with a history of addiction, people with mental health problems or those at risk of domestic abuse. Yet some vulnerabilities are more elusive, such as greater social isolation due to learning disability, old age, displacement or migration. With their material support structure undone by a benefits sanction, these claimants find it difficult to communicate their need and seek help and can all too easily end up adrift'.

Homeless Link told us in its submission that in 2013, homeless Jobseeker's Allowance claimants were around ten times more likely to be sanctioned than other claimants. Yet, as we noted earlier in this report, very few homeless people draw upon help from food banks. This begs the question, therefore, as to how this group of our fellow citizens is able to stave off hunger.

Moreover, 90% of respondents to Homeless Link's latest annual review identified sanctions as 'the most common problem experienced by people using homelessness services'; while 61% felt that the situation had worsened in the last two years. Our evidence suggests that there remains a hard core of vulnerable claimants – likely to be those least able to keep to the terms attached to their benefit claim – for whom sanctions represent a likely route into hunger and prolonged homelessness.

We were pleased to learn that Homeless Link and other voluntary groups have co-ordinated a pilot with the Department for Work and Pensions in which Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit rules are eased to allow 'newly homeless' claimants a grace period where job-seeking conditionality is loosened to enable them to focus on resolving their immediate accommodation needs. The early results are encouraging:

- 81% of those services who were aware of this easement pilot confirmed it had reduced the number of 'newly homeless' clients receiving sanctions.
- 60% confirmed it had helped 'newly homeless' clients overcome housing difficulties more quickly.

Homeless Link stated in its submission that 'building on this progress can have a significant effect on reducing absolute food poverty amongst homeless claimants'.

Referring to a wider group of vulnerable claimants, Tameside South and Longdendale Food Bank, stated:

'Whilst [we] understand the logic behind the idea of sanctioning those who do not take appropriate steps to obtain work, [we] don't think sanctions work. Sometimes they seem overly harsh. We need to consider what the people affected are likely to do if sanctioned, e.g. will they steal food or money? Will they sell drugs? A particular category most likely to be sanctioned are people with drug/drink problems who don't turn up for interviews. They need a different approach that deals with their substance abuse'.

As a further step, Crisis suggested the Department for Work and Pensions should introduce a new financial assessment for Jobcentre Plus decision makers before a financial sanction can be issued. Crisis believes the assessment should determine if a sanction is likely to result in destitution, in which case it should not be issued.

27. We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions introduces a 'grace period' for

vulnerable claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance, during which the requirements placed upon them are eased at times of transition or acute difficulty. It might wish to focus this pilot initially on homeless claimants.

We are concerned that when particularly vulnerable claimants are sanctioned, a certain proportion may simply disappear off the radar. There is currently no mechanism through which their destination or wellbeing following a sanction is monitored.

Dr David Webster informed us that 'the Government has flatly refused the [Work and Pensions Select] Committee's recommendation to track what happens to claimants in terms of employment and claimant status after a sanction, in spite of clearly having the capability to do so'. The Children's Society therefore suggested that 'the Government should put into place effective arrangements to monitor sanctions and the impacts on claimants and their families'.

28. **We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions pilots a monitoring exercise in which it tracks and records the destinations of claimants who have been sanctioned. The results of this exercise should be laid before both Houses of Parliament so we can discover how many claimants find work, for example, and how many others run the risk of being exposed to destitution.**

Immediately following the publication of **Feeding Britain**, the Government stated that it was reforming its computer system to ensure a benefit sanction should in no way affect the payment of Housing Benefit. The aim here was to address our concern around the risk of sanctioned claimants being exposed both to hunger and homelessness.

Despite the Government's assurance, the Law Centres Network reported to us this year that 'numerous claimants have [found out] the hard way, when their Housing Benefit had already been stopped. The shortfall has led them to incur debt and rent arrears, sometimes in the hundreds of pounds, for which they were nonetheless liable even when their Housing Benefit was restored'.

Within the Sheffield Diocese's submission one food bank reported that 'people are [increasingly] getting threatening toned correspondence and threats of legal action around housing and Council Tax issues. It seems to me that if a claimant's benefit is sanctioned, their Council Tax/Housing Benefit is also stopped leaving them with a double whammy. The local council, despite saying they do what they can to help seem very quick to issue legal proceedings'.

Law Centres Network told us of one claimant, whose 'Housing Benefit was stopped but she rang to explain that they were on zero income due to a sanction. She only knew to ring them because a friend who works at the Council told her to do it. She has had to pay £300 towards rent arrears'.

Why then, despite the Government's computer fix, has this double whammy persisted in some cases? The problem may stem from a technicality in which claimants who have been 'disentitled' rather than 'sanctioned' – two actions that are almost indistinguishable to claimants – stand to lose their Housing Benefit too.

Summing up the evidence from its caseload, Law Centres Network wrote that 'Law Centres are seeing signs that the problem of sanctions affecting secondary benefits remains an issue in areas and with clients that have been moved onto Universal Credit. Even in this supposedly improved system, the problems described above still persist: lacking communication, claimants find that they were sanctioned after the fact and are forced into emergency coping behaviour'.

One such claimant affected was in this way 'Gary', who 'was transferred onto Universal Credit early this year. Diagnosed with depression, he was told that he would need to take his sick note to the

local Jobcentre, which he did but was told that they were unable to accept it. As a result, Gary was issued with an open-ended Universal Credit sanction. With no benefit payments for a couple of months, he relied heavily on handouts from friends, family and a food bank for subsistence. What he was not aware of is that the housing element of his Universal Credit had also been stopped. He found that out when he was issued with possession proceedings for his home, for arrears of about £1,600. It is at that point that he was signposted to the Law Centre, which liaised with the Department for Work and Pensions to make sure his sick note was sent and accepted'.

The Department for Work and Pensions recently followed up its computer fix with additional guidance for Local Authorities, to ensure they take correct action following a sanction notification, and that they classify the sanction in the right way.

However, this could leave unaddressed the technical distinction made between claimants who are 'sanctioned' and others who are 'disentitled'. Dr David Webster wrote in evidence that 'the Government appears to have given up any attempt to ensure that the one third of all sanctioned claimants whose alleged 'failure' is not actively seeking work do not wrongly lose Housing Benefit as a result. These claimants are 'disentitled' as well as 'sanctioned' and [the Government's response to the Work and Pensions Committee] accepts that Housing Benefit may be affected as a result. A recent clarificatory circular to Local Authorities […] related only to the two thirds of penalties which are purely 'sanctions' and not 'disentitlements'.

29. We recommend that 'disentitled' as well as 'sanctioned' claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance should retain their entitlement to Housing Benefit, so as to avoid a total loss of income and possible homelessness.

Changes to an existing benefit claim

A major cause for concern within the social security system – again one which brings food banks into play – is the sudden cessation of income for those people already in receipt of benefit who report or undergo a change in circumstances. Many of those reliant on Whitchurch Food Bank, for example, 'find their circumstances are often changing and therefore their benefits are stopped whilst it is reviewed. They do not have the means to allow for this in any budgeting they might make […] Most delays are due to recalculation of existing benefits'.

Our frustration here centres upon the seemingly avoidable nature of many of these problems. We were told by Liverpool's HOPE+ Food Bank, for example, of 'the stopping of a claim in order to process a very simple change such as an address. In one extreme example we assisted a resident at the YMCA, whose benefit had been stopped whilst the Department for Work and Pensions processed his change from room to bedsit within the same building'. Must it be necessary for somebody to lose their income and have to rely on an emergency food parcel while such a simple change is processed?

Two further examples were forthcoming from the St Vincent de Paul Society:

- In Altrincham, 'we visit a family who have difficulties in balancing the family budget. They are in receipt of Housing Benefit and when they have any changes in their family income, they have to submit a new application. Once this happens, the existing Housing Benefit is stopped and once granted no arrears are paid since the benefit was stopped. For this reason when their income has been reduced they do not submit a new application but prefer to struggle with the incorrect benefits'.
- In Whitstable, '[In the year to June 2015] A couple with two young children and a baby. Benefits were stopped due to a change in circumstances. September 2014: benefits were resumed, but payments halved to £130 per fortnight as they had moved in together. February 2015: benefits were stopped again advising them there was a change in circumstances, which the family had already informed them of. April 2015: income support resumed, but no tax credits. There were advised penalty charges would be applied. May 2015: tax credits were resumed, and [the Local MP] is dealing with a complaint they have logged against Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. June this year, two months' arrears of tax credits were received. This was a year of extreme anxiety and hardship for such a young family. They had done all they could to keep the appropriate authorities informed and up to date with their situation. During this time the SVP supported them with regular food bags, some financial assistance and help with form filling and appointments with the Citizens Advice Bureau'.

The impact of this cessation can be particularly pronounced among those claimants being transferred from one benefit to another, namely from Employment and Support Allowance to Jobseeker's Allowance.[6]

The Feeding Britain Working Party on Benefit Administration reported common issues around claimants 'not being advised that [they] could reclaim Employment and Support Allowance under a new condition; not [being advised] of the possibility of appealing an Employment and Support Allowance decision; and being told that they cannot claim Jobseeker's Allowance after being turned down for Employment and Support Allowance'.

In respect of the latter point, an all too common scenario affects those people who claim

[6] Employment and Support Allowance is available only to people who are deemed unable to work due to an illness or disability, while Jobseeker's Allowance is available to people who are deemed able to work.

Employment and Support Allowance and then are found fit for work. When their benefit payment ceases they may be advised to apply for Jobseeker's Allowance. Weeks later and with nil income, they may then be told by Jobcentre Plus that they are not fit for work and are therefore ineligible for Jobseeker's Allowance. Such claimants may subsequently be advised to reapply for Employment and Support Allowance. In our evidence:

- The Trussell Trust stated that '[emergency food parcel] recipients switching between [Employment and Support Allowance and Jobseeker's Allowance] were the most often cited benefits with issues of delivery. Recipients switching between the two benefits were frequently left without income due to delays and errors with the average wait time of 4.4 weeks whilst in some cases claimants were waiting for as long as 10-20 [weeks]'.
- Clay Cross Food Bank noted that 'mostly it is benefits relating to Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance. In some cases clients are assessed fit for work and benefits are stopped and a new claim made. In that delay – a minimum of three weeks – clients are referred to us. It is not uncommon for clients to appeal and are swapped back onto Employment and Support Allowance, causing yet another delay and requiring feeding.'
- The Matthew Tree Project told us of 'DP', who 'is a 50 year old lady referred from the Avon and Somerset Probation Trust. She was unemployed and had been on Employment and Support Allowance until this was suspended awaiting appeal. She was also experiencing severe debt and had no income for food. She lived alone in rented accommodation and had no functioning fridge and very little cooking equipment. She reported losing weight and requested referral to the malnutrition screening service at The Matthew Tree Project. DP reported regularly missing meals including one recent period where she had only eaten two meals over an entire week. DP was borderline underweight with a BMI of 20 (ideal range 20-24.9). She had lost 8.7 kg over the previous six months – a 12% weight loss'.
- Camborne, Pool and Redruth Food Bank reported that 'transfers across the benefit streams, especially Employment and Support Allowance to Jobseeker's Allowance, is never seamless – the greatest concern which is increasing'.
- West Cheshire Food Bank wrote that 'difficulties most frequently occurred where participants changed from claiming Jobseeker's Allowance to Employment and Support Allowance'.
- Liverpool's HOPE+ Food Bank suggested 'a reversal of the requirement to stop payment of benefits whilst moving from one benefit to another, or whilst processing a change of circumstances. Any resulting overpayment to be deducted at source on a weekly basis'.

We support the policy of moving onto Jobseeker's Allowance those claimants of Employment and Support Allowance who are found fit for work. But this transfer from one benefit to another must not be allowed to open up a gap in household income for weeks on end.

The Government does not know how many claimants are left stranded with no income during a transfer between Employment and Support Allowance and Jobseeker's Allowance. Of utmost importance here is to ensure these claimants are identified and then offered a continuous form of income.

30. We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions records how many claimants are left stranded with no income, and for how long, during a transfer between Employment and Support

Allowance and Jobseeker's Allowance, while continuing the payment of a minimum rate of Employment and Support Allowance right up until eligibility for Jobseeker's Allowance has been established and a new claim has been set in train.

The Feeding Britain Working Party on Benefit Administration surveyed 170 welfare rights workers on the length of time the Department for Work and Pensions takes to process a Mandatory Reconsideration – the period in which Employment and Support Allowance claimants can challenge a decision which finds them fit for work, before they are able to make a formal appeal. The Working Party reported 'a range of responses, with the majority giving a range of between 3 and 6 weeks, with a small number saying it could be quicker than this, and only two giving a response of two weeks or less. A significant number of respondents gave ranges that went higher than 6 weeks'.

We would welcome confirmation from the Department for Work and Pensions on the level of the formal time limit, due to be implemented from April 2016, on the Mandatory Reconsideration period during which Employment and Support Allowance claimants may challenge their fit for work decision.

31. **We reiterate our call for claimants to be paid a minimum rate of Employment and Support Allowance for the duration of their Mandatory Reconsideration period, again so as to avoid a total loss of income.**

Moving from welfare into work

The transition from Jobseeker's Allowance into work brings with it a barrage of extra costs that must be met before a first month's wages are paid. These additional costs, according to our evidence, can restrict new employees' ability to afford food.

When we raised this issue in **Feeding Britain**, the Government sought to reassure us by pointing to the discretionary support available to new employees, amongst others, from the Department for Work and Pensions' Flexible Support Fund. Each Jobcentre Plus can allocate sums from this Fund to cover such costs at different parts of a benefit claim, including the transition from Jobseeker's Allowance into work.

Yet we were alarmed to find from a recent parliamentary answer that in 2014-15, almost half (£64 million) of the £136 million budget set aside for the Flexible Support Fund remained unspent. Meanwhile we received further evidence of the hunger and hardship experienced by new employees before they received their first wage packet:

- The Parson Cross Initiative told us that 'in June, 'Louise' visited us. Her partner had just started a new job and was having to work a 'month in hand'. The family's budget was unable to stretch to cover these four weeks without any money'.
- Chichester District Food Bank has seen 'many clients whose benefits stop immediately when they get a job despite the fact that they will not be paid until the end of the month'.
- Norwich Food Bank has 'had phone calls from people saying they were on Jobseeker's Allowance, got a job so benefits stopped, but […] they're not paid until the end of the month so have four weeks without anything […] anecdotally, the most problematic time is switching between benefits, especially in relation to starting a new job'.
- Pershore Food Bank recommended 'greater help for the transition to work from business [i.e.] not having to wait a month to get paid. [People starting work should] receive a wage at the end of the first week so that new employees are incentivised and don't have to wait weeks for payment of wages which leads to further problems especially if they have been unemployed for some time'.
- The Association of Pension and Benefit Claimants suggested that 'the London Underground are funding a scheme to give people starting a job free travel for two months. Schemes like these need to be introduced nationally'.

32. We strongly recommend the pursuit within Jobcentre Plus of a reformed welfare contract, in which claimants' duties are properly buttressed by a package of support to which they might be entitled. As a first reform, the Department for Work and Pensions should roll over the £64 million that was unspent from last year's Flexible Support Fund and allocate it to a ring-fenced 'First Month In Work' pot. Jobcentre Plus officials should automatically offer weekly payments from this pot to all claimants entering work, or to cover the costs of all journeys over a certain distance to their new place of work.

Tax credits

Among those food banks forecasting an increase in need in the year ahead, the standalone contributory factor was the proposal in the 2015 Summer Budget for a series of cuts to the generosity of tax credits that top-up the wages of lower paid workers to a more adequate minimum.

Concern was expressed in evidence that any reforms that might potentially reduce the value of tax credits would increase the numbers of people relying on food banks. Chichester District Food Bank wrote that 'it is inconceivable that the application of the tax credit reductions, when they come into force, will not add appreciably to these problems and increase the numbers requiring our service'.

Likewise Clay Cross Food Bank warned that '[the number of hungry people in the year ahead] mainly depends on tax credits and whether the cuts are imposed. Then I believe we will see an increase in the numbers of employed gaining referrals to Clay Cross Food Bank. If the sting is taken out of these cuts then I expect that numbers accessing our food bank will continue to decline […]'.

We very much welcome the Government's decision to reverse its proposed cuts to tax credits for people working for low wages. The proposal had emerged as a persistent source of anxiety among those individuals and organisations submitting evidence to us. However, we believe that there is scope to improve the administration of tax credits in order to reduce avoidable errors and delays which may result in people being unable to afford food.

It beggars belief that some families in work face hardship because their tax credits have been suspended following an administrative error or a change in household circumstances. In particular, our evidence suggests that disputes over the whereabouts of important supporting documentation are most likely to lead to an unwarranted suspension of tax credits and, with it, exposure to hunger. The issue of 'missing letters' required to validate a tax credit claim was picked up by the Feeding Britain Working Party on Benefit Administration.

It was reported earlier this year that a family in Essex was left relying on a food bank after their tax credits were stopped when the father's 16 year-old brother moved in with the family. Their claim was suspended and had yet to be resolved three months later, in part because the birth certificate provided by the family had been lost by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs even after it had acknowledged receipt and the letter had been signed for.[7]

We similarly heard from Winston Waller of one working mother who needed emergency help from Our Lady of Grace, East London:

'In July this year the mother got a standard letter asking her to reapply for Working Tax Credit before the 31st or it would cease. The letter arrived on 28th July. I did it for her online and thankfully printed the page that confirmed their application. Her payments stopped on July 31st as the online application never arrived! Because I had proof it was done I was able to have her payments reinstated. This took until yesterday [22nd September] to do, as she had to make a new application providing evidence of both her and her husband's income for the tax year 2014-15. More statements to find. More expense. More stress for the family and they did nothing wrong'.

The Rt Hon Frank Field MP, chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger, submitted evidence showing more than half of all tax credit enquiries he had handled since May 2015 resulted from forms going missing in the post or claimants' information otherwise not being processed correctly by Her Majesty's Revenue and

[7] http://www.gazette-news.co.uk/news/13638732.Red_tape_has_left_us_relying_on_handouts/?ref=mr&lp=1

Customs. Upon enquiring with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, in each case the appropriate correspondence was eventually tracked down and the cessation in payments was reversed.

One such case involved a self-employed person whose tax credit payments ceased in August 2015. The reason given was a failure to declare her recent circumstances, even though she had submitted them via Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs' website. It was admitted weeks later that a clerical error had occurred within Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and the payment was soon reinstated.

The cessation of tax credit payments for existing claimants who are alleged to have failed to submit the necessary paperwork required to process a renewal, or a change of household circumstances, needs to be addressed.

33. **We recommend that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs establishes a reliable mechanism which makes clear the whereabouts of important documentation relating to tax credit claims, acknowledges the submission of online renewals, and does not suspend payments until it can be proven that claimants have received and then failed to respond appropriately to the necessary paperwork. A first step should be to initiate a phone call to claimants if the receipt of a claim renewal form has not been acknowledged within a reasonable period of time.**

34. **We reiterate our call for Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to guarantee continuity of income for those existing claimants who report a change in household circumstances, by implementing a minimum tax credit payment while it recalculates their entitlement.**

Universal Credit

The early signs from the rollout of Universal Credit – a new working-age benefit which is intended to replace tax credits, Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit and Income Support, by 2020 – suggest that two of its main features already have impacted on the need for emergency food parcels.

