

An Evidence Review for the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom

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into Hunger in the United Kingdom

This review is separate to the report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom. It details the evidence that the Inquiry received, but does not seek to make recommendations. The views within it are those of the hundreds of individuals and organisations from right across the country who have taken the time to submit evidence, and the Inquiry is deeply grateful for their contributions.

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Contents

To understand the extent and geographical spread of hunger and food poverty in this country; and to understand the extent, nature and organisation of emergency food assistance schemes in this country	3
To investigate the underlying causes of hunger and food poverty in this country	25
To identify the circumstances behind the rising number of people requiring emergency food assistance in this country	31
To discover the food choices and other forms of support available to clients when using emergency food assistance; and to consider the effectiveness of emergency food assistance in meeting immediate and long-term needs, and the possibility of these schemes becoming permanent features of the welfare state	69
To investigate the source of emergency food assistance providers' supplies – how much is supplied by consumers and institutions?	83
To examine the effectiveness and sustainability of our food model in providing universal access to healthy, affordable food in this country	87
To consider approaches to improving household food security in this country	101
Annex A – Written evidence	108
Annex B – Oral evidence	113
Notes	118

To understand the extent and geographical spread of hunger and food poverty in this country; and to understand the extent, nature and organisation of emergency food assistance schemes in this country

The Inquiry found in its evidence that hunger is affecting people in all corners of the country – in urban, rural, wealthy and deprived areas – with financial shocks and sudden personal crises proving enough to expose them to hunger, regardless of where they live.

Many people have been shocked that a leafy, middle class place like Chichester should need a food bank but when we tell the stories they become deeply angry and ashamed that in a country, which is still one of the richest in the world, families go to bed hungry, children go to school hungry and single people, who are inevitably at the bottom of the housing list, have to live in tents. We are praying that you can tell their story to listening ears.

Written evidence from Chichester Food Bank

I have encountered families who live in affluent areas but due to recession, redundancy and reduced employment opportunities for highly skilled workers they have found themselves to be increasingly in debt and struggle to provide for the day to day needs of their families.

Written evidence from Elaine Chegwin Hall, Care 4 Free, Greater Manchester

This area has had a number of problems with deprivation for a long time. But it has never, ever reached the point as it has recently where deprivation necessitates the urgent forming of a food bank.

Oral evidence from Nigel Hughes, Chief Executive, YMCA Wirral

In one wealthy town in Berkshire alone, £17,000 worth of food has been collected for distribution in four months by a newly established food bank – with 500 people helped so far. This is the town where one of the three food bank directors discovered a woman in the advanced stages of pregnancy and her partner living in a child's toy tent in winter, with nothing to eat, down a lane less than 200 yards from one of the churches.

Written evidence from Alison Webster, Social Responsibility Adviser, Diocese of Oxford

Rural hardship

Within this shared national phenomenon, the Inquiry identified certain factors which may worsen the ability of low-income households in rural and coastal parts of Britain to be able to afford food.

The Inquiry heard in oral evidence from Cornwall Citizens Advice Bureau that low-income households, particularly in rural parts of the county, are struggling with the higher costs of heating their homes, the costs of transport to and from work or Jobcentre Plus, as well as the often seasonal, part-time and low-paid nature of local employment. In addition, these households may find it more difficult to access places where they can buy decent, affordable food.

Similar issues arose across large parts of rural and coastal Britain:

Derbyshire's rural nature presents a range of food challenges. Residents often live some miles away from cheap supermarkets and may not be able to afford the bus fare to travel into major towns to shop. Food choices are limited (particularly access to fresh fruit and vegetables) and considerably more expensive ... In some of our communities in Derbyshire it costs £6 for the bus fare to get to the nearest Tesco. Access to budget supermarkets like Aldi or Lidl is almost non-existent due to distance and cost of travelling.

Written evidence from Financial Action and Advice Derbyshire

Being in a rural community, there are no large supermarkets, so the price of food is higher. Although there is an hourly bus service to Hereford (22 miles) and once a day bus to Leominster (15 miles), many of our clients lack money for bus fares.

Written evidence from the Kington Community Larder, Welsh Borders

The cost of living in rural areas is significantly higher than many urban areas ... and local private rental costs are very high. Much housing stock is low quality and expensive to heat/air ... other rurality factors also add to living costs: public transport; travel to Jobcentre (13 miles away); travel to medical services ... The seasonal nature of much of

the local economy (tourism, agriculture etc.) means that many are only ever in insecure, short-term employment, so never accrue savings or resources to provide resilience in difficult times.

Written evidence from Wendy Butler, Transform 4 Work, North Devon

Everything costs more in the rural areas, services, fuel, bus fares and goods. The nearest Tesco store is one of their 'premium' stores so not much help for those who would benefit from some economy ranges of products. Local shops seem to have a 'mark-up' on goods compared to those in the bigger branches in Cheltenham.

Written evidence from a member of the public, North Cotswolds

South Shields is a really good example. Because it's a coastal town, there are lots more employment opportunities in the summer than in the winter. A lot of the young people we work with work at the arcades. They get thirty seven hours per week, so they're moving off benefit, but then the bills come six to eight weeks later when they're back down to twelve hours and they end up getting into debt again.

Oral evidence from Ross Allen, Services Manager, South Tyneside Churches Together KEY Project

The Inquiry also received evidence highlighting the longstanding difficulties facing poorer families who live in wealthier parts of the country, and who may be struggling to afford life's essentials:

For a number of foodbanks, low income is the primary referral reason. This is particularly true of