The extended wait of five or six weeks for a first payment of benefit, as well as the policy of no longer paying rent monies directly to landlords, have proven particularly troublesome:

- The Feeding Britain Working Party on Benefit Administration reported that delays 'are in-built in the [Universal Credit] system'.
- Most of the seven Universal Credit claimants referred to Tower Hamlets Food Bank have been referred due to the long delay between making a claim and receiving their first payment. The First Love Foundation stressed that 'the "advance" of £139 is not sufficient to cover a 5 (or now 6) week period, whilst at the same time, given that Universal Credit also includes their Housing Benefit, this means that any delay will also result in arrears'.
- The Trussell Trust reported that 'food banks also experiencing Universal Credit starts found that a combination of payment arrears and administrative delay caused acute short-term income crises amongst clients […] Waits of up to five weeks were reported in Blackburn where there was a sharp increase in referrals due to issues with Universal Credit'.
- Wirral Food Bank warned that 'those in need during this period have to apply for advance payment of benefits – the onus is on the client, and creates additional obstacles, especially for those who are not computer literate or find difficulty with communication, be it written or verbal. The offer of an advance should be made and processed at the point of application'.
- Glasgow South West Food Bank reported that 'the switch to Universal Credit with the built-in five week delay before the first payment almost seems to accept the existence of food banks to provide a safety net'.
- Knowsley Food Bank noted via The Trussell Trust that 'the biggest problem seems to be with the people transitioning to [Universal Credit] having been on Jobseeker's Allowance … In one example a client who was on Jobseeker's Allowance, got a job, but then his company went bust so he had to sign on to Universal Credit. He was in work six weeks but then had to wait nine weeks to get his welfare payments started again'.
- Liverpool's HOPE+ Food Bank reported that 'although statistically we lack sufficient data as yet to make an accurate assessment, it is our belief that Universal Credit is already leaving the most vulnerable with significant budget shortfalls. That it is paid a month in arrears can lead to the claimant accruing significant and expensive debt whilst awaiting the first payment. The need for the claimant to pay rent directly rather than have it paid via Housing Benefit can often result in people "robbing Peter to pay Paul", and we are beginning to see a small but significant increase in rent arrears and utility arrears being cited as a cause of debt. Universal Credit assumes a level of fiscal and budgetary awareness, which is often either unknown, and/or beyond some of the most vulnerable in our society'.

35. **We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions reviews the impact on claimants' financial circumstances of the six-week wait for a first Universal Credit payment.**

36. **We recommend that food banks and other charitable providers of food follow the practice employed by the Leeds Food Aid Network, in continually promoting their local credit union's Budget Account. This account will allocate Universal Credit to particular items of household expenditure. Crucially, it will make sure people's rent is paid.**

We were alarmed to hear from Wirral Citizens Advice Bureau that 'it can be six weeks until [new claimants] get their first payment, but they can only apply for hardship within the first 21 days'. A claimant may not know three weeks into their claim being processed whether or not they might need emergency support three weeks later.

37. **We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions immediately revokes the requirement that new Universal Credit claimants may only apply for an emergency payment within the first 21 days of what might be a 42-day wait for their first Universal Credit payment. We believe claimants should be entitled to apply for emergency support at any point while they are waiting for their claim to be processed and then paid.**

Overall, there is no conclusive evidence on how Universal Credit might impact upon hunger in this country. It would nonetheless be wise to listen to the concerns expressed by food banks serving those areas in which Universal Credit has been rolled out. By acting on these concerns the Government could pre-empt any difficulties that might arise on a wider scale if and when it reaches a wider group of claimants.

The local welfare safety net

A last line of defence for those at risk of falling below the national minimum is the local welfare safety net. This line of defence is manned mostly by Local Authorities.

Our evidence on the practical delivery of local welfare has revealed a mixed picture. Some Local Authorities have clearly stepped up to the mark and are finding innovative ways to deliver better services in partnership with local charities and groups. Others, we were disappointed to learn, are viewed as 'non-existent'. There is a clear need in some areas for the local welfare safety net to be strengthened.

We encountered concerns in evidence around the Government's move to subsume funding for the local welfare safety net into Local Authorities' overall funding allocation. In its first years of operation this pot of funding was ring-fenced. The removal of this ring-fence, in some cases, may have resulted in Local Authorities using the funds to fill financial holes in other vitally important frontline services. The net effect is that Local Authorities might have no other option than to refer people to their local food bank, rather than offer them direct emergency help:

- Hastings Furniture Service reported that 'the removal of a well-funded emergency/crisis system, and replaced by a low funded discretionary system has had an enormous impact on our ability to link clients with short term assistance, where clients no longer have the options available to them that could improve their situation and instead means they remain in dire need. And while the future of the discretionary scheme remains uncertain this looks like it will only get worse'.
- Clevedon and District Food Bank told us that 'the Local Authority used to issue Tesco vouchers paid for by the [local welfare] scheme. This has now ended and we do get people coming to us as a result, though this is not quantifiable'.
- The City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council wrote that, 'Local Welfare Assistance funding is now part of the overall revenue support grant which is likely to be cut in future years and therefore the Council's ability to provide Local Welfare Assistance could be further compromised. We would ask that future Local Welfare Assistance payments are identified separately and be protected from any future cuts'.

We welcome the Government's decision to maintain funding for the local welfare safety net. However, the ring-fence around this funding has been removed and its funding in future years remains uncertain. The Feeding Britain Working Party on Benefit Administration reported that at least eight Local Authorities have removed their local welfare safety net entirely, and others have significantly scaled back provisions. The Working Group argues that 'this is likely to have a direct knock-on effect on to food bank use, since this removes (or scales back) a major source of crisis support for individuals'.

38. We recommend that the Government sets out a provisional funding settlement for the local welfare safety net for each year until 2020, and given the evidence of some vulnerable people falling through the net, consider whether this funding should be ring-fenced.

Again we were told in evidence that some people in dire straits have not been made aware of their entitlement to this emergency support. Clay Cross Food Bank, for example, told us that 'none of our clients are made aware of this fund by Jobcentre Plus when access to this fund at the outset might result in clients not needing our services.'

39. We recommend that the standard script given to Jobcentre Plus advisers be updated so new and

existing claimants are told that they can seek temporary advances towards emergency costs from the local welfare safety net.

For those people who may have been made aware of their local welfare safety net, they could have found that the strict criteria applied to any potential support meant they did not qualify for it. One such example is the stipulation that, in order to qualify, applicants must already be in receipt of benefit. This could mean, in some cases, that people who are awaiting their first benefit payment are not eligible for support. It was reported by Homeless Link that 46% of respondents to one survey stated they had experience of an applicant for local welfare support being turned down because they were 'not in receipt of other qualifying benefits'.

40. **We recommend that Local Authorities should not restrict eligibility to the local welfare safety net to people in receipt of means-tested benefits, for some people in desperate need may actually find themselves waiting for a decision on a new benefit claim, and working families in persistently low-paid work must not be barred from assistance in a crisis.**

Within the Sheffield Diocese's submission one provider said, 'the Local Welfare Assistance scheme seems to be set up so that if you need help, you do not qualify for it. We have not had much luck in helping our clients to apply for help'. Another said, 'the statutory assistance schemes are becoming more difficult to access as monies allocated for support are reduced from central government'.

The Trussell Trust reported in its submission that 'some of our food banks also feel that there is unfair and restricted eligibility to these funds, which in some cases is only available to those who are currently in receipt of benefits. It is therefore problematic for those who are not receiving welfare payments – due to delays, changes or sanctions to their benefits – and need to access the local welfare assistance scheme […] issues with welfare delivery are the most common reasons for referral to food banks, yet in some cases these clients do not have any recourse to emergency local funds as Councils say they are not eligible to access them. Expanding the eligibility criteria would ensure Councils are not underspending and leaving people in severe need without access to funds that could alleviate poverty and decrease reliance on food banks'.

41. **We recommend that each Local Authority consults every year with local voluntary organisations who work with the very poorest citizens, on the types of costs that should be covered by the local welfare safety net and from whom claims should be invited. This criteria should reflect the size of the funds available as well as the diverse and changing needs of the very poorest in each community. Equally, we would emphasise that where local welfare is not operating properly, local voluntary organisations should enter into a dialogue with Local Authorities about this.**

We have focused so far in this chapter on those features of the social security system that risk leaving people exposed to hunger. But what of those deeper seated, longer term factors that bring food banks into play for all too many of our fellow citizens?

A continuation of the long term trends disadvantaging Britain's poor

We now have fresh evidence of the long-term trends that have most disadvantaged Britain's poor, over and above poorer citizens in other advanced Western economies.

According to the House of Commons Library, in the eight years to August 2015:

- **Consumer prices increased by 23% in the United Kingdom; compared with 15% in the United States, 14% in Canada, 12% in France and 12% in Germany.**
- **The price of food and non-alcoholic drinks increased by 31% in the United Kingdom; compared with 28% in Canada, 20% in the United States, 18% in Germany and 12% in France.**
- **The price of domestic energy increased by 63% in the United Kingdom; compared with 34% in France, 23% in Germany, 14% in Canada and 2% in the United States.**
- **The cost of renting increased by 22% in the United Kingdom; compared with 15% in France, 15% in the United States, 12% in Canada and 10% in Germany.**
- **And yet in the seven years to 2014 annual earnings increased by just 13% in the United Kingdom; compared with 14% in France, 15% in the United States, 17% in Germany and 21% in Canada.**

These trends impacted most heavily on the poor. Data from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation tells us that between 2002–03 and 2013–14, the poorest fifth of the population experienced an annual average inflation rate of 3.4% compared with 3% for the wealthiest fifth, and the official rate of 3.1%. Moreover the real cost of living went up 50% for low-income households between 2002–03 and 2013–14, compared with 43% for high-income households.[8]

Examining the impact of these trends on family budgets, Dr Flora Douglas was able to share with us some analysis which 'showed that Scottish households with a household income that is less than 60% of median income are spending [up to 23%] of their income on food compared to approximately 10% for Scottish households on average and above incomes'.

The last two years have brought some respite though, thanks mainly to falling food prices. Food prices rose 11.5% in real terms between 2007 and their peak in June 2012 as measured by the Consumer Price Index, following a long period in which they had fallen. Gradual price reductions since 2013 have reduced that real terms increase to 8% since 2007.[9]

Despite these welcome reductions, households still are devoting a larger proportion of their income to food than they did in 2007. 11.4% of the average household budget went on food in 2013, still 0.9 percentage points above the 2007 level.[10] For the poorest 20% of households, 16.5% of the budget went on food, still 1.3% percentage points above 2007.

Market prices are working against the diets of Britain's poor. We believe these trends have contributed significantly to the struggles many families in this country face when seeking to balance their income

[8] Abi Adams and Peter Levell, *Measuring poverty when inflation varies across households* (London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2014)

[9] Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Food Statistics Pocketbook 2015 (London, DEFRA, 2015): p. 15

[10] Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Food Statistics Pocketbook 2015 (London, DEFRA, 2015): p. 16

against the monies required to pay their food, rent and utility bills. It is these struggles which have played a most important role in sustaining the need for food banks in 2015.

The struggle to make ends meet on a low income

A most striking finding from our evidence is the large number of people citing an extended period of low income, or no income at all, from work or benefit as the main reason for their hunger.

2015 saw a significant increase in the proportion of food bank referrals resulting from insufficient income over a sustained period of time. This sizeable group of people, termed 'once a monthers' by ReadiFood, consists of those who cannot make ends meet through to the end of each month and for whom a food bank becomes a necessary tool for survival.

The submission we received from Cambridge City Food Bank was typical of many others: 'In 2015 we have seen a trend away from benefits as a reason for need and towards the more generic "low income". This may be due to a reduction in the sanctioning of benefits or the fact that low paid jobs are not enough for people to manage on'. Moreover:

- Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau told us that 'the impact of 'benefit sanctions' and 'benefit delays' seem to have reduced [from 49% of referrals in 2014 to 25% in 2015] in stark contrast, the single largest contributor to the demand for food vouchers from the Bureau – one that received only negligible entries in the previous report – has been low income [from 11% of referrals in 2014 to 50% in 2015]'.
- Dunstable Food Bank reported that 'in the first five months of this year low income has become by far the largest cause, followed by benefit delays and changes in benefits.'
- West Cheshire Food Bank noted that 'issues relating to low, insecure income and debt were […] hugely significant reasons why people accessed emergency food provision (31%)'.
- Pershore Food Bank wrote that 'low income is consistently the biggest reason for crisis. Benefit delays/changes reduced slightly […] low erratic income, zero-hours contracts'.
- Ely Food Bank informed us that 'the number of clients presenting with difficulties resulting from 'low income' has now surpassed those presenting with benefit details or issues […] utilities, transport and rent combined all exhaust the available income for people on benefits or low income – leaving scant little for food and certainly no reserves'.

Hunger in Britain, therefore, is a deeper issue than just an unexpected crisis. This deeply distressing conclusion was reached by many of those individuals and organisations submitting evidence to us:

- A school governor from Birkenhead reported that 'the key problems for our families are the ability to manage a very tight budget, when rent, Council Tax, heating, water and other essential costs such as clothing for growing children are paid there is little left for food. Even those in receipt of Housing Benefit have to top up their rent due to the high cost of private rents'.
- Caritas Social Action Network wrote that 'the primary cause of people accessing [food banks and other charitable providers of food] relates to the gap between income and outgoings; this remains consistent regardless of whether the individual's primary income is sourced via benefits or employment. Many clients which Nugent Care provide with emergency food provision need this support due to an unexpected cost, or a higher than average bill. Their immediate priority therefore is not food, and as a result families and individuals are skipping meals; or in some cases going without food altogether that day'.
- Camborne, Pool and Redruth Food Bank said that 'the real problem is that

wages/benefits do not meet the demands of modern day society's aspirations. The knife edge of income to expenditure is far too close'.

- The Brighton and Hove Food Partnership reported that 'the chronic or "long term" food poverty experienced in our very high cost city is hard to tackle – often it is simply down to people not having sufficient income in relation to their household costs, day in-day out, and being forced to make difficult choices, e.g. heat or eat'.
- Food Plymouth CIC noted that 'many of our families face the dilemma of "what bill shall I pay – heating or eating, children's shoes or food on the table, can't afford to work, can't afford not to"'.
- Wirral Food Bank said how 'people have a finite "pot of money" they can use. As a consequence many who use the food banks are in debt, and are attempting to "juggle" their finances on a daily basis, deciding what to spend their money on and in some cases to go without'.
- The Parson Cross Initiative recalled how 'many of the families and individuals we talk to tell us that their household budgets cannot cope with unexpected bills or sudden dips in income. There is not enough money coming into the household to save for 'emergencies'. Food is one area of their budget that they find themselves cutting.'
- Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau expressed the problem of 'those who struggle to fulfil all of their financial commitments on a day-to-day basis find it almost impossible to save money regularly, if ever. When exceptional circumstances arise, they are extremely unlikely to be able to find the extra finance needed to cope without falling into hardship'.
- Dunstable Food Bank said that 'one of the main issues people have is the inability to budget or live cheaply to match their means. For example, prepayment meters are supposed to help with this but utilities are more expensive when paid for this way. There is a lot of pressure on people to have the 'latest' or 'best' things but these are defined by the businesses that make them or the advertising agencies they employ. Value products are often as good, and sometimes better than 'best' ones but that message does not seem to get through'.

Our evidence brings up two possible explanations for this constant vulnerability to hunger, both of which we emphasised in our report last year: first, most families who find themselves struggling to balance the books simply do not have enough money to make ends meet, despite attempting to live within limited means; second, some families simply do not possess the skills needed to cope. It is important to stress that this is the regrettable continuation of a longer term trend, and not simply a phenomenon that has emerged in the last year.

A shortage of budgeting skills

Our evidence suggests that some people relying on food banks tend to have a low level of financial cushioning, so that benefit delays, or unexpected outgoings, can trigger the need for an emergency food parcel. On the one hand, this demands that the Government improves the timely delivery of benefits, reduce error, and improve the processes of Mandatory Reconsideration and appeal, so that individuals do not experience unexpected drops in income. However, it is also important that people are helped to build up their financial resilience for when disaster may strike, and the Department for Work and Pensions should consider ways in which this can be encouraged.

One such way might be for Budgeting Advisors in Jobcentre Plus to identify a strategy with claimants for building up a savings pot, however modest, by helping them to open an account which gives them a clear idea of their disposable income, less their essential bills. Such an account could give people a better chance of being able to budget and, where appropriate, save in order to build up resilience.

42. We recommend that long-term resilience should be the main aim of budgeting support offered to benefit claimants, and as a first step the Treasury should ask National Savings and Investments to create accounts that are tailored for individuals who might otherwise struggle to budget, let alone save.

A sizeable minority of submissions attributed the onset of, and constant vulnerability to, hunger in some families to their inability to cook and budget from week to week. For some families lacking sufficient budgeting and cooking skills the food bank takes on a longer term role of relieving some of the pressure:

- Dunstable Food Bank stated that 'many of our clients have incorporated the availability of food banks into their daily lives.'
- Financial Action and Advice Derbyshire identified from its caseload that 'many people have poor budgeting skills and prioritise wrongly, choosing to pay the doorstep lender that they owe money to before paying the rent or electricity bill. Some have poor literacy and numeracy and don't understand contracts or have the skills to compare deals'.
- Norwich Food Bank reported that 'sometimes a lack of education around priority debts/bills, what a "good" loan looks like and sometimes a "priority" generally'.
- Clevedon and District Food Bank noted that 'many families do not nowadays possess the skills (or inspiration or energy) to buy raw ingredients and cook from scratch, even though it is cheaper and healthier. The introduction of savoury cooking into the primary national curriculum was an excellent move, providing an opportunity to get these skills across to pupils, and possibly through them to their parents, so they are better fed at home'.
- Liverpool's HOPE+ Food Bank said that 'whilst it might not be a popular observation, it is a fact that many people do not spend their limited budget wisely in respect of food. We would assert that this is due to a lack of basic budgeting skills; and an inability or unwillingness to cook'. It concluded that [a] review [of] school curricula [is needed] to include compulsory home economics and life skills courses'.

The financial benefit of being able to use one's resources more efficiently could make a huge difference to household budgets. The average cost to all households of the food and drink they

throw away each week is £9, or 14% of the average weekly shopping budget.[11]

Even if wages and benefits were high enough to provide a subsistence minimum, we fear some of our citizens would remain below this minimum because of the havoc wreaked on their budgets by addictions to drink, smoking and gambling. A recent study suggests over 432,000 children are made poor because their parents smoke.[12]

One food bank reported that 'we have found that many of the people being sent to us have quite high levels of benefit and the reason they have been sent to us is that they have debts which eat into their income. We are working at trying to cap the level of the benefit which entitles clients to come to us. Some of them have very high levels of benefit and we are anxious that by giving them food we are freeing up money for some of them to fund other habits! Most of them smoke, many of them have drug or alcohol dependency, and after three years we are still helping many of the same people'.

We heard also in one submission that 'fags are expensive and they are an "ever present" among poor people. They hoover money out of the pocket, they wreck health and they shorten lives … the addictive and damaging impact of smoking is awful. It is a major factor in taking money for food and spending it on addiction …'

Action is required to help parents quit smoking, both for the sake of their children's immediate and long-term health and also to free up some vital monies with which they can buy food.

43. We recommend that Local Authorities trial an intervention to help women quit smoking during pregnancy. Based on an ongoing piece of work in Merseyside, such trials should encompass stress management support sessions to help pregnant women cope with the stresses associated with quitting smoking while pregnant; a "quit buddy" to support them on this journey; and a financial incentive to encourage them to stop smoking.

[11] Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Food Statistics Pocketbook 2015 (London, DEFRA, 2015): p. 36

[12] Belvin, C., Britton, J., Holmes, J., and Langley, T., *Parental smoking and child poverty in the UK: an analysis of national survey data* (MBC Public Health 15:507, May 2015)

A lack of money with which to budget

These observations, which must be part of any serious discussion on hunger in Britain, must also be balanced by the overwhelming issue of low income. In most cases families' vulnerability to hunger boils down simply to a lack of money with which to buy food, pay rent, keep up to date with utility bills and sometimes have a little over for a small treat.

For, as the Bill Sargent Trust explained, many 'food bank users are struggling to get by on their income, despite careful budgeting and frugal living. A significant number of food bank users were in food crisis because, from day to day, their benefits didn't provide enough to meet their basic needs'.

Likewise, according to the Devon and Cornwall Food Association, 'whilst we are aware that, in some cases, the lack of "skills" relating to food preparation or household budgeting might be to blame for poor household management (and will need attention), it is worrying that an increasing number of working families are now experiencing stress of this type [due to low income]'.

From where does this stress arise, and what might be done about it?

The budgets of those households who, for an extended period of time, have been striving to keep their heads just above water may only begin to feel the pinch following a sudden change in circumstances, be it the loss of one's job or a sudden family illness or bereavement, for example. When this happens, some items of expenditure that were taken on during slightly more fortunate times may quickly become unaffordable.

This all too common scenario was spelt out in two submissions:

- Tameside and Longdendale Food Bank reported that 'when someone is affected by a change to their income due to loss of job, illness, benefit change, there is often a knock-on effect – they get behind with their rental payments or utility bills or get into debt. Often they are faced with a choice between paying a bill and feeding their family'.
- The Oxford Food Bank noted that 'nowadays whilst people are in employment they sign contracts for things such as mobile phones, HP agreements etc. without any care as to how they will pay for them when circumstances change. So when they do, these families are left with "contractual commitments" first and what is left is for food and clothing. This top slicing of income will of necessity result in less money being available for food. Is a possible solution to allow a moratorium on these payments for 3-6 months to allow the families/individuals to reorganise their finances – but ultimately not walk away from their commitments?'

Along these lines, The Children's Society suggested that 'The Government should work with creditors and the free debt advice sector to develop a 'Breathing Space' scheme. This would give struggling families an extended period of protection from default charges, mounting interest, collections and enforcement action'.

We see great merit in this proposal. If enacted it could create some vital room in household budgets for sufficient food purchases during some unbelievably tough times.

44. We recommend that suppliers of gas, electricity, water, communications, and credit introduce a 'breathing space' mechanism. This would allow pre-existing contractual commitments to be suspended or at least eased for a fixed period and without charge, to allow households experiencing a sudden loss of income to reorganise their finances,

particularly in compassionate circumstances or where households have an exemplary track record with payments.

In some cases, as we documented last year, support towards utility bills is already made available to households trying to survive on a low income. The problem in many cases might be a lack of knowledge or awareness of this support:

- One school governor from Birkenhead wrote that 'there is a need for the support available to people to be highlighted and advertised as many people do not know of the available support or how to access it'.
- Clevedon and District Food Bank suggested that '[The Government] could at least take the positive step of telling benefits staff they can hand new clients a flyer with details of any budgeting, shopping and cookery courses locally available, and say 'money might be a little tighter than you're used to, while you're looking for work, so here's a list of help that's available to help you manage'. We had a case a year or so ago of a woman left with five children, because the man had walked out. If he had been referred to this kind of help at the start of his unemployment, they might not have got into debt, the relationship might have been saved, and the kinds wouldn't have grown up with an absent dad'.

We recommended in **Feeding Britain** that Jobcentre Plus advisers should distribute to new benefit claimants alongside their Claimant Commitment a handful of literature outlining the support they can receive towards their household bills while they are on a low income and looking for work.

We are pleased to report that that Birkenhead Jobcentre Plus has begun piloting this initiative, as part of the **Feeding Birkenhead** project, with literature supplied by British Gas, npower, Energy UK, United Utilities and Ofcom. The aim here is to reform the welfare contract into a two-way agreement, in which the claimant is made aware both of their duties and the help to which they are entitled.

Birkenhead Jobcentre Plus began distributing the literature in September 2015 to new claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Universal Credit and Income Support. The Jobcentre Manager told us that 'customers who claim Employment and Support Allowance or Income Support do so because of a major upheaval in their life, such as illness, bereavement, caring responsibilities and new baby etc. They can find the change in their circumstances especially in relation to income and budgeting quite daunting'.

The Jobcentre has agreed to collate feedback and data on the effectiveness of the literature. This feedback will be reviewed at the next meeting of **Feeding Birkenhead**. We advocate the national rollout of this new contract so that new claimants can be helped to make their money go further while they seek work.

45. As a second part of a reformed welfare contract, each local network of food banks and other charitable providers of food should seek permission from their Regional Jobcentre Plus Director to share information through Jobcentre Plus from gas, electricity, water, and communications providers outlining 'help to make your money go further'. This information should be distributed to new claimants when they sign their Claimant Commitment.

The costs of gas and electricity

While the cost of a basket of food has fallen and remains low, gas and electricity bills, in particular for poor households, remain high.

Our concern on this matter is shared among those food banks who gave evidence to us:

- The Cathedral Food Bank in Bangor, Gwynedd, reported that 'occasionally clients tell us that they have no fuel to cook food'.
- Chichester District Food Bank noted that 'many clients have not turned on their heating for the past two winters, and are reliant on vouchers from local charities for minimal electricity for cooking and lighting'.
- Birmingham's Sparkhill Food Bank told us that 'our referrals definitely increase as soon as the cold weather arrives with many having to choose to 'heat or eat'. Clients often ask if we can help with money on their gas and electricity but we do not have funds to do so'.
- Sue Baic from the Matthew Tree Project wrote that 'many do not have money for fuel to cook and heat houses so choose the latter.'
- St Peter's Church in Rock Ferry found that 'in the winter period our parishioners have to choose between paying a large heating bill and buying in sufficient food for the family. If they are cut off they pay more on a meter and so the spiral begins'.

Indeed, the Trussell Trust reported that food banks across its network 'have reported increases in referrals during the colder seasons as people balance the cost of both heating and eating'.

A most prominent source of concern is the reliance of many poorer households on prepayment meters, which by and large charge a higher tariff on each unit of energy over and above the costs paid by mainly more fortunate Direct Debit customers.

According to the Citizens Advice Bureau households relying on prepayment meters can expect to pay £226 a year more on average than other households on the cheapest Direct Debit deals. Manchester Central Food Bank described prepayment meters as 'inefficient, expensive and [they] punish the poor'.

We regret the compounding of this problem among those households seeking to repay a debt on their prepayment meter, which may sometimes prohibit them even from cooking the contents of their emergency food parcel. According to Liverpool's HOPE+, 'debts to utility companies resulting in prepayment meters, despite modifications to tariffs, are still a significant problem. Guests will often reject food, especially fresh vegetables on the grounds that it will cost too much to cook'.

The Children's Society explained further that 'energy debts can also have a deleterious impact on family finances, meaning that they face difficult choices between feeding their children and heating their home. Our report Show Some Warmth showed that one in five families have cut back on food as a result of energy debt. One parent told us that: 'It is actually taking the control out of your hands and other than cancelling, which I've had to do before to cancel the direct debit because I just could not [afford it]'.

An example of the knock-on effect of trying to pay off debt on a prepayment meter came from a grandfather who wished to submit evidence under anonymity:

'Two weeks ago there was quite a cold snap in the evening and my grandchildren were complaining of being cold. My daughter also needed to bathe them ready for the start of the new school year so she put £10 of credit onto the gas meter. However [the energy company] immediately deducted £9.50 for rental of the meter and arrears payment which of course left her with 50 pence worth of gas to heat the hot

water system. This is not a one-off as last week she put £6.00 credit on the gas meter but [the energy company] immediately deducted £5.70 leaving her with 30 pence to heat the hot water system'.

Such reports are frequent, it seems, at Cambridge City Food Bank. It reported that 'many of our clients use prepayment meters for their gas and electricity. This is charged at a higher rate and is very costly if they go into debt. This gives them a greater problem since they need a greater income to pay for their gas and electricity'.

We agree therefore with Whitchurch Food Bank, in that '[we need] systems of paying for utilities that do not penalise the poorer in society'.

One such penalty is the high standing charge applied to prepayment meters. Many of the people relying on Wirral Food Bank pay for their gas and electricity using a prepayment meter. The Food Bank told us that 'daily standing charges are applied; during the summer months clients will economise by not using one or both utilities for heating etc, standing charges will accrue on a daily basis. The next time the client tops up their prepayment card the standing charges are debited thereby using all or the majority of the payment applied by the client'. We are pleased that Ofgem has granted British Gas a derogation to reimburse those households who are struggling financially and then find themselves caught in this situation, and would wish for this to become a minimum requirement for all energy suppliers.

A further penalty is imposed through the lack of choice on offer to households relying on prepayment meters. Southampton City Mission, for example, noticed among its clients a common difficulty in paying for 'high energy costs, particularly during the winter months with the added frustration of limited ability to shop around when on key meters'.

The misery is compounded by charges of up to £180 for the installation of a meter, and £160 for its removal.

We welcome the steps Ofgem has taken to improve the availability of a wider range of tariffs for households relying on a prepayment meter, as well as their ability to switch providers if they are repaying debt on their fuel bills, and to review the charges levied on the installation and removal of a meter. We hope it will build on these initial steps.

Based on the evidence of hardship experienced by a sizeable number of mainly poor households who pay for their gas and electricity using a prepayment meter, earlier this year we submitted to Ofgem a proposal for a New Deal on Prepayment Meters. This proposal, which has received the support of 112 Members of Parliament,[13] called on energy suppliers to:

- **Proceed as soon as possible with 'Smart Pay As You Go Meters' for their poorest customers, on the understanding that they eliminate the premium charged over and above the costs incurred by other customers**
- **Publish the additional costs incurred on supplying and maintaining each prepayment meter, to enable a comparison with the premiums charged to households who rely on a prepayment meter**
- **Abolish fees for the installation and termination of a prepayment meter**
- **Provide two-week credit tokens to households relying on emergency food parcels and who cannot afford to top up their prepayment meter**
- **Offer rebates to prepayment customers caught out by the**

[13] Early Day Motion 236, Prepayment Meters, tabled by The Rt Hon Frank Field MP in July 2015, can be found at http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2015-16/236

standing charge on their meter over the Summer months

We wish to add a sixth strand to this proposal, in light of concerns around the potential incorporation of 'peak tariffs' into 'Smart Pay As You Go Meters'.[14]

46. We would welcome a firm guarantee from energy supplies that households who currently rely on a prepayment meter will not be charged more for their gas and electricity once they are transferred to a 'Smart Pay As You Go Meter'.

We are pleased to report some progress by individual energy suppliers, further details of which are included in the Appendix, although a co-ordinated response remains lacking.

One particular initiative we wish to celebrate here is the 'Fuel Bank' being piloted by npower and the Trussell Trust, which comes under the fourth strand of our proposal. Under this scheme households who are unable to afford the gas required to cook the contents of their emergency food parcel are given a voucher which entitles them to roughly £30 worth of emergency credit on their prepayment meter. Between July and October 2015, as part of the **Feeding Birkenhead** project, 402 households, totalling 824 people, received vouchers worth a total of £11,730 from the npower Fuel Bank at Wirral Food Bank. The pilot has proved to be a valuable source of help, freeing up vital resources for households who have hit rock bottom.

Wirral Food Bank told us that 'the introduction of [the] npower [Fuel Bank] has assisted clients, enabling them to meet their gas/electricity costs thereby enabling them to allocate their funds across other areas of household spend'.

Elsewhere, County Durham Food Bank, which has also piloted the scheme, said: 'the Fuel Bank partnership with npower has improved the "heat or eat" situation for those with prepayment meters. Better advice as to the options for others in energy crisis, has also helped to make existing support more accessible. In the six summer months this has been operating over 2,500 people have benefited and we are glad to be continuing the scheme'.

As part of our New Deal on Prepayment Meters we propose that all energy suppliers offer their very poorest customers this emergency support.

47. We recommend that Ofgem, with the support of the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, should set energy suppliers a target of phasing in the New Deal on Prepayment Meters by 2020, so as to eliminate the additional costs incurred by this group of mainly poor households and to ensure emergency support is available when they find themselves unable to afford gas and electricity. The Secretary of State should convene a summit with energy suppliers to negotiate a timetable for its implementation.

We very much welcome the decision taken by the Department of Energy and Climate Change to allow families with young children trying to survive on a low income, regardless of their employment status, to apply for help towards their energy bills through the Warm Home Discount scheme. However, they still do not receive the same automatic entitlement as poor pensioners. A next reform to counter hunger therefore should be to grant automatic help for all poor families with young children.

48. We very much welcome the acceptance by the Department of Energy and Climate Change of our recommendation in Feeding Britain

[14] See, for example: http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/bills/article-3322658/The-great-smart-meter-rip-UK-energy-giants-use-devices-DOUBLE-cost-power-need-most.html

to extend the Warm Home Discount to low-income families. We recommend further that families with young children who are struggling to make ends meet – regardless of whether they are in, or out, of work – should be included within the Core Eligibility Group for the Warm Home Discount. This would mean they automatically receive a discount of £140 on their gas and electricity bills during the winter months.

The battle to stay up to date with rent payments

Over and beyond the struggle to afford food and pay the utility bills, we were told of the financial pressure placed upon some tenants who rent either in the private or social housing sector.

Chichester Food Bank told us that 'rents are escalating: we are seeing more evictions; some clients are living in fear of bailiffs or of interference of rogue landlords', while Homeless Link drew attention to the latest Homelet Rental Index data showing that in the three months to August 2015, average rents for new tenancies were 10.5% higher than in the same period in 2014. For short, according to Wantage and Grove Food Bank, 'rent is a big one'.

49. We recommend that Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords should take it upon themselves not to evict tenants who have built up arrears and are at risk of hunger or homelessness. They should instead establish a manageable repayment plan.

We received some evidence to suggest this pressure has impacted particularly strongly on those tenants affected by the under-occupation penalty (known by some as the 'Spare Room Subsidy' and others as the 'Bedroom Tax') in the social rented sector:

- West Cheshire Food Bank noted in its submission that 'some participants suffered from a reduction in income because of factors such as the Spare Room Subsidy'.
- Birmingham's Sparkhill Food Bank reported 'a number of clients citing the Bedroom Tax as being a reason for their referral as their income has reduced'.

Beyond this, we saw no significant link between the under-occupancy penalty and the need for emergency food parcels. However, in some parts of the country, in combination with other factors, it does appear to have diminished the ability of social housing tenants to afford food and other essentials:

- Leeds Food Aid Network, part of Unity in Poverty Action, reported in its submission that 'private landlords can increase a sense of insecurity in the housing market with a knock-on effect regarding food poverty. This means that there is continuing reluctance for people to move away from social housing even if they have a spare bedroom in social housing and it seems logical that they should move. The combination of the withdrawal of finance from the under occupancy ruling combined with a lack of social housing and the significant insecurity of private rented accommodation, is resulting in approximately 6,000 people in Leeds still being affected by this policy […] arrears continue to rise in Leeds as people struggle to make ends meet […]'.
- Dave Beck, Bangor University, noted that 'the costs of living, focussed on housing, also seems to be detrimental to the local population of North Wales. With a deficit of one bedroom houses/flats people have very little option but to pay the Bedroom Tax, as the Local Authority can only fail to move single persons'.
- Revd. Paul Nicolson, contributing on behalf of Taxpayers Against Poverty, drew attention to the cumulative impact of 'the cuts in Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit' on thousands of people in Haringey, North London. He added that 'allowing local authorities to reduce Council Tax support has the consequence that claimants cannot pay between 8.5% and 20% of the tax out of benefits provided for survival by central government'.

50. We recommend that Local Authorities consult with local voluntary groups on whether their criteria for Council Tax support is

most effectively protecting the poorest households who may be exposed to hunger, and if necessary, seek further local insight on how these criteria might be amended.

51. We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions communicates with each new Universal Credit claimant's landlord to inform them when the claimant is expected to receive their first housing component of Universal Credit, so the landlord can plan accordingly. Alternatively, the Department might consider awarding an interim claim consisting only of the housing component while the remainder of the claim is calculated. The objective here is to avoid the accumulation of rent arrears that could potentially leave claimants with little or no money for food.

A lack of facilities with which to cook

The food storage and cooking facilities offered to tenants in return for their rent monies are sometimes unbelievably inadequate:

- The Chichester Food Bank reported that 'some clients have no cooking facilities, sometimes not even a kettle'.
- Financial Action and Advice Derbyshire told us that a 'lack of cooking facilities is a major barrier for some and limits the recipes that they can cook'.
- Food Plymouth CIC warned that '[The Council] may be paying out Housing Benefit for accommodation which is not adequately supplied for people living here. This comes to light when sorting out food parcels'.
- Friends of the Earth suggested that 'private sector landlords should commit to providing adequate cooking facilities in rented accommodation to support the preparation of affordable and nutritious meals and remove reliance on convenience foods'.

There currently is no statutory requirement for landlords to provide their tenants with a cooker. The House of Commons Library has advised us that Local Authorities have neither the powers nor the duty to require landlords to provide cooking facilities to properties that are not in multiple occupation. They can, though, include this requirement within their licensing criteria for private landlords.

52. We reiterate our call to the Department for Communities and Local Government for a new regulation requiring landlords to provide their tenants with basic cooking facilities.

Low and inadequate earnings

It seems as though a growing number of people working for low wages are relying on emergency food parcels:

- Advice Nottingham told us that 'we are seeing increasing numbers of working clients who have to access emergency food'.
- Food banks have reported to the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership that 'they have seen a shift in who is accessing food aid in the city, with more working people including working families accessing food'.
- Whitchurch Food Bank noted a 'slight increase in numbers experiencing problems due to low pay'.

While this growth was not quantified in our evidence, it was said to have increased due to low and irregular hours of work, problems arising from the tax credit system and the absence of free school meals for children of low earners.

We turn first to the low and irregular hours of work – often in the form of zero-hours contracts which do not guarantee a minimum number of working hours from week to week – which afford families an income that is too low to purchase sufficient food. For this was the single area on which we received the weightiest evidence:

- Chichester District Food Bank reported that, 'until the last three months benefit delays were the most common reason for needing a voucher, now it is low wages. Many workers have been put on zero-hours contracts, or had their jobs scaled down to part-time'.
- High Peak Food Bank recorded 'a notable increase in people who are employed on zero-hour contracts. These people all work at least a week at a time then are laid off for at least a week. The employer does not make it clear how long the lay-off will last so they don't know if it's worth signing on but by the time they do they might not have worked for 3-4 weeks so will have lost in unclaimed benefits what they earned in the week they worked'.
- Oxford's Community Emergency Food Bank has 'had an increasing number of people who are in work, usually part-time and often on zero-hours contracts'.
- Southampton City Mission noticed '[…] more people coming who are in part time, low paid and often on zero-hours contracts […] many of the jobs created in Southampton are low paid, service industry, mainly part-time and often zero-hours contracts. There has been a significant rise in the 'working poor' accessing the food bank'.
- Penzance Area Food Bank told us that 'some clients are still affected by minimum hour and nil hour contracts. Since we live in a tourist/agricultural area which employs seasonal workers we find that clients come on and off benefits regularly resulting in payment delays'.
- Liverpool's HOPE+ Food Bank explained 'the increased use of zero-hour contracts has seen a steady rise in the number of people in employment seeking assistance […] anecdotally we would also point to the growth in the use of zero-hour/restricted work contracts as the most significant factor behind someone using our services citing debt as an issue. One particular group has been auxiliary education employees such as cleaners, caretakers, and ground staff, who have no contracted hours during vacation periods […]
- Financial Action and Advice Derbyshire has noted from its caseload that 'zero-hours contracts are causing a lot of hardship, as is the policy of some employers in our area who employ large numbers of migrant workers on very low wages. Even when both partners are working, the wages are so low and unstable that one week without work can pitch the family into crisis'.

- The Bill Sargent Trust shared a testimony from one food bank worker saying, 'We had a single parent in not so long ago who was on a zero-hours contract and she'd, I think, only had her hours cut by half an hour a day, but it had made a massive difference to her. You know it didn't seem much in terms of time for the employer but it made a massive difference to her circumstances'.

Indeed, the numbers of people employed on a zero-hours contract has grown rapidly. In June 2015, 744,000 people reported themselves as working on a zero-hours basis; an increase of 120,000 on the year before. 41% of this group reported to the Office for National Statistics that they wished to work more hours.[15]

When the Government concluded its review of zero-hours contracts in September 2013, it saw "exclusivity clauses" as being the most troubling aspect of zero-hours contracts. Exclusivity clauses are those that bar the worker from undertaking work elsewhere while contracted to work with one particular employer. The Government acted on this by legislating to ban exclusivity clauses with the *Small Business, Enterprise and Employment Act 2015*, but our evidence suggests further action might be necessary to enshrine paid work as a safeguard against hunger.

53. We welcome the recent steps that have been taken to tackle abuse in zero-hours contracts, including banning exclusivity clauses, and recognise they offer some employers and employees flexibility that is appreciated by both parties. However, we received evidence suggesting that zero-hours contracts are not operating effectively in all circumstances. We therefore recommend that the Government consults broadly on whether further legislative action is required to protect the wellbeing of those people who are employed on a zero-hours contract and wish to work more hours than they are being offered by their employer.

One area which has seen decisive government action is the minimum hourly rate of pay offered to employees. In July 2015 the Government announced that a new National Living Wage would take effect from April 2016 for workers aged 25 and over. It will begin at a rate of £7.20 an hour, rising to over £9 an hour by 2020.

Liverpool's HOPE+ Food Bank believed 'that a move from minimum to living wage will lead to a reduction in the number of people who we statistically count under the category 'low wage".

The National Living Wage could potentially be a revolutionary move and we applaud the Government for taking the initiative on eradicating low pay as we have known it.

We nonetheless believe that more of the nation's largest and most profitable organisations should pay their workers a voluntary Living Wage rate which is calculated to cover the costs of life's essentials. This rate currently stands at £9.40 in London and £8.25 elsewhere. We wish for central and local government to lead by example on this front.

Sustain gave us evidence showing that two thirds (64%) of London's Local Authorities do not guarantee employees a London Living Wage, and in July 2015 we found the Government's own record on this score to be patchy. In a series of parliamentary answers we found:

- 3,936 outsourced staff at the Department for Work and Pensions were being paid less than the Living Wage
- 66 agency staff and 253 contracted workers at the Department for

[15] Office for National Statistics, *Employee contracts that do not guarantee a minimum number of hours: 2015 update* (September 2015)

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs were being paid less than the Living Wage
- 14 agency staff and 118 contracted staff at the Department for Education were being paid less than the Living Wage
- 283 members of staff at the Ministry of Justice were being paid less than the Living Wage
- Five direct employees and 66 agency workers at the Insolvency Service were being paid less than the Living Wage
- 22 cleaners and 11 catering staff at Ordnance Survey were being paid less than the Living Wage
- 27 contracted workers at the Department for Energy and Climate Change were being paid less than the Living Wage
- 70 support staff provided by Interserve to the Department for Communities and Local Government were being paid less than the Living Wage
- 89 members of staff at the National Offenders Management Service were being paid less than the Living Wage
- 13 outsourced staff working at the Homes and Communities Agency were being paid less than the Living Wage
- Six agency staff, 34 contracted workers supplied by Compass and 109 outsourced staff provided by EMCOR to the Department of Health were being paid less than the Living Wage
- 12 contracted workers at the Northern Ireland office were being paid less than the Living Wage
- 1,218 staff working at the Ministry of Defence were being paid less than the Living Wage
- The Attorney General's Office, the Treasury, the Scotland Office, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, the Department for International Development, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills were not collecting information on the wages paid to their outsourced workers.

54. We reiterate our call to the Government to lead by example in the campaign to eradicate low pay. The Cabinet Office should require each government department to become a Living Wage Employer by paying its own employees a Living Wage (as defined by the Living Wage Foundation) and extending this commitment to agency, outsourced and contract workers.

The burden of household debt

Although, with one or two exceptions, debt is not a common trigger for food bank usage, it is difficult to state with any certainty the number of cases in which debt has been a major contributing factor. Our evidence suggests families who are carrying large sums of debt when they seek help from a food bank are more likely to remain dependent for a very long period of time:

- Liverpool's HOPE+ Food Bank argued that households are prone to racking up debt when an unexpected expense needs to be met: 'There would appear to be particular pinch points such as increased fuel consumption in cold periods, domestic difficulties requiring expenditure such as a need to replace white goods. This can lead to the use of companies such as Bright House, which can cause yet further difficulties with debt'.
- Clay Cross Food Bank recorded debt as being 'the third most common crisis stated and also many of those with benefit delays and changes also have debt'.
- County Durham Food Bank reported that 'Our debt advice service is increasingly seeing people who are simply on low incomes rather than those who have been unwise in how they spend their money. Single parents, working but on low incomes, are being seen especially. Generally demand for debt advice is increasing rapidly and telephone or online support is not enough for many, especially the most vulnerable, who need personalised one to one support'.

Sometimes this indebtedness remains under wraps until food banks learn more about people's crippled finances. Christians Against Poverty (CAP) informed us that '[The Truro CAP Debt Centre] was receiving few referrals, until they started running a desk at the food bank venue. They found that most service users were telling food bank staff that they were not in debt, but when encouraged to talk to CAP staff directly, it was evident that they did need help. This system has proven successful, and over the first two days they booked six food bank users in for a debt help appointment with CAP'.

We hope that our proposal for the creation of accounts that are tailored for individuals who might otherwise struggle to budget and save, in combination with the introduction of a 'breathing space' mechanism and the growth and development of Food Bank Plus, might address at an early stage the burden of household debt which limits some households' ability to buy food, thereby reducing the number of times they need to rely on help from a food bank.

The data presented to us suggests the accumulation of problem debt by lower income families has indeed pushed them that much closer to being hungry. The Debt Advisory Centre found in its latest Financial Wellbeing Survey that the high cost of gas, electricity and water has left 13% of customers, equivalent to 8.3 million people, with utility bill arrears of between one and three months.

In too many cases, this has spiralled out of control. Almost 1.4 million families with dependent children are currently in problem debt. According to The Children's Society, 'families with children are behind with payments of £4.8 billion to service providers and creditors (including national and local government). Around 2.4 million dependent children live in these households. However, this is only part of the problem; an additional 2.9 million families with dependent children have struggled to pay their bills and credit commitments over the previous 12 months, putting them on the edge of falling into problem debt. Our report The Debt Trap showed that 10% of families had previously taken out credit to pay for food for their children. A

third of parents (33%) have borrowed money over the last 12 months to pay for essentials'.

It is worth acknowledging the regulatory action taken by the Financial Conduct Authority to curb some of the predatory practices of the high cost credit industry which, according to our evidence, may also have loosened the link between problem debt and the need for emergency food parcels. Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau, for example, stated that 'at a national level, more rigorous regulation by the Financial Conduct Authority of the consumer credit industry – alongside strong local debt management awareness campaigning – can be argued to have contributed to local indebtedness not becoming a bigger factor in food voucher demand'.

Indeed, in the three months to March 2015 the number of complaints regarding payday loans in England and Wales fell by 45% compared to the same period in 2014, from 10,155 to 5,554. The Financial Conduct Authority reported in March 2015 that where it had found instances of unfair practices within the industry, such as the misapplication or mistiming of fees and the provision of misleading information, it had intervened quickly to address these failings. Moreover its cap on loan interest rates hit lending volumes by an estimated 70% from January 2015 onwards.

The Financial Conduct Authority has also implemented our proposal for higher rate telephone numbers to be banned from the financial services sector.

We welcome the steps taken by the Financial Conduct Authority to regulate the payday loan industry. It has shone a bright light upon some of the industry's most predatory aspects and then followed this up with swift action.

Attempting to establish an income upon leaving prison

We heard in evidence of the arduous process prison leavers must go through to establish a source of income. Many of them are vulnerable to hunger or otherwise being recruited to the shadow economy in order to survive this period:

- West Cheshire Food Bank reported that some people 'had no or low income because they had recently been released from prison or had started work but were awaiting their first pay packet.
- The First Love Foundation recommended that 'more is done to ensure that prisoners who are due to be released receive the assistance to apply for benefits before they are released. This could reduce reoffending as some often resort to crime as they have no other forms of support'.

Child hunger in the school holidays

The queue for help from Britain's food banks tends to grow once the school bells ring to mark the beginning of the holidays. For those children who usually receive a daily free school meal during term time, these bells often usher in a period of going day after day without a substantial meal.

Some parents have responded to this challenge by sacrificing their own wellbeing – a sacrifice that does not go unnoticed. Glasgow South West Food Bank told us that '[During a summer lunchbox session] a seven year old offered her last quarter sandwich to her mother because "you haven't eaten anything today"'.

This testimony bears out the findings of Kellogg's submission, which drew heavily on its June 2015 report on holiday hunger, stating that:

- More than six out of ten parents with household incomes of less than £25,000 said they weren't always able to afford to buy food outside of term time.
- For households with income less than £15,000 that figure rose to 73% of parents who struggled to afford food in the holidays.
- 47% of parents on low household incomes would take their children to a community holiday club that served breakfast.
- 78% of parents on low household incomes believe a community holiday club would ease their stress.

Indeed, this often is reflected in an increase in family referrals during the school holidays, which specifically was highlighted in evidence from:

- Oxford's Community Emergency Food Bank
- Birmingham's Sparkhill Food Bank
- Sheffield's Parson Cross Initiative
- Leeds Food Aid Network
- Glasgow South West Food Bank
- Portslade Purple People Kitchen Food Bank
- Middlesbrough Food Bank

Across its network, 1,137 referrals were made to Trussell Trust food banks over the Summer Holiday in 2015, 'specifically because families found it difficult to feed their [children], although this will underreport the problem'. Moreover, Liverpool's HOPE+ Food Bank told us that 'teachers frequently report to us that children return visibly thinner after the summer holidays than before them'.

It comes as no surprise that voluntary projects in different parts of the country have put themselves forward to stem the concerns around the unmet need among poorer families during the school holidays. Communal projects have been set up in some areas to provide free food and fun. Not only do they afford poorer children the same opportunities as their more fortunate peers to have fun and enjoy food and activities in the holidays, but they ensure that all children can receive a good meal each day. Moreover, our early evidence suggests they effectively reduce the numbers of people having to rely on food banks.

As part of the **Feeding Birkenhead** project, eight community groups ran free food and fun projects during the Summer Holiday in 2015. They fed 2,058 children at a total cost over six weeks of approximately £9 per child. The food was sourced mainly from FareShare, His Food and Kellogg's who donated surplus breakfast products, with other foodstuffs bought in. The number of people fed and supported by Birkenhead's food banks fell from 493 in July to 479 in August. In September, once the **Feeding Birkenhead** projects had come to an end, and the school term began, the numbers increased. The feedback from children, parents and volunteers was incredibly positive. One parent said it had 'been a godsend having somewhere like this during the holidays', and the Wirral Play Council said, 'one young boy asked could he have strawberries as he always asked his mum for some, but was told they were too expensive; on

the day of the party he ate a punnet of strawberries that we bought for him (fruit was available to all children)'.

The **Feeding Birkenhead** projects operated again in the October half term holiday, providing free food and fun for 360 children at a cost for the week of £6.75 per child.

A similar programme, Food (and Fun) In School Holidays, has been developed in Norwich where clubs provide a free hot meal and fun activities for children invited from families trying to survive on a low income. Nine clubs have been set up serving 281 children. Again the numbers using Norwich Food Bank fell while the clubs were in operation.

Elsewhere Cardiff's Summer Holiday Enrichment Programme ran for three days a week between 9.30am and 12.30pm for four weeks. It provided children with a morning snack followed by fun activities including sport delivered by Sport Cardiff, creative and educational play, food and nutrition skills training by Cardiff Dietics and a hot lunch provided by City of Cardiff Council Education Catering. For phase one of the pilot, the cost of the food was around 85p per child per day, and combined with one unit of staffing (which consists of two teachers, one member of catering staff and provision for 40 children) as is required for delivery, comes to a combined cost of £6.50 per child per day, or £260 per school per day. According to Sustainable Food Cities, 13% of children skipped one meal or more on days they attended the club – compared to nearly 50% of children who skipped at least one meal on days they did not attend the club.

Both the need for, and benefits yielded from Summer Holiday provision were outlined by the First Love Foundation, who wrote that 'as free school meals and breakfast clubs are for many of the borough's children their main meal of the day, school holidays only exacerbate the issue of child hunger further. Through the delivery of our own Summer Scheme, we have seen that it often serves as an outreach to parents who are isolated, hard to reach, living in poverty – and very much under the radar of statutory services. During the scheme, we engaged with families by laying on a number of weekly activities for children and parents – we also extended access to having a benefit health check. We found just under a quarter of those attending were under-claiming benefits by up to £70 per week […] It is for these reasons and more that we would recommend that there is an expansion of support given to struggling families during the Summer Holidays – but with a focus on meaningful engagement to learn about the challenges they face'.

55. We recommend that voluntary projects delivering school holiday provision offer parents a 'benefit health check' to ensure they are not going without vital additional monies to which they might be entitled.

A different approach was taken by the Bolton At Home/Storehouse Food Bank partnership, which distributed over 1,000 packed lunches each day though children's centres and other community buildings.

Another form of provision was outlined by Hilary Hamer, Food4Hull:

'Hull City Council [in October's half term] have run a pilot project in two primary schools in the more deprived areas of Hull to act on holiday hunger. I attended one morning – the schools were only open till 11am and it was not intended for them to act as holiday clubs – that was an important point – it was about feeding hungry children, not acting as holiday care. The food was donated by the William Jackson Food Group and cereal and toast was put out on arrival, homemade cookies followed and then hot dogs produced before going home. Children who have nothing at home to eat at all (sometimes, as we know, created by parental drug and alcohol problems) were getting something to eat at least for half term […] as facilities of the community I would hugely support all food provision all the year round and think this should be one of the keystones of our education system'.

Reflecting on its own school holiday project, Norwich Food Bank recommended 'links with the local councils to provide support/assistance to schools – either a ring-fenced part of their budget or an addition with a clause about providing/developing breakfast clubs [and] links with the local council to provide holiday support for struggling families – similar to FISH but funded/supported by the council – this would come from education and social service areas'.

Caritas Social Action Network similarly suggested that 'projects should be explored, based in Primary Schools which often act as community hubs, to provide meals at least once a day to children and families during school holidays'.

56. We recommend that Local Authorities learn and apply lessons from a national leader in providing free food and fun for hungry children during the school holidays. East Renfrewshire Council has for the past ten years offered two holiday schools. At a cost of £88,000 a year from the Local Authority's Education Budget, with food prepared in-house, the holiday schools ensure that:

- **Up to 200 children each day who are entitled to free school meals continue to have access to a free healthy meal outside of the school term.**
- **These children participate in sport, physical activity and creative activities which promote health and wellbeing during the school holidays.**
- **School buildings are used for the year-round benefit of their communities.**

Nationwide, however, school holiday provision remains sporadic. In order to meet the needs of those children who are without free school meals for 170 days of the year, therefore, we believe national co-ordination is required. Lindsay Graham, writing on behalf of the Holiday Hunger Task Group, said 'it is clear to us that no one model fits all. What is also apparent is that funding and policy to support those organisations who are working on the front line is urgently needed […] there now needs to be a joined up strategic approach to help give children and young people access to life chances they are currently being denied'.

We believe an effective programme would entail voluntary groups each day laying on fun activities and preparing hot meals using ingredients provided by the likes of FareShare. An ideal location for this activity would be schools that are willing to remain open during the holidays and other community buildings with kitchens. The sourcing of food, cooking materials and staff, however, will require some initial funding.

It was raised in evidence that 'children are eating poor quality food, and too much sugar', and Sustainable Food Cities estimates that a levy of 20p per litre on sugar drinks could raise up to £1 billion.

A national programme backed by £200 million could all but eliminate child hunger during the school holidays, and thereby reduce considerably the number of families relying on emergency food parcels.

57. We recommend that the Government gives serious consideration to the Health Select Committee's recommendation to introduce a small levy of 20p per litre on drinks that are high in sugar content. It should consider also top slicing 4p per litre of this levy to fund a national programme of school holiday provision. Not only could such a levy encourage people to make healthier choices, but even a fraction of the revenue raised could reduce substantially the need for food banks in this country.

Under-registration for free school meals

The Department for Education no longer publishes data on the number of children who are eligible, but not registered to receive free school meals. According to its most recent estimate in December 2013 there were 161,400 such children in England. This will of course have been reduced to some extent, although we do not know by how much, by the introduction of Universal Infant Free School Meals in September 2014. We do know, though, that 20,000 children in Northern Ireland are eligible, but not registered to receive free school meals.

The problems stemming from the under-registration of children who are eligible for free school meals are twofold: first, each of these poor children risks going without a decent meal every day; second, their school misses out on up to £1,320 each year in Pupil Premium funding to support their education.

The Pupil Premium is tied to the number of pupils in each school who are registered to receive free school meals. Even if the first problem is addressed to some extent by Universal Infant Free School Meals, schools may still be losing out on millions of pounds of vital monies to support the education of the poorest children in their earliest years of school because their parents no longer need to register their children as being eligible.

Fortunately, we have encountered and encouraged a small but growing number of Local Authorities who are using their Housing Benefit records to identify such families whose children are eligible, but not registered to receive free school meals. Once identified, each family is informed by the Local Authority that their child has automatically been signed up to receive free school meals, with no need to fill in any forms unless they wish to opt out of entitlement.

This innovative work delivers a win-win situation, at no extra cost to Local Authorities, in that children need not suffer hunger and their schools receive vital additional funding towards their education.

We wrote to 20 Local Authorities in England who, according to the House of Commons Library, were forecast to underspend their 2014-15 Local Welfare Assistance budgets. We asked each Local Authority about its policy on registering children for free school meals, as well as the possibility of running school holiday provision. We heard back from:

- Hartlepool – The Local Authority already implements automatic registration for free school meals. Efforts to feed children in the school holiday are undertaken by voluntary organisations.

- Knowsley – The Local Authority already implements automatic registration for free school meals. It is considering the proposal for a 'holiday hunger' project.

- Plymouth – The Local Authority is considering the proposal for automatically registering eligible children for free school meals, and it has established a food co-operative project to feed children in the school holidays.

- Greenwich – The Local Authority is considering the proposal for automatically registering children for free school meals. It is considering also the proposal for a 'holiday hunger' project.

- Somerset – The Local Authority has not taken up either suggestion.

- Walsall – The Local Authority since 2005 has implemented automatic registration for free school meals. If a family applies for free school meals but does not qualify, their records are held and should their circumstances change and their child becomes eligible, the system in most cases will automatically award free school

meals using the information already held. 400 pupils benefit from this each year.

- Birmingham – The Local Authority has not taken up either suggestion.

- North Tyneside – The Local Authority has not taken up either suggestion.

- West Sussex – The Local Authority encourages district and borough councils to alert parents in receipt of Housing Benefit that they may be entitled to free school meals.

North Ayrshire Council too automatically registers all eligible children for free school meals. The Council also has found £36,000 from underspends elsewhere in its budget to keep open ten schools during the holidays. Each school makes available one hour of free food and a further hour of fun activities to primary school children who usually receive free school meals. In the first five weeks of the 2015 Summer Holiday, 600 children were fed each day – a not insignificant achievement.

Some Local Authorities cite concern around data protection when considering the policy of automatic registration. Yet others such as Liverpool City Council have pressed on and, in the process, have delivered a guaranteed hot meal each day to poor children and a welcome financial boost towards their education. Having been encouraged by the **Feeding Birkenhead** campaign to adopt this policy, Wirral Council since September 2015 has identified more than 600 children in the borough who stand to benefit from automatic registration. Once it has registered them, this could deliver up to £600,000 in additional funding towards their education.

58. We recommend that the Secretary of State for Education issues guidance and writes to all Local Authorities bestowing upon them the duty to automatically register all eligible children for free school meals.

Over 100 Members of Parliament have pledged to support the Free School Meals (Automatic Registration of Eligible Children) Bill which, if enacted, would implement this recommendation in full. The Bill has been drawn up by The Rt Hon Frank Field MP and it will receive its first reading in the House of Commons on Tuesday 15 December 2015.

Breakfast clubs

We were confronted in our evidence with hunger amongst some children when they arrive for school each morning. Some of these children may have gone without food because their parents failed to get them ready for school and either could not, or would not get them to school in time to attend a breakfast club.

In some homes, according to the Devon and Cornwall Food Association, 'the responsibility for balanced meals lies with eleven to 18 year olds as they are the only ones who know how to cook', while one school in Coventry told Magic Breakfast that they 'had been moved to ring the charity's office after a child had come to school with one "value" packet of supermarket crisps in their lunch box – which was all they were supposed to eat for the whole school day'.

Some parents suffering from a chronic addiction or mental illness, for example, may find it incredibly difficult to prepare their children for school. It was noted in Food Plymouth CIC's submission that 'many of our parents are on anti-depressants readily assigned by GPs without there being sufficient follow up or referral/communication with wider services to develop a support package of intervention. The life becomes entrenched in sense of hopelessness combined with the other financial elements in relation to low paid work/lack of employment opportunities, ability to get their children up and ready and fed to get to school. Their resilience is low and in turn this impacts on their families/children creating loss of aspiration. Debt is a very common theme with many having huge water/fuel debts they simply cannot pay'.

Moreover, Dr Flora Douglas shared in her submission, 'reports from health visitor sources of destitute women preferring to sell their possessions, including household goods, to prevent them having to go to a food bank to feed their children'.

In some cases teachers themselves have taken on the responsibility of providing children with a first item of food each morning. One school in the south west of England reported that 'we have staff with supplies of snacks in their desk drawers precisely because pupils come to school hungry. "Mum wasn't up and the cupboards were empty". Household budget seeming to be spent on the last phone, but not healthy meals'. A startling consequence of this is 'a significant number of our children would be slight of build. Also, they are noticeably smaller than other pupils in local schools – we notice this in sports competitions'.

We therefore welcome the carrying out of our recommendation for the Troubled Families programme to be extended in an attempt to 'turn around' those families who send their children to school hungry. We believe nonetheless that all too many children going without food before school do so because of a lack of money, for reasons covered elsewhere in this report, with which their parents can buy food. Indeed, many parents themselves will have sacrificed a meal to try and abate their child's hunger. These parents are simply terrified that any admission of poverty will result in their children being taken into care.

59. We recommend that the Department for Education, with help from the Troubled Families programme, begins collecting data on the numbers of children who begin the school day hungry, and the reasons why.

One possible solution of course could be the provision of free breakfast facilities in schools. Magic Breakfast told us that its 'partner schools are reporting that they are finding the breakfast clubs are a very effective way of engaging "hard to reach" parents, especially those of younger children, who can sit next to them at breakfast club, have an informal chat with school staff and maybe have something to eat themselves if they are cutting back on food to ensure the rest of their family is fed […] schools say that pupils are more settled in the early lessons at the start of

the day; both because they are not hungry, and because the time in the breakfast club gives children time to settle and get into the rhythm of the school day so they are more attentive as soon as lessons start'.

60. **We recommend where possible that all schools offer free breakfast facilities for their pupils and refer to the Troubled Families programme those families who fail repeatedly to ensure their child is fed, either at home or using the free breakfast facility, before the beginning of the school day.**

61. **We ask that Magic Breakfast provides the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger with a list of its partner schools in each parliamentary constituency, so we as Members of Parliament can encourage those schools who are not on the list to begin providing free breakfast facilities.**

The absence of free school meals for children of low earners

A most crucial factor keeping hunger at the door of low-paid workers is their children's lack of entitlement to free school meals. The Government's eligibility criteria dictates that parents drawing an annual income of up to £16,190 from out-of-work benefit are able to take up this entitlement for their children. Yet those parents who earn the same level of income from work, while drawing Working Tax Credit to raise their wages to a more adequate minimum, are disqualified. We estimate that 1.6 million children miss out on free school meal entitlement because their parents work for their low income, rather than receive it in out-of-work benefits.

One mother working for low wages told us that 'I am deeply concerned that it will cause severe hardship to pay for my son's school meals when he starts secondary school next week. Since I started a part time job two years ago I have been in receipt of Working Tax Credit and I have given my son a packed lunch for school […] I want to continue to work and show my son that it is worthwhile'.

Expressing concern for such parents, Exeter Food Network reported that, 'some parents who are classed as self-employed, farmers/builders/odd job people who are unable to make a Living Wage and cannot claim free school meals, fall between the gap […] the families in work but just above the benefit cut off are the most affected. They scrimp to make ends meet and I have often had mums in crying about how hard they find it, trying to work and having to give up because they get more money on benefits'. Therefore, it said, 'families on Working Tax Credit who don't get free school meals – they have to watch their friends on the same income getting free school meals, whereas they have to provide meals'.

The Children's Society noted in its submission that 'many parents living in the Eccleshill Ward [in Bradford] that the children's centre serves are in short-term, low paid work, or on zero-hours contracts. The uncertainty that their employment status produces is further compounded by the fact that many of their children do not qualify for Free School Meals, which means that they are missing out on the opportunity of one hot, nutritious meal per day'.

Although it is currently to the detriment of families striving to make ends meet, at least the current system makes clear who is entitled to free school meals. Not so under Universal Credit. Because Universal Credit is streamlined and its relationship with free school meals has yet to be confirmed, officials may find it hard to decide which families are eligible for free school meals and some parents mistakenly have been told that their children are not eligible, when in fact they are.[16]

62. We recommend that the Department for Education consults on the most effective use of its free school meals budget to ensure all poor children are guaranteed a free school meal each day, and that it clarifies as a matter of urgency the entitlement to this support of children whose parents are in receipt of different components of Universal Credit. Action on both fronts could help to cement work as the best route out of poverty.

[16] See, for example, http://www.mirror.co.uk/money/desperate-family-loses-free-school-6544652

Healthy Start

We applaud the Government for supporting the provision of Healthy Start vouchers. These vouchers entitle parents living on low incomes, with young children, to free milk, fresh and frozen fruit and vegetables, and infant formula milk. As with any benefit, or benefit in-kind which relies on a household means test, though, we encountered concerns around parents failing to take up their entitlement to Healthy Start Vouchers.

Sustainable Food Cities outlined in its submission that, 'nationally, 1 in 4 eligible families are not enrolled in the Healthy Start voucher scheme. For low-income mothers and young children, Healthy Start vouchers can increase food budgets by 14-25%. Although poverty rates among families with young children have increased, Healthy Start uptake has decreased in recent years due to logistical problems with delivery of the service and a lack of awareness among health professionals and service providers. Local authorities are best placed to increase awareness and uptake of Healthy Start vitamins and vouchers through the health professionals with direct access to those who may be eligible'.

63. **We recommend Local Authorities make it a key responsibility of Health Visitors to register parents living on low incomes, with young children, for Healthy Start vouchers. This registration should take place automatically, with parents given the choice to opt-out.**

Chapter 4 - Rescuing Britain's wasted food

Social Supermarkets - Improving access to affordable food

Earlier in this report we outlined a series of uncomfortable findings around some families lacking the skills that were once passed from one generation to the next; namely how to be good parents and be able to cook decent meals on a limited budget. Combined with a lack of money with which to budget, and poor access to decent food, the absence of these skills can impact badly upon one's self worth.

There is one intervention – the social supermarket – that has shown some considerable success in addressing these problems, and one of **Feeding Britain**'s key objectives for 2016 is to establish one in each region of the United Kingdom.

A next phase in Britain's fightback against hunger must include the growth and evolution of social supermarkets. Here we have an accessible source of affordable food that also comes with so much more in the way of practical and emotional support, and which has the potential to catch families before they descend into a crisis situation that necessitates help from a food bank.

North Oxfordshire Food Bank stated in its submission that 'giving families the skills they are lacking in many areas of life, but with support, can change and be proud of what they can achieve, and give them self-worth'. We believe social supermarkets, if driven by the local community and encompassing the appropriate support, can deliver on this objective.

Britain's first two social supermarkets, operated by Community Shop, opened in 2013 and 2014. They rescue surplus food from manufacturers for ten pence in the pound and sell it for 30 pence in the pound. In doing so, they redistribute more than 35,000 tonnes of surplus food each year.

Once fully operational, the social supermarkets are self-sustaining. The food itself is all within date and of good quality. One batch of Maltesers being sold at the West Norwood Community Shop was as good as anything we might expect to see in any other store, but it had become surplus because the closing date had passed for the competition on its packaging.

Only people in receipt of means-tested benefits are able to buy their groceries from Community Shop, which operates on a membership scheme. Alongside the two-thirds discount on a weekly shop, each social supermarket has an on-site café and runs group sessions on looking for work, sorting out problem debt, and cooking and eating on a small budget, designed to help individuals with the problems that have left them vulnerable to hunger. In order to shop at the social supermarket, members must sign up to these sessions. All shop, kitchen and mentoring staff are all paid at least a Living Wage.

There was some strong support in our evidence for the development of this model:

- Food Plymouth CIC noted that 'there is scope to put this surplus food to good use (with community will) to create 'pay as you feel' or 'social supermarket' outlets in Plymouth – an area that has been discussed a lot of late, but finding the 'champion' to take this work forward (and to find funding for this) is a barrier'.
- Bolton at Home in partnership with Storehouse has opened The Pantry which is a community food shop selling surplus food sourced via FareShare and local food growing projects at a much discounted price.
- North Ayrshire Food Bank plans to start up its own community shop which would be open to all, but with higher discounts given to people living on a low income.
- Sheffield City Council is weighing up options for developing a more affordable food supply, for example 'pay as you feel' cafes and social supermarkets.
- The Pantry model developed by Stockport Homes charges a membership fee, around £2.50 per week, and for that

members can select a basket of goods with a typical value of around £15.
- Wirral Food Bank wrote that the 'key issue is how we collect, store and distribute the food. Unlike non-perishable items issued by the food bank, fresh food needs to be stored and maintained under strict conditions. Turnaround of such food is essential. In other parts of the UK Community Shops operate, this provides a good operating model that can be replicated across the UK'.

The evidence from Community Shop's early work is highly encouraging. It reported in evidence that:

- 'Since the launch [of Goldthorpe Community Shop] 73% of members reported feeling better off financially after receiving training [and] 92% said they felt more confident as a result of training they received, with 77% feeling more positive about their future […] and as a result of the access provided to low cost, wholesome food, and professional training services, members have saved more than £700,000'.
- The West Norwood Community Shop has provided training to 350 people since its launch in December 2014, of whom almost 100 are now in work.
- 'Doreen was struggling with money to the point where she often would not eat, and would struggle to feed her children too. Now she has access to low-cost food, her and her family eat three proper meals day, not just the beans and chips they had been used to. Doreen was one of the first people to go on the four week success programme. The first week focuses on self-confidence and self-esteem, the second, debt and finances, the third on careers and the fourth on interview skills and job applications. She went on the programme to help her develop the necessary skills to get a new job. Community Shop helps Doreen get out of house and make friends in the community. Now, as a peer mentor, she is helping others to help themselves too'.
- 'Steve found out about Community Shop through his family. In tough times, he was finding it really hard to find work. Debt was mounting up and he was struggling to manage. Things are still tight, but thanks to Community Shop, the pressure on his finances is starting to ease. Community Shop has supported Steve to take control of his debts, helping him to contact creditors and arrange alternative repayment options. With Community Hub's support, he is facing his challenges head on and sorting out his finances.' Company Shop Group.

The Matthew Tree Project, which lays out its provision in the way a supermarket would and, as we have seen, offers support on cooking and budgeting alongside this food, reported that 'one of our clients who had felt socially isolated said; "Coming to the Food Plus Centre is the best part of my week. I feel welcomed, a sense of community spirit, listened to without judgement, and for the first time in a long time, feel someone is on my side"'.

64. We believe social supermarkets must play an increasingly significant role in countering the vulnerability of so many families in this country to hunger. We recommend that Local Authorities make available the appropriate facilities to host social supermarkets. We also seek as a matter of urgency a one-off start-up grant to establish a social supermarket in each of the 12 regions in the United Kingdom.

Using good quality surplus food to reconnect with our most vulnerable citizens

Following last year's **Feeding Britain** report we encountered some reluctance around our call for more of Britain's good, edible surplus food to be rescued from the tip or the anaerobic digestion plant and diverted to the nation's hungry. A lot of this reluctance understandably stemmed from the thought of the poor having to make do with 'less good food'. We wish to counter this reluctance and to challenge this thought.

Some surplus food of course is unsuitable for human consumption or is simply too close to going out of date. We therefore support moves to divert this type of surplus to anaerobic digestion or turn it into animal feed.

A sizeable amount of food, though, becomes surplus because of a mislabelled package, for example, or an incorrect quantity being ordered and produced at some point in the supply chain. The food itself is as good as one might expect to buy off the supermarket shelf, but a logistical problem might have led to it being dumped or turned into energy. The idea therefore that we are encouraging the diversion of low quality 'scraps' to the poor, after being rejected by those more fortunate is incorrect and, we believe, abhorrent.

We also wish to counter claims that we see *the* long term solution to hunger in the provision of surplus food by food banks and other charitable providers of food. We agree with Cambridge City Food Bank in its submission that 'people in need should not form a dependency on supplies that are unreliable'. Hence the urgency with which we believe reforms must be enacted to the delivery of working-age benefits, the wages paid to low earners, and the operation of utility markets.

In respect of the role surplus food might take on, our desire is for Britain to make better use of the good food that is produced and would not otherwise be eaten, before it becomes inedible. Globally the United Nations estimates that if the amount of food wasted were cut by a quarter there would be enough to feed the world's population. As the Hastings Furniture Service said in its submission, 'avoidable food waste is unacceptable in a society with people who do not have enough food'. The food rescued by FareShare is 'perfectly good food, within its use by/best before date, which doesn't have a commercial outlet anymore and would otherwise go to waste'. The evidence we received suggests this food can be used to kick start local projects which seek to address social ills such as loneliness and isolation.

We wish therefore for more of this food to find its way to those groups who manage to use it in a way which reconnects some of our most vulnerable citizens with mainstream society. Within the Sheffield Diocese's submission one provider said, 'for many people the chance to get out of the house for a few hours and spend time with other human beings is the most important part of what we do'. The Brighton and Hove Food Partnership also wished to 'flag up the important role of shared meals, and that some surplus which is unsuitable for redistributing via food banks is perfect for settings such as lunch clubs […] we do recognise that surplus food plays an important role both via emergency food aid in keeping costs down for many organisations which offer shared meals'.

One submission from Whitchurch Food Bank even suggested that 'a redistribution of excess food to the less "well off" would of course be a way of redistributing some of the wealth in this country and reducing hunger', and King's Lynn Food Bank described the diversion of surplus food to the most vulnerable as 'one of the keys to moving forward in a sustainable way'.

Aside from the importance attached to the food itself, we believe its significance lies in creating and strengthening relationships between people. As Hilary Hamer noted in Food4Hull's submission, 'food acts to break down barriers of behaviour and communication difficulties. The cooking and serving of food is an act of great compassion, humanity and nurture'.

FareShare estimates that there is enough good food currently going to waste to make over 800 million meals a year. Yet it has access to just 2% of this food. The majority of people turning to organisations supplied by FareShare are those who are marginalised and suffering from long-term hunger. The organisation said in evidence that 'these people are struggling to cook nutritious meals for themselves (due to ability, access or lack of knowledge) and are accessing services such as shelters for the homeless, day centres for older people, hostels for young people or refuges for women and children fleeing domestic violence'.

We are therefore deeply disappointed that some commentators are prepared to dismiss any potential moves that might rescue more of this food so it can be used to offer a lifeline to the very poorest.

One example of the good work that is driven by this food is that being carried out by FoodCycle. In 2014, FoodCycle served over 31,000 meals through 46,000kg of surplus food donated by suppliers. We welcome this development as sign of those at the very bottom of the pile reaching out and taking the lifeline being thrown to them. FoodCycle reaches vulnerable senior citizens, the homeless, asylum seekers and refugees, and people affected by mental health issues. This latter group make up one quarter of people relying on FoodCycle for a hot meal. 63% of FoodCycle's visitors live alone and, unsurprisingly, 85% of its visitors struggle to pay for life's essentials. Having visited FoodCycle, 73% of guests report eating more fruit and vegetables.

FoodCycle informed us that many of those people who draw upon these community meals then begin to open up at each session to organisations such as Mind, Outward, John Pounds Centre, Inkwell and Students Action for Refugees, who are capable of offering a 'hand up'. Elsewhere the impact of The Strategy in Aylesbury, which with help from FareShare provides hot meals and shelter to homeless people, has brought about a 9% reduction in crime during operating hours. Why on earth would one not want to rescue more of the food Britain produces so that more of those who have fallen below the national minimum can be thrown such a lifeline?

The Leeds Food Aid Network, led by Unity in Poverty Action, noted from its experience that 'it's once we see the synergy between food waste getting to where it's needed to feed hungry people that providers can then see every effort made to assist people with their longer term needs, whether it be addiction, housing, education, training or finding voluntary or paid work'.

Indeed, as we reported last year, voluntary organisations who are able to tap into this source of food often will find that resources have then been freed up to invest in this longer term help.

John Pacitti, Food Donation Connection, reported that 'increasing the amount of food donated to charity […] would allow charities to focus more of their budget on their core services, instead of meal planning/budgeting, thus beginning to address some of the structural causes of hunger'.

Since it last gave evidence to us in 2014, FareShare has distributed surplus food to 2,135 charities and community projects feeding 167,500 people each week. This source of food has enabled charities to invest £2.3 million into other support services. One in five of those organisations supported by FareShare would fold if it wasn't for this supply of free, fresh food.

A crucial advantage for those hungry citizens relying on emergency food parcels, according to Clevedon and District Food Bank, is that rescuing more fresh food and diverting it through food banks 'could make a big difference to the quality of their diet, and hence their overall health and resilience, and the long-term health of their children', because, as Dr Bryce Evans outlined in his submission, 'it will reduce waste and service hungry people by giving them good quality food rather than non-perishable rubbish'. Glasgow South West Food Bank suggested further that 'the logic of "good food being wasted – give it to

the hungry" as a concept is very powerful. However, in terms of food security it is a stretch to imagine a situation where there is a sufficient infrastructure to "guarantee" supplies'.

In seeking to address this conundrum, one member of the Food Plymouth CIC suggested that 'the food industry should take more responsibility for the food it doesn't sell. Food for humans should be the first priority for food waste ahead of food for animals or food for anaerobic digestion. More community shops receiving this food and providing a service for those most in need would be a huge step forward'.

How might Britain tap into more of this food as a means of maintaining the health of those relying on emergency food parcels, and then reaching out to our most vulnerable citizens who, even with a National Living Wage and a social security system delivering correct payments promptly, would find themselves constantly at risk of falling below the national minimum?

An ideal model for food banks was set out in evidence by the Black Country Food Bank: 'Perishable food needs to be consumed quickly, so needs to be distributed at a very local level. Big supermarkets should allow individual stores to get stuck in on the ground. Bottom up, rather than top. So, the local food bank is open at 10am on a Tuesday. The local supermarket drops around a few boxes of good quality perishables to be distributed that day. This would keep distribution costs to a minimum, get the food where it needs to go quickly and build a good community relationship'. Hence our earlier proposals for local food bank networks.

A broader model was sketched out by John Pacitti, Food Donation Connection: 'The key components to a large-scale food donation programme are a network of local charities that are able to consistently pick up surplus food and a national coordinating group that would ensure that each interested donor is partnered with a charity in their area'.

Such a model, though, will be incredibly difficult to achieve in the current climate. FareShare in its submission identified three key barriers: transportation costs; the lack of incentives for food redistribution, meaning that it makes more financial sense to use food to feed animals or send it to anaerobic digestion plants; and the lack of commitment currently being shown to operate the food waste hierarchy.

An innovative tool being used in Northern Ireland, to overcome the first of these barriers, is the SOS Bus NI. The Bus picks up surplus food from supermarkets and distributes it to various charities and refugee centres across Belfast. A similar model of mobile redistribution is operated by Gloucestershire's Wiggly Worm. These initiatives are hugely welcome, but we are not aware of each model being replicated on a much wider scale.

One proposal put forward in evidence for meeting transport costs and other logistical barriers was to seek the help of supermarkets themselves. Clevedon and District Food Bank raised the prospect of supermarkets freezing surplus stock so that charities could transport it on a more predictable timetable and Lambeth Food Partnership felt 'that it would be a massive opportunity to drive change if we could use the retailers who already have fleets of delivery vehicles across the country start delivering the surplus food rather than dropping it in the bin for the refuse trucks to carry away'.

It is worth noting here that Britain's supermarkets have made an admirable commitment to reform their operations so they produce 'zero waste'. The Food and Drink Federation told us that in the first year of the Courtauld Commitment 3 – a voluntary commitment which moves supermarkets towards 'zero waste' – the amount of food sent for redistribution had increased by 80%, albeit from a relatively low base. Yet our evidence suggests that a large proportion of the food becoming surplus in stores as well as the supply chain is disposed of through anaerobic digestion or turned into animal feed. We therefore encourage

Britain's retailers to take a second step by signing up to a 'zero waste, maximum human consumption' pledge. Again there has been some encouraging early progress on this front, which we believe retailers should look upon as a useful foundation.

- Aldi provided FareShare with over 144,000 meals in 2013-14.
- Tesco since 2012 has donated the equivalent of 6.6 million meals of surplus food from its fresh food distribution centres and 'dotcom centres' to FareShare and it has set itself the task of embedding weekly ongoing donations from ambient depots by the end of this year. It has also set out to eliminate edible food waste from its stores – equivalent to around 30,000 tonnes – by setting up the FoodCloud with FareShare. The scheme is designed so that, using the app, Tesco alerts local charities in their area to the amount of food they have left over at the end of each day. The charity then confirms it wants the food, picks it up free of charge from the store and then uses it. Nearly 25,000 meals already have been donated since May via the twelve pilot stores. The pilot is expected to be scaled up early in 2016.

According to the British Retail Consortium:

- Marks and Spencer (M&S) diverts its back-of-store surplus to Community Shop. It has been working with a range of food redistribution organisations to redistribute surplus food from the back of its stores. Following a number of trials in 45 stores to establish the best model for getting surplus food to those who need it, M&S has now launched a nationwide charitable redistribution scheme, working with Neighbourly to provide an online platform that connects every store with existing and new local charity partners. This single platform removes some of the logistical barriers to redistribution, including ensuring that all those registered have the correct charity and food hygiene credentials in place. M&S believes this will maximise the amount of food that can be redistributed and accelerate M&S towards its Plan A target of reducing food waste by 20 per cent by 2020.
- Sainsbury's has been donating surplus food to a network of good causes across the UK for over 20 years. Over 300 of Sainsbury's stores and four distribution centres are currently involved in donating food to their local communities. If stores don't already have a food donation partner, they are now being encouraged to set them up with dedicated support available. The food is perfectly edible, safe and nutritious but is past its best before date. It provides a lifeline to many local charities and helps to improve the quality of life of the most vulnerable groups in society. Sainsbury's was a founder member of FareShare and surplus food that would otherwise go to waste is taken from Sainsbury's suppliers, stores and depots to FareShare's six centres located across the UK.
- The Co-operative Food is donating its warehouse depot surplus food to local charities as it diverts food for over a million meals away from anaerobic digestion energy plants. Following a successful trial at its depot in Castlewood, Derbyshire the mutual is rolling out the programme from September 2015, supplying a range of chilled food items to FareShare, which passes the food on to charities and community groups who transform it into nutritious meals for vulnerable people. The Co-operative Food estimates that in 2016 it could provide 500 tonnes from all depots – enough food for over a million meals.
- In June 2013, Asda forged a partnership with its suppliers and FareShare to redistribute surplus food to UK charities and community projects. To date this has

resulted in over 1,300 tonnes of surplus food being redistributed — enough food to make over three million meals at over 2,000 charities every week. Asda has extended this scheme in 2015 to include donation of non-technical quality rejections.

- Waitrose has been donating surplus food for many years and works with over 80 different charities and organisations around the UK. To date, over half its shops have contracts in place. To meet its ambition for all shops to have a donation arrangement in place, it has set up a dedicated email address to encourage charities to come forward enabling Waitrose to put charities in touch with as many shops as possible. Following a number of recent trials, Waitrose has a target for all of its redistribution centres to be redistributing surplus food within the next six months.
- In addition to working with the national charity FoodCycle redistributing food from Morrisons stores to local FoodCycle hubs, Morrisons began a trial unsold food redistribution programme in June 2015 with 112 of its stores. The aim of this trial was to see whether stores could effectively redistribute edible unsold food to a local charity of their choice. The trial has been really successful, with over 70 per cent of stores engaged with a local charity, with a weekly average of £60-80 worth of food donated. Morrisons will be rolling this programme out across all stores in the early part of 2016.

While we continue to encourage retailers and manufacturers to do as much as they can to deliver their edible surplus food to charities, we realise for small businesses in particular that this could prove costly or burdensome. The Food and Drink Federation, for example, said 'the cost and availability of transport for business to distribute products to charity and other redistribution centres can be an issue', and Lambeth Food Partnership acknowledged in its submission that 'given the challenges faced by often small businesses trying to help their community, they cannot afford to give food and also fund the logistics to support the challenges'. The Partnership suggested that 'if a national logistics strategy could be developed and then rolled out at a borough level in partnership with the Councils and organisations like the Lambeth Food Partnership and our partners […] inroads could be made'.

Moreover the charities receiving these supplies, according to County Durham Food Bank, 'may have considerable problems in handling unpredictable quantities of perishable food unless significant resources were made available for storage and logistics to smooth out the supply to match demand'. The Matthew Tree Project suggested further that 'the problem isn't the food industry. In our experience they want to give us more food. We (the sector) are not equipped to receive, process and redistribute it. This is where significant funding is needed and where the focus should be'.

There nonetheless exists a strong will to do more. According to one food bank volunteer, who also works in a supermarket, 'supermarkets don't like throwing food out; they have a financial incentive to do their best to get at least something for it. Most supermarkets workers also hate throwing good food out and would happily pass out-of-date but still usable food on to charity. But the gap between sell-by and use-by dates is so short, and perishable food can only be passed on reliably where there is a well-ordered and efficient transfer system to shift it quickly, and a ready outlet for it which matches demand to supply – and supply is totally unpredictable; one day it might be lettuces, another, loaves; one day two crates, another day, two bunches; another, nothing. Charity workers – usually volunteers – are unlikely to want to attend the store at the end of every day on the off-chance of something being available. Any many charities are not able to distribute stock every day […] another problem is the fact that the stock needs sorting – one bad apple in a crate could spoilt the

rest before it found a home; or there might be lots of bad apples under the top layer. Supermarket workers won't have the time to sort through what they are passing on, so unless the recipient agency checks it through on site, disposing of the discards becomes the agency's (possibly considerable) problem'.

This process is crucial to ensuring those groups helping our poorest citizens are not being supplied with poor quality 'scraps' of food. Norwich Food Bank, for example, said 'we have ended up with literal waste – split packets, damaged beyond repair and we have ended up binning it – wasting our time and resources picking up stuff we cannot use while the business/supermarket claim to be 'doing their bit''.

It is essential that supermarkets train their staff to prevent second class goods being passed off as usable surplus stock.

As things stand, most voluntary groups do not have the capacity to collect, sort and store fresh food that becomes surplus. Likewise it can prove costly and burdensome for some retailers and manufacturers to rescue and then divert this food for human consumption.

We addressed earlier in this report the need for more storage space to be made available for voluntary groups, but what further action could stimulate the diversion of more surplus food for human consumption?

Most of our submissions were against the idea of legislating to ban food waste:

- FoodCycle questioned if legislation would help […] Ultimately we know charities have to build local relationships at store level to ensure good food does not go to waste. More should be done to facilitate relationships and we don't believe legislation will do that […] By building partnerships with the grocery industry, charities can lead the way for best practice: developing good relationships between FoodCycle volunteers and more staff, helping those in-store understand the good work they are doing and putting back-of-store surplus to very good use'.
- FareShare argued in its submission that legislation should not be introduced 'before there is enough capacity support for charity food redistribution in the UK. The legislation before capacity will result in more food waste going into anaerobic digestion and animal feed rather than feeding people in need'.
- The Oxford Food Bank wrote that 'we do not necessarily believe that a ban would work in the UK. The obvious conclusion (if suppliers wanted to get around it) would be to declare more of the surplus unfit for human consumption, thus affecting existing supply levels. Providing the suppliers with a mechanism of using their "surplus" food, which does not cost, nor interfere with their operations, would have a much greater impact'.
- Feedback stated that 'there are a number of major limitations to the French law. Foremost among these is that it actually only obliges retailers to divert food waste from landfill, rather than higher up the food waste hierarchy to be fed to livestock or redistributed to people. Although retailers are obliged to donate some of their produce to charities, the amount is not specified. Therefore, since many UK retailers have already made significant progress to zero waste to landfill since the introduction of the Landfill Tax, and all currently donate some of their in-store food waste to charities like FareShare, a direct extension of the French law would have little effect in the UK in its current form […] therefore, though Feedback advocate regulation to significantly reduce food waste, this must be in a stronger form than the French law. The law must cover all stages of the supply chain, and also enshrine the food waste

hierarchy, so that redistribution to humans is prioritised over anaerobic digestion. Ambitious targets should be set for redistribution of edible food to human consumption'.

- One food bank expressed concerns that 'knee-jerk legislation could do more harm than good […] if you force supermarkets to get rid of waste by giving it away, some of them will simply try to bully the charities, just as some of them already bully their suppliers. They will try to offload the uncertainty on to the recipients; creating agreements where the charity has to take whatever the supermarket gives it […] in essence, the charity becomes the supermarket's dustbin, and the problem (and expense) of disposal of perished stock has simply been shoved further down the chain'.

It was proposed in some submissions, therefore, that a financial incentive targeted on the transportation of fresh food that becomes surplus, could hold the key.

The evidence from Feedback Global suggests this would be a next logical step: 'both at the EU and Member State level, measures such as landfill taxes and other fiscal incentives have been the principal drivers of shifting food waste away from landfill and into composting or anaerobic digestion. However there is a policy gap in terms of measures to incentivise food waste avoidance and pushing food waste up the […] hierarchy, towards more beneficial uses such as redistribution for human consumption and feeding livestock'.

One suggestion from Financial Action and Advice Derbyshire was that 'there should be a renewed commitment from government to tackling food waste. It is criminal the amount of food that is wasted. Retailers have shown [themselves] to be willing to work with local food banks, but the key is distribution. FareShare could be expanded to be free of charge to food banks and its costs covered by a levy on retailers and food producers based on the amount of food wasted'.

John Pacitti, Food Donation Connection, suggested that 'a financial incentive for food donations would […] help overcome corporate objections to the cost of a food donation programme. While these costs are small, they do exist and a financial incentive would help mitigate them'.

Based on their work in the United States, Food Donation Connection proposed to us an incentive in which retailers and manufacturers donating good quality surplus food to charities serving those in need would be eligible for a tax deduction of 20% covering 75% of the total value of the food they have donated, as calculated at the time of donation.

We will know for sure how much surplus food is fit for human consumption once the Waste and Resources Action Programme publishes the results of its Food Waste Quantification Survey in February 2016.

But let us start by taking FareShare's estimate of there being 400,000 tonnes of good quality surplus food produced each year. If this were valued at a total of £1 billion, a tax incentive to redistribute the whole lot of this food, equivalent to 800 million meals a year, would be worth £150 million to retailers and manufacturers.

At a cost of £150 million a year the Government could bring to an end the scandal of perfectly good food being thrown to waste or converted into energy. In doing so it would equip Britain's charities with enough food to provide two meals a day for one million people.

65. We recommend that the Government should consult on a series of moves to reorder existing subsidies, at nil extra cost, in favour of rescuing surplus food for human consumption. As part of this consultation the Government should seek views on whether a small amount of expenditure currently allocated towards incentivising anaerobic digestion

should be diverted towards establishing a start-up fund for local communities wishing to rescue more fresh food that has become surplus so it can be diverted to the hungry.

66. We recommend that the Government should consult also on a series of targeted tax incentives to encourage supermarkets and manufacturers to transport their surplus stock of fresh food to charities.

67. In the meantime, we recommend that each of Britain's major supermarkets should consider using the proceeds from their plastic bag charges to support the diversion to the hungry of fresh food that has become surplus.

68. Each of Britain's major supermarkets should appoint a 'Food Rescue Champion' in each store to take responsibility for the diversion of surplus stock to the hungry. Such a role would necessarily entail building relationships with local voluntary groups working with our most vulnerable citizens, so that a local timetable can be agreed. This innovation of course would be in addition the existing arrangements that have been established by national commitments. It should not seek to replace them.

We emphasise here that rescuing surplus food and diverting it towards those voluntary organisations working with Britain's most vulnerable citizens must form only part, albeit an important one, of a national anti-hunger strategy.

Abolishing hunger in Britain is not yet totally within our grasp. But the moves advocated here would reduce significantly the numbers of hungry citizens and go a very long way to abolishing hunger amongst children.

A full implementation of our recommendations would signify that we were as a society now clearly making progress along the path to abolish hunger as we know it by 2020.

Chapter 5 - Feeding Britain in 2016

As part of the evidence gathering exercise which led to this report we invited views on how **Feeding Britain** might most effectively contribute to the fightback against hunger.

It was suggested that **Feeding Britain** should:

- Be the radical voice challenging the status quo.
- Commit to halting and, and ultimately putting an end to the need for charitable food assistance in the United Kingdom.
- Improve and extend the delivery of anti-hunger projects and identify barriers to progress, but not to become a direct provider of services.
- Collate data on the numbers of hungry people in the United Kingdom.
- Facilitate a more co-ordinated and joined up approach across private, public and voluntary sectors.
- Encourage the development of Food Bank Plus and social supermarkets.
- Lobby for funding to support a national programme of school holiday provision.
- Continue pushing for the end of utility bills discriminating against the poor.
- Value local provision, celebrate local success stories and encourage local projects.
- Create an online template for local **Feeding Britain** steering groups wishing to implement an anti-hunger strategy.
- Highlight some of the unintended consequences of reforms to the social security system.

The Trussell Trust and FareShare stressed the importance of **Feeding Britain** enabling collaboration between the various players in the field to avoid duplication of efforts and to ensure that efforts are focused to where the need is greatest. We would add to this that gaps in provision must be filled or existing provision be supplemented by local expertise and enthusiasm.

Feeding Britain will strive to put these suggestions into action and it will report regularly to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger. Together they will pursue:

- A co-ordinated strategy to tackle hunger, including a national programme providing year-round protection against child hunger.
- The development of Food Bank Plus.
- A more efficient food system that puts human needs first.
- The expansion of social supermarkets giving comprehensive help on jobs and skills.
- A new deal on the costs of household essentials.
- A repaired social safety net.
- The enshrining of paid work, built around the new National Living Wage, as a safeguard against hunger.

Appendix One – An audit of the recommendations made in Feeding Britain – A strategy for zero hunger in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (December 2014)

Recommendation	Progress
We suggest the creation of a new national network called '**Feeding Britain**', whose membership would be composed of the food bank movement and other providers of food assistance, the voluntary organisations redistributing fresh surplus food, the food industry, and representatives from each of the eight government departments whose policy affects the number of people at risk of hunger.	**Feeding Britain** was established as a charitable body in October 2015. Its President is The Most Revd. Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, and its Trustees are The Rt Hon Frank Field MP (Chair), Andrew Forsey, John Glen MP, Baroness Jenkin of Kennington, Emma Lewell-Buck, Laura Mason, and The Rt Revd. Tim Thornton, Bishop of Truro.
As an initial step, we recommend that the Government provides support to facilitate the establishment of twelve pilot projects – one in each region of the United Kingdom – to draw together private, voluntary and public expertise to eliminate hunger. The facilitation of twelve pilot projects and the creation of a Board of Trustees to drive this programme will require a modest amount of money. These pilots will help test how best to achieve the Inquiry's aims of a hunger-free United Kingdom. We believe that this objective is most likely to be achieved by adopting our following recommendations.	The **Feeding Britain** pilot projects have proceeded without funding from the Government.
We believe that, as the system is built up, **Feeding Britain** will need to develop a network of towns, cities, counties and regions that match food needs and resources in each town, city, country and region, with the ultimate aim of eliminating hunger. While **Feeding Britain** has the overall goal of a hunger-free United Kingdom, this goal can only be achieved if its strategy is based up from the local town to city and then to region. We believe that, as it develops, it is crucial that this body develops a life of its own that is independent of government and with the ability to rise above other sectorial interests.	**Feeding Britain** pilots have been established in Birkenhead, Devon and Cornwall, Derbyshire, Salisbury, and South Shields. Further pilots are soon to be established in Brighton, Greenwich and Woolwich, Liverpool, and Suffolk.

Horizontal cooperation is also required. We believe that **Feeding Britain** should be tasked with raising the level of knowledge and on the nature and sources of good food, and how best these supplies can be made ready for eating. Here, **Feeding Britain** must have the responsibility for fostering collaboration between food banks and other voluntary providers, Local Authorities, schools, food retailers and manufacturers, so as to build food policy around the often complex needs of individuals facing the long-term risk of hunger. Central, however, to this overall success is the local point of contact, whatever it is called. This might be 'Food Bank Plus', or something else. It is at this local level that we have experienced the most crucial aspect of a vibrant voluntary movement; the free giving of care and attention to fellow citizens who find themselves in the most difficult and demanding circumstances. If there was a medal for exercising human compassion we would seek that it be awarded collectively to the volunteers of the food bank movement.	Food Bank Plus has been embraced by a growing number of communities. A notable example is the **Feeding Birkenhead** project, in which Food Bank Plus has effectively addressed people's crises related to benefit payments, gas and electricity payments, and ill health. We wish for Food Bank Plus to become the standard way of operating in as many food banks as possible.
We believe our work and the recommendations that come from this report should be used as the basis of **Feeding Britain**'s developing agenda.	In 2015 the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger pursued all of the recommendations made in **Feeding Britain**.
The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger will call a meeting of all the interested parties to establish the pilot projects.	In June 2015 the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger called a National Summit with supporters and interested parties. Meetings have also been held to establish a series of local pilot projects.
We very much support the Trussell Trust's recent pilot of cooking courses and co-location of welfare benefits, debt advice and other services in its food banks. We saw the success of this during our visit to Salisbury, and in our evidence from Tower Hamlets. We recommend that these pilots be extended across the Trussell Trust network so as to tackle some of the deep-seated causes of	Over the past year eight Trussell Trust food banks have run debt and money advice pilots, four have run an npower Fuel Bank pilot, an idea to which we return later, and 29 food banks have been trained to run an 'Eat Well Spend Less' course.

hunger, beyond the immediate crisis, and be adopted, wherever possible, by the network of independent food banks.	The Trussell Trust will expand its More Than Food initiative in January 2016 following a generous donation of £500,000. We very much support the Trussell Trust in this venture and we wish for the intervention to be piloted in as many of its food banks as possible, so that more people's crises can be addressed the first time they set foot in their local food bank. We make a plea too to the nation's independent food banks to reach out to voluntary and legal services in their area.
We recommend that **Feeding Britain** should be tasked with identifying areas of the country in which social supermarkets could feasibly make a real and positive difference to people's living standards, and where feasible, to help the Local Authorities in these areas roll out this model.	**Feeding Birkenhead** has secured premises in The Pyramids Shopping Centre for a new Community Shop. It has applied to the Big Lottery Fund for support to establish one here. The Neo Café is operating an independent social supermarket, stocked by FareShare, at The Vikings Centre in Rock Ferry. One of **Feeding Britain**'s objectives for the year ahead is to establish a social supermarket in each region of the United Kingdom.
We recommend that supermarkets begin experimenting in other ways to meet the need for fresh food. Tesco, for example, a pioneer in this field of combating hunger, adds 30% to any food given by its shoppers to food banks. The Inquiry would like to see Tesco experiment with using some of this subsidy to include the recycling of fresh food.	We have written to each supermarket asking whether they might top slice a small sum of this 30% supplement from the National Food Collection to pay for the distribution of a small number of vouchers via food banks that enable people in need to obtain fresh fruit and vegetables in their store.
We also recommend that other supermarkets follow this example through their collection arrangements with food banks, and reward entrepreneurial skills of staff by allowing their	We are pleased that most supermarkets do now allow their stores a degree of local flexibility in a way which does not impinge upon their national contracts. We wish for this policy of flexibility to be communicated clearly to individual store managers so they

stores a degree of flexibility so that they can imaginatively meet local needs.	can proactively approach voluntary groups in their local community with the offer of food and support.
The Inquiry is asking the Government to consider whether a part of its entitlement from European structural funds to address poverty and deprivation might be better spent through the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived. We believe **Feeding Britain** should be financed from this source. We recommend that the Government reallocates some of its EU Structural Funds as well as local public health grants, and to allocate this to organisations that promote the equitable distribution of surplus food, and to finance other developments we suggest in **Feeding Britain**.	The Government drew down the smallest possible amount from the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived and has allocated this towards the development of school breakfast clubs.
We believe it is indefensible that huge numbers of people are going hungry in a country that wastes such vast quantities of food that is fit for consumption. Whilst we acknowledge that a certain amount of food waste is unavoidable, and that not all surplus food can be redistributed, we urge the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to set food retailers and manufacturers a target of doubling the proportion of surplus food they redistribute to food assistance providers and other voluntary organisations and to agree this target, and the timescales over which it will be achieved, with **Feeding Britain**. This would still only amount to using a mere 4% of usable food, yet if organisations that promote the equitable distribution of surplus food were given the resources to double their output, this very important target would save the voluntary sector £160 million over the next Parliament. We believe a long-term objective should be to minimise the amount of surplus food in this country, while ensuring that of this falling surplus progressively more is used by the third sector.	We acknowledge the steps WRAP has taken to prioritise the redistribution of good quality surplus food to groups working with people in need. However, we believe a target for retailers and manufacturers, at a minimum, of doubling the amount of good quality surplus food that is redistributed is achievable and should be pursued.
We also support calls made by the House of Lords European Union Committee for the Government to introduce financial incentives	The Government so far has rejected this recommendation.

in Britain so as to divert more fit-for-consumption surplus food from landfill and anaerobic digestion to voluntary organisations serving meals to people.	
We recommend that the food industry as a whole should set itself a target, built up from its constituent parts, of reducing the amount of food disposed of in landfill, and turned into compost or energy, by 100,000 tonnes each year by the end of the next Parliament. The body we suggest to drive this, as well as all other aspects of our reforms will be **Feeding Britain**.	We acknowledge the steps WRAP has taken to prioritise the redistribution of good quality surplus food to groups working with people in need. However, we believe a target for retailers and manufacturers, at a minimum, of reducing by 100,000 tonnes each year the amount of food disposed of in landfill, and turned into compost or energy, is achievable and should be pursued.
We believe that by encouraging the production and retail of local grown food, Local Authorities can play a key role in addressing the lack of access to affordable food in deprived areas. Success in establishing local networks will require Local Authorities amongst other things having the willingness to work with local food organisations to free up land for food production, retail and storage, as and when resources are available.	Limited progress has been made on this front, although Wirral Council as part of the **Feeding Birkenhead** project is reviewing the availability of allotment space and other areas in which food might be grown for home consumption or other purposes.
As part of renegotiating the Barnett Formula, we recommend that the Government considers reintroducing a needs element to the funding for Local Authorities, so as to enable them, amongst other things, to carry out the reforms outlined in this report.	We are not aware of the Government having taken up this recommendation.
We recommend that the Government grants itself new legislative powers to instruct Ofgem to work with energy suppliers to establish a national minimum standard for fair energy prices for all prepayment energy customers.	The Government has not taken up this recommendation, but Ofgem has shown tremendous initiative. We are pleased that Ofgem has acted on our concerns by addressing some of the worst injustices associated with prepayment meters. We expect further proposals to follow in 2016.
Similarly, we recommend that Ofgem should take an immediate step towards this objective by encouraging energy suppliers to bring their practice up to the best.	We have proposed a New Deal on Prepayment Meters. Parts of this proposal are already being put into action, but we wish for it to have been adopted in full by all energy suppliers by 2020.

We recommend that Ofgem reviews the impact the introduction of standing charges has had on energy bills for poorer households – particularly those relying on prepayment meters. We believe Ofgem should consider carefully the unintended consequences of standing charges, such as the accumulation of debt on prepayment meters.	Ofgem has reviewed standing charges on prepayment meters and it is currently consulting with the energy industry on how best to protect vulnerable customers.
The Inquiry recommends that Ofgem set out how energy suppliers should go beyond meeting the minimum legislative criteria for the Warm Home Discount. We believe the Broader Group criteria should be extended automatically to cover all low-income working families. This would provide welcome support to an additional 1.7 million families in poverty.	The Government has implemented this recommendation.
We recommend that the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change considers implementing a standard set of rules for all energy suppliers involved with the delivery of the scheme, so a greater number of families in poverty are able to benefit.	The Government has implemented this recommendation.
We recommend that Ofwat audit each water supplier's customer base to find out how many low-income households would be better off on an unmeasured tariff, and direct that they should be transferred or have their bills capped at this level.	Ofwat rejected this recommendation.
The Inquiry endorses the findings of the Financial Conduct Authority's investigation into continuous payment authority schemes, which found some firms were automatically deducting arbitrary amounts of money from individuals' accounts as a debt collection method. High-cost short-term lenders are now limited to two unsuccessful attempts to use a CPA to take a repayment and cannot use a CPA to take a part-payment. However, the borrower will be able to 'reset' the CPA following two unsuccessful attempts to deduct money, meaning it can begin the process all over again. We therefore recommend to the Financial Conduct Authority that it monitors closely the effectiveness of these new measures, report annually to **Feeding Britain** on its findings, consider how best to modify the sums that a lender can immediately	We have written to the Financial Conduct Authority asking for an update on the effectiveness of these measures.

withdraw from a borrower's bank account, and to take further action, if necessary, to ensure vulnerable households are not left exposed to high-cost short-term lenders.	
The Inquiry heard that some payday loan brokers pass on the bank details of people looking to take out a payday loan to a large number of other brokers and lenders, who may seek to extract fees, even if they have not supplied a loan. We recommend that the Financial Conduct Authority should require as soon as possible payday loan brokers to amend their privacy policies so as to protect poorer households from being exploited in this way.	The Financial Conduct Authority announced in January 2015 that it is to require as soon as possible payday loan brokers to amend their privacy policies. It has passed new regulations covering practices such as imposing charges that consumers often knew nothing about until they checked their bank account. Payday loan brokers cannot now request an individual's bank details or take a payment from their account without their explicit consent first. Payday loan brokers will also have to include their legal name, not just their trading name, in all advertising and other communications with customers, and state prominently in their adverts that they are a broker, not a lender.
We recommend that all credit union accounts be made eligible for the receipt of Universal Credit, so as to allow for and encourage their use among low-income households.	The Government has accepted this recommendation.
We recommend that Ofcom better target relevant information on special offers and deals to new claimants of social security benefits as part of a reformed Claimant Commitment.	Ofcom has implemented this recommendation.
We recommend that Ofwat, Ofgem and Ofcom oblige all utility companies to transfer immediately all public telephone numbers from higher to standard regional or free rates	Ofgem is reviewing the provision of telephone services by energy companies, including the use of higher-rate telephone numbers and the costs borne by households needing to call their supplier. Ofwat is encouraging all water companies not to use higher-rate telephone numbers.
We recommend that the Financial Conduct Authority report within six months the progress it has made in abolishing the use of higher-rate telephone numbers in the financial services sector.	The Financial Conduct Authority has implemented this recommendation.
We recommend that the Cabinet Office reviews the progress made by public bodies in phasing out the use of higher-rate telephone numbers, and require any remaining adjustments, where necessary, to be made within six months.	Government departments appear to have implemented this recommendation. We have not found any evidence of 0845 numbers being used or advertised to members of the public wishing to call up about a benefit or tax credit claim, for example. Generally these lines have been transferred to 0800 and 0345 numbers. In some cases the latter may only be marginally cheaper than the higher rate numbers it replaced. We will continue monitoring this issue.
We recommend that the teaching of budgeting and parenting skills should be	The Department for Education issues non-statutory guidance on parenting skills, and

embedded on a statutory basis in the National Curriculum as the cornerstone of a reformed Personal, Social and Health and Education (PSHE) module.	financial literacy is taught in Citizenship classes on a statutory basis for Key Stages 3 and 4. Cooking is now compulsory in local authority maintained schools at Key Stage 3.
A large proportion of primary schools that submitted evidence to the Inquiry said they had witnessed children arriving at school hungry because their parents could not, or would not, wake them up to make them breakfast, or bring them to the school breakfast club. We recommend that schools should wherever possible refer chaotic families to their local Troubled Families project whose success can be measured in the number of families they have 'turned round' to being functioning in a normal way.	The Government has implemented this recommendation. Since April 2015 schools have been able to refer such families to the Troubled Families project.
We believe the Government and the voluntary sector should consider whether there is an opportunity to provide information about available food skills training alongside Healthy Start vouchers.	The Department of Health makes information available on food skills and healthy eating when parents receive Healthy Start vouchers.
The Inquiry received evidence suggesting that the opportunity for adults to undertake food skills training would be one way of boosting the resilience of people relying on food banks, and other forms of food assistance. We recommend such support be made available by members of **Feeding Britain** to all individuals relying for any length of time on emergency food assistance.	We are pleased that a growing number of food banks and other charitable groups seek to offer cooking sessions. We wish for this to continue and expand in 2016.
We recommend that Local Authorities begin collecting information on whether landlords in receipt of Housing Benefit are providing basic cooking facilities for their tenants, with a view to making Housing Benefit receipt conditional on these facilities being provided, and to report their findings to **Feeding Britain**.	This recommendation has not been enacted.
We urge each Local Authority to use the Eligibility Checking System to register automatically children of eligible parents for free school meals and for **Feeding Britain** to report on progress.	A small but growing number of Local Authorities have taken up this recommendation. We believe as a next step the Secretary of State for Education should grant all Local Authorities the duty of registering automatically children of eligible parents for free school meals.
We recommend that the Department for Education prioritises poor children from working families in any future expansion of the free school meals programme.	The Government has yet to confirm whether these children will be eligible for free school meals under Universal Credit.
We recommend that the Government begins costing the extension of free school meal provision during school holidays.	The Government has rejected this recommendation.
We recommend the establishment of a single Office for Living Standards within the	The Government has rejected this recommendation, stating that living

Treasury to monitor pressures on low-income households' budgets and for the Cabinet Office to co-ordinate effective responses from government. It should be tasked with reporting regularly to Parliament, and to **Feeding Britain**, on its monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations set out in this report. The Treasury should then commit to an annual Parliamentary debate on the level of progress made in this field.	standards are already monitored within the Treasury.
We encourage the Government to continue to pursue policies which seek to raise the National Minimum Wage, increase take-up of the Living Wage, and to reduce the total amount of tax taken from low-paid workers.	The Government increased the National Minimum Wage to £6.70 in October 2015, it has announced a new National Living Wage beginning at £7.20 in April 2016 for workers aged 25 and over, and it has raised the personal allowance.
We recommend that the Low Pay Commission be empowered to set reference minimum wage rates in each sector of the economy, leaving in place the National Minimum Wage, and for these powers to be used immediately to encourage higher minimum wages in sectors of the economy that can most easily afford them, such as finance and banking. These higher minimum wages should be set at the level of a Living Wage, and should apply to all directly employed, outsourced and agency staff performing functions with these sectors.	The National Living Wage will rise to £9 an hour by 2020, but we believe there is room in some sectors for employers to pay a higher voluntary Living Wage designed to cover the cost of living.
The Low Pay Commission should also be granted additional powers to work with those sectors of the economy in which the immediate implementation of a Living Wage would lead to the highest threat of unemployment, such as social care and retail, in order to draw up interim packages – including product discounts and incremental pay increases – so as to provide a 'Roadmap to the Living Wage' for each of these sectors.	Employees aged 25 and over in all sectors will be paid a National Living Wage of £7.20 from April 2016.
We also believe that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills should work with sector interests on a strategy to raise productivity and thereby enable the higher minimum wage, or Living Wage, to be implemented without a loss of jobs.	This recommendation has yet to be enacted.
Alongside this, we recommend the Government leads by example through its pay and procurement policies so as to ensure all of its directly employed, outsourced and agency staff are paid at least a Living Wage.	This recommendation has yet to be enacted.
Likewise we recommend that Local Authorities, beyond and including paying their own employees a Living Wage, should use their procurement strategies to encourage	Some local authorities have led the way on this front and we will be encouraging others to follow their lead in 2016.

local businesses to themselves become Living Wage employers.	
We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions investigates the IT systems used in Jobcentre Plus and make necessary improvements to ensure all claims can be processed through one system which can be accessed on a single screen, so Jobcentre Plus staff are able to calculate and process entitlements within five working days.	We are unsure whether this recommendation has been enacted. We would welcome confirmation from the Department for Work and Pensions that all Jobcentre Plus staff are able to access and process information on a benefit claim through one single computer system on a single screen, so as to prevent complications and delays.
We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions provides claimants with an email address to which personal documents can be scanned and sent, and if this is currently viewed as impossible, the Department should commission further work to overcome the barriers.	The Department for Work and Pensions informed us that it was working on an online portal that would meet this recommendation, but we have yet to be informed as to when this might be operational. Again we would welcome confirmation from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions of any progress that has been made.
We recommend that emergency food assistance providers amend their referral categories to differentiate more clearly between the various benefit-related problems they encounter; this should include delays in the processing of a new or existing claim, sanctions, changes in entitlement, loss of benefit during a Mandatory Reconsideration period, being made to transfer from one benefit to another, and payments made to cover debt owed on previous overpayments or Crisis Loans.	With one or two useful and notable exceptions, this recommendation has not been enacted.
We recommend that the Secretary of State for Health makes it a part of a GPs role to provide evidence in relation to benefit claims, and make it unlawful for the National Health Service to charge for medical documents in connection with benefit claims.	While we regret that this practice remains lawful and to the detriment of some of our poorer constituents, the Secretary of State for Health has asked officials to encourage GPs to ensure patients know they can access their medical records online for free.
We believe the Government must urgently reform the benefits system so it is able to deliver payments quickly within five working days. We fully understand this will take time to achieve. But the Department for Work and Pensions must begin this process of reform by ensuring it has the data to measure the time between a claim being made and the claimant receiving their first payment.	We welcome the progress the Government has made to speed up the processing of a new benefit claim. We wish for this progress to be built upon in 2016 and we would welcome clarification from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on what proportion of claims are not only calculated, but paid within its 'Actual Average Clearance Time' measurement, and how many new claims are paid after this period has elapsed.
We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions should simplify the application process for Hardship Payments and Short Term Benefit Advances. Information on this emergency support, along with other emergency measures such as Discretionary	We welcome the progress the Government has made to improve the system of emergency payments, but we remain concerned that in some areas people in desperate need are not made aware of these payments.

Housing Payments, should be clearly publicised within Jobcentre Plus offices, and introduced into Jobcentre Plus advisers' standard scripts for benefit claims. The Department should review its existing trigger mechanism that prompts staff to discuss support, and consider whether it could be improved.	
We urge the Department for Work and Pensions to examine the possibility of allowing advice workers to request automatically Short Term Benefit Advances electronically for their clients.	The Government has rejected this recommendation.
We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions should automatically consider paying Short Term Benefit Advance if a benefit claim has not been paid within five working days.	The Government has rejected this recommendation.
We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions monitors closely the impact of changes designed to speed up Hardship Payments, and if necessary, consider further action to ensure a decision on Hardship Payments is made at the same point as a sanction decision.	We have written to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions asking him to publish the results of a short review of the Hardship Payments system, in particular its ability to meet and prevent need.
We recommend that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and the Department for Work and Pensions both introduce and proceed with the continuous payment of a minimum tariff whilst a change of household circumstances is processed for tax credits and benefits, with adjustments being made later if necessary.	The Government has not enacted this recommendation.
We urge the Department for Work and Pensions to consider introducing a time limit for the Mandatory Reconsideration period, as well as continuing the payment of Employment and Support Allowance, at the lower assessment rate if necessary, for the duration of claimants' Mandatory Reconsideration period to avoid a sudden loss of income for claimants.	The Government has yet to introduce a formal time limit for the Mandatory Reconsideration period, although we understand it has begun operating to an internal target and this is scheduled to be formalised in April 2016. The Secretary of State has acknowledged that claimants should expect this process to be conducted within a 'reasonable' timeframe. We would welcome information on the form this 'reasonable' timeframe might take.
We strongly welcome the Government's decision to accept in full the recommendations made by Matthew Oakley's independent review into sanctions for claimants failing to take part in back to work schemes. We accordingly call on the Government to extend these measures to cover all Jobseeker's Allowance claimants.	The Government has informed us that the wider application of sanctions is being kept under review, and, as part of this, it is reviewing all claimant communications and sanctions process. We have written to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions asking him to update us on the outcomes of this review process.
We recommend that the Government make clear in guidance that a sanction decision is	As far as we are aware, this recommendation has yet to be enacted in

only lawful if letters are sent, and can be proven to have been received, to the claimant explaining the reason that a sanction is being imposed, the period the sanction will apply for, and whether Hardship Payments may be granted, and if not, why not.	full. We remain concerned by evidence suggesting that claimants are not informed of a sanction being applied to their claim until after their payments have been suspended. The Feeding Britain Working Party on Benefit Administration, convened by Child Poverty Action Group, informs us that while all Jobseeker's Allowance who are sanctioned will receive an automatic written letter, these letters do not make it clear why, or when, they have been sanctioned.
We recommend that, in cases where sanctions are applied, the Department for Work and Pensions should require that claimants be immediately informs of their right to appeal the decision, and provided with the necessary documentation to do so.	The Government has informed us that it expects Jobcentre Plus advisors to make claimants aware of their right to appeal before any sanction is imposed. Depending on the benefit and nature of the decision, such advice should be issued either in person, or by post. We would welcome input from voluntary organisations confirming whether this chimes with their experiences of the system.
We recommend that Jobcentre Plus staff should be able to exercise their own discretion as to whether a requirement was missed through error or circumstances beyond the claimant's control, and should be able to recommend that sanctions are not implemented on these occasions.	The Government has rejected this recommendation. It believes there are a number of steps taken to ensure decisions are correct, and says that independent specialist decision makers consider each case as well as any evidence of good reason put forward by a claimant.
We believe claimants should be given a 'Yellow Card' warning with the chance to provide an explanation for a first offence, and perhaps be given additional requirements to meet, before a sanction is applied.	The Government has accepted this recommendation and we expect the results of an early pilot exercise to be published early in 2016.
We recommend that once a sanction has been applied, Jobcentre Plus should promptly advise the claimant to contact their Local Authority, or make contact themselves, to tell their opposite number of a the claimant's reduction of income and their right to continue to claim other benefits. In this way there should be no disruption to Housing Benefit payments and/or Council Tax support.	The Government has accepted this recommendation, although further tweaks may be required to ensure no claimant wrongly loses entitlement to Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax support following a sanction being applied to a different benefit claim.
We recommend that the welfare contract be a genuine two-way contract between claimants and Jobcentre Plus, outlining a claimant's duties as well as their rights. In making this a properly balanced exercise the new contract should make clear what sources of additional support claimants are entitled to, as a way of enhancing their chances of finding their work. It should be made clearer, for example, that help is available to cover travel expenses for job interviews or that it is	The Government has rejected this recommendation.

possible in some circumstances to sign on by post or in a local library if claimants have difficulty in getting to their nearest Jobcentre Plus office.	
We recommend that, alongside this contract, a claimant should be provided with a leaflet produced by the voluntary sector or their Local Authority, listing the charges that the mobile phone companies have, hopefully, agreed and the claimant's rights against rip-off utility charges.	This recommendation is being piloted in Birkenhead Jobcentre Plus as part of the **Feeding Birkenhead** project. Every Jobcentre Plus in the United Kingdom has the freedom to implement this recommendation.
We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions should consider as part of the new welfare contract making upfront payments from the Flexible Support Fund to cover eligible claimants' travel expenses, rather than in arrears, as we believe this could ease considerably the hardship faced by claimants looking for work.	Payment in arrears remains the preferred payment method for the Flexible Support Fund, including for travel costs. However, payments in some cases can be made in advance where the claimant cannot afford to make up-front payments. We remain very much concerned that although the need for this support is evident, almost half the Flexible Support Fund remains unspent.
We recommend the Department for Work and Pensions estimates how much additional expenditure would be incurred if the Flexible Support Fund were to be extended to cover the costs of travelling to routine fortnightly interviews at Jobcentre Plus, where claimants live more than a mile from their Jobcentre Plus office or have mobility problems and do not claim mobility allowances.	The Government has rejected this recommendation. On reflection this need could, in fact, be met from within the current budget.
We recommend that regional Jobcentre Plus offices be given the opportunity to attempt to negotiate discounted or free return journeys on public transport to Jobcentre Plus, from day one of a Jobseeker's Allowance claim, and that Ministers look at making this concession part of any new negotiations on large taxpayer subsidies to bus and train operators.	Department for Work and Pensions Regional Offices are able to negotiate with Travel Operators on travel subsidies and can utilise the Jobcentre Plus Travel Discount Card to assist this. However, in practice, funding is not available to support wide scale travel to Jobcentres for normal attendance purposes (signing on), although attendance outside of normal attendance is fully reimbursed to claimants. A minimum of 13 weeks is applied before a claimant can apply as the Government believes offering concessions from day one would create funding difficulties for travel operators. Local negotiations have secured support packages in some parts of London, Scotland, West Yorkshire, West Midlands and the North West.
As an immediate step, we recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions should assess whether some claimants, particularly those in rural areas, or with caring	The Government is offering postal 'signing' in some circumstances, for example, if the claimant has health issues that restrict mobility or journeys that take more than

responsibilities, could be given the right to sign on and report regularly on job search activity without always having to travel to a Jobcentre Plus office. Our evidence suggested that some claimants face a round trip of 26 miles to their nearest office. Given the majority of Universal Credit claims will be handled online, we believe there is a case to explore whether some additional access points and Jobcentre Plus services could be co-located at venues such as Sure Start Children's Centres or One Stop Shops, to help claimants 'sign on' without incurring additional travel costs by having to travel to Jobcentre Plus.	one hour door to door by public transport. It will not publish information on how many claimants are benefitting from this service.
We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions reviews the quality, repetition and appropriateness of its training courses, so that these courses are of value to claimants and help them into work.	We would welcome a response from the Government to this recommendation.
We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions considers the feasibility of courses being provided within Jobcentre Plus offices to develop claimants' IT skills while they look for work, with volunteers taking a lead in transferring these skills.	We are not aware of this recommendation being enacted.
We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions reconsiders its decision to remove such a vast number of telephones from Jobcentre Plus offices, as we have received evidence suggesting that claimants are struggling to afford the cost of telephone calls they are required to make to apply for jobs.	The Government has rejected this recommendation.
We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions immediately phases out the use and publicity of higher-rate telephone numbers for claimants wishing to speak to somebody about their benefit claim.	The Government has accepted this recommendation, with many of its main benefit lines now listed as 0800 numbers. Some numbers have been replaced with 0345 numbers which may only be marginally cheaper to call. We may wish to reconsider this matter at a later date.
We recommend that the Department for Work and Pensions monitors the Jobcentre Plus network closely for any 'pinch points' emerging in parts of the country where access to computer facilities is inadequate to cater for the number of jobseekers.	We are not aware of this recommendation being enacted.
The Inquiry understands that the Government recently consulted on the future of the Local Welfare Assistance fund from April 2015, and is considering whether to incorporate local welfare funding into the local government	We are not aware of this recommendation being enacted.

finance settlement. We recommend the Government considers the potential impact of this decision on the level of, and eligibility for financial support available to households who might face sudden crises in income, and to publish its findings.	
We recommend that the Government continues to protect Local Welfare Assistance funding.	This recommendation was enacted for 2015-16 and we would welcome its renewal each year for the remainder of this Parliament.
We similarly recommend that the Department for Communities and Local Government should monitor take-up rates for Local Welfare Assistance within each Local Authority and work with those where registration is uncharacteristically low. One way of doing this might be to issue a 'best practice' application form used by those Local authorities with the highest rates of take-up.	We are not aware of this recommendation being enacted.

Appendix Two – An audit of the recommendations made in Feeding Britain: Six Months On – A progress report on the work of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom (June 2015)

Recommendation	Progress
The Department for Work and Pensions should implement as soon as possible its new approach to sanctions using warnings and non-financial penalties following a first failure to comply with conditionality on the Work Programme.	The Government is piloting a Yellow Card warning system.
The Department for Work and Pensions should reconsider its decision not to accept electronic requests from advice workers for their clients to be paid a Short Term Benefit Advance, nor to consider automatically paying a Short Term Benefit Advance to those claimants whose benefit payment hasn't arrived after a certain period of time.	The Government has rejected this recommendation.
The Department for Work and Pensions should assess what impact its decision to remove telephones from Jobcentre Plus will have on claimants' ability to look for work.	The Government has rejected this recommendation.
The Treasury should consider introducing a continuous payment of a minimum tax credit tariff whilst a change of household circumstances is processed, with adjustments being made to later entitlements if necessary to recoup these monies.	We would welcome a response to this recommendation.
Every Government department should pay a minimum hourly rate equivalent to the Living Wage to all staff – directly employed, outsourced and agency workers – and write a clause into major public contracts which would look favourably upon those bidders paying at least a Living Wage to all of their staff.	This recommendation has not been enacted.
The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills should consider extending this year's remit for the Low Pay Commission so it can research the affordability of a higher minimum wage in highly profitable industries, such as finance and banking, which would cover all directly employed, contracted and agency workers.	A new National Living Wage beginning at £7.20 comes into force in April 2016, but we believe there is room within highly profitable industries for all staff to be paid at least the higher voluntary Living Wage.
Our Inquiry heard from people using food banks that they would like to be able to access fresh fruit and vegetables more readily. We believe this could be achieved through partnership working between the retailers and charities fighting hunger: we therefore recommend national retailers and charities should consider if their existing partnerships might be improved. For instance, Tesco	This recommendation has not been enacted.

currently supplements its national collection for the Trussell Trust by 30%, a small proportion of which we believe might be diverted to vouchers entitling food bank users to free fruit and vegetables.	
The Treasury should consider running a three-month consultation on two options: first, to divert existing monies from anaerobic digestion or some of the proceeds from the Landfill Tax to incentivise the redistribution of surplus food, and second, if necessary, to legislate against food waste.	This recommendation has not been enacted.
The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) should set food retailers and manufacturers a target of doubling the proportion of surplus food they redistribute to groups working with those in need and reducing the amount of food disposed of in landfill, and turned into compost or energy, by 100,000 tonnes each year by the end of this Parliament.	Despite some welcome progress on this front, the recommendation has not been enacted.
Retailers should consider how technology might enable them to make better use of their surplus food. FareShare's 'FoodCloud' app, for instance, enables local branches to connect with local charitable groups and advertise good quality surplus to them quickly. Food banks can then respond by text message and arrange to collect food	There has been some welcome progress on this front, as set out elsewhere in this report.
All food banks, however small, should consider whether they are collecting effective data about why individual users are being referred to them, and how this might be published in order to improve the evidence base about the underlying causes of hunger.	This recommendation has yet to be enacted.
The Department for Communities and Local Government should consider granting Local Authorities the power to specify the provision of basic cooking facilities as a minimum requirement for private landlords, if their local food banks were to provide evidence of negligible cooking facilities in their clients' homes.	This recommendation has not been enacted.
The Department of Health should consider what additional information could be provided to parents on low incomes when they receive Healthy Start vouchers, such as information on local food skills training or eating well on a budget.	This recommendation has been enacted.
Ofgem should ask each energy supplier to build on the outstanding recent examples of individual best practice, as part of a 'New Deal on Prepayment Meters'.	Ofgem is consulting on the termination of charges for installing and removing prepayment meters and ending the use of security deposits.

	We recommend elsewhere in this report that each energy supplier be asked to phase in this policy by 2020. Individual suppliers do not wish to publish the additional costs incurred on supplying and maintaining each prepayment meter, due to commercial confidentiality. British Gas expects soon to be offering smart meters to its existing prepayment customers; its prepayment tariffs are in line with credit customers paying by cash or cheque; it does not charge to install or remove prepayment meters; it has established a fund through the British Gas Energy Trust to provide emergency credit payments to customers struggling to top up their meter; and it has received a derogation from Ofgem to provide a standing charge rebate worth £95. This latter move has benefitted 1,000 customers already. E.ON, like Ovo, has begun offering smart meters to prepayment customers; it does not charge a fee if one of its customers asks to have their meter exchanged, but it does charge for 'force fits'; its emergency support is added to a meter as a debt; and it runs an Energy Fund which offers grants to eligible pensioners, families, people with disabilities and those on low incomes who are struggling to repay energy debt or to pay for energy efficient white goods. EDF Energy does not charge customers for the removal or installation of prepayment meters; its Blue+Fixed Prepay March 2017 protects customers from any price increases until March 2017.
The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs should extend its WaterSure discount to families with two children or more.	The Government has rejected this recommendation.

Submissions

1. Advice Nottingham – Becky Ramsden
2. Aldi
3. Association of Pension and Benefit Claimants
4. Belfast Food Network
5. Bill Gray, Community Food and Health (Scotland), NHS Scotland
6. Birmingham City Council
7. Birmingham Food Council
8. Black Country Food Bank – Emma Crook
9. Bolton At Home
10. Brighton and Hove Food Partnership
11. British Red Cross
12. British Retail Consortium – Alice Ellison
13. Burgess Hill Community Food Bank
14. Camborne, Pool and Redruth Food Bank – Don Gardner
15. Cambridge City Food Bank
16. Canterbury Food Bank
17. Caritas Social Action Network
18. Cathedral Food Bank, Bangor, Gwynedd
19. Chichester District Food Bank
20. Children's Food Trust
21. Christians Against Poverty
22. City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council
23. Clay Cross Food Bank
24. Clevedon and District Food Bank
25. Community Emergency Food Bank, Oxford – Jane Benyon
26. Company Shop Group
27. Councillor Matthew Patrick
28. County Durham Food Bank
29. Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau
30. Crisis
31. Dave Beck, Bangor University
32. Devon and Cornwall Food Association
33. Dr David Webster, Honorary Senior Research Fellow, University of Glasgow
34. Dr Flora Douglas, Rowett Institute of Nutrition and Health, University of Aberdeen
35. Dr Rachel Loopstra, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of Oxford
36. Dunstable Food Bank
37. Ely Food Bank – Revd. Karl Relton
38. Exeter Food Network/Devon County Council
39. FareShare
40. Feedback – Niki Charalampopoulou
41. Feedback Global – Martin Bowman
42. Feeding Britain Working Party on Benefit Administration – convened by Child Poverty Action Group
43. Financial Action and Advice Derbyshire
44. First Love Foundation – Denise Bentley
45. Food and Drink Federation

46. Food Cardiff and Public Health Wales
47. Food Donation Connection – John Pacitti
48. Food Plymouth CIC – Dr Clare Pettinger and Richard Price
49. Food4Hull – Hilary Hamer
50. FoodCycle
51. Friends of the Earth
52. Glasgow South West Food Bank
53. Hartlepool Borough Council
54. High Peak Food Bank
55. Holiday Hunger Task Group – Lindsay Graham
56. Homeless Link
57. HOPE+ - Nadine Daniel
58. Involve North West
59. John Fenton, Diocese of Chester
60. Kellogg's
61. Kensington and Chelsea Food Bank
62. King's Lynn Food Bank – Adam Whittle
63. Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
64. Lambeth Food Partnership – Ainslie Beattie
65. Law Centres Network
66. Leeds Food Aid Network, Unity in Poverty Action
67. Magic Breakfast
68. Manchester Central Food Bank
69. Manna Community Kitchen – Dr Bryce Evans
70. Middlesbrough Food Bank, c/o Satty Rai, Northern Housing Consortium
71. Naomi Ridley, Hastings Furniture Service
72. North Oxfordshire Community Food Bank
73. Norwich Food Bank
74. Parson Cross Initiative
75. Penzance Area Food Bank – Christine Gendall
76. Pershore Food Bank
77. Phil Edwards, St Peter's Church, Rock Ferry
78. Plymouth City Council
79. Portslade Purple People Kitchen Food Bank
80. ReadiFood
81. Royal Borough of Greenwich
82. Sheffield City Council
83. Sheffield Diocese – Prepared by Jane Perry on behalf of the Bishop of Sheffield
84. Somerset County Council
85. Southampton City Mission – Chris Davis
86. Sparkhill Food Bank, Birmingham
87. St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council
88. St Vincent de Paul Society – Winston Waller
89. Stoke-on-Trent Food Bank
90. Sustain
91. Sustainable Food Cities
92. Tamar Grow Local, Plymouth

93. Tameside South and Longdendale Food Bank
94. Taxpayers Against Poverty – Revd. Paul Nicolson
95. Tesco
96. The Bill Sargent Trust
97. The Children's Society
98. The Food Foundation
99. The Matthew Tree Project – Mark Goodway and Michelle Dron
100. The Matthew Tree Project – Sue Baic
101. The Oxford Food Bank – David Cairns
102. The Rt Hon Frank Field MP
103. The Rt Revd. Robert Paterson, Bishop of Sodor and Man
104. The Strategy, Aylesbury – Toby Mallowan and Stacey Levy
105. The Trussell Trust
106. The Wiggly Worm
107. Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
108. Wantage and Grove Food Bank, Oxfordshire – Neil Townsend
109. Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP)
110. Welsh Government
111. West Cheshire Food Bank – Alec Spencer
112. West Sussex County Council
113. Whitchurch Food Bank – Alan Scutt
114. Wirral Citizens Advice Bureau
115. Wirral Food Bank
116. Wirral Play Council

Seven submissions were made on an anonymous basis.

This report was published on Thursday 10 December 2015 by a cross-party group of Members of Parliament and Peers who serve as officers on the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger. The document can be accessed online at www.feeding-britain.org.

Should you have any enquiries regarding this report, please email andrew.forsey@parliament.uk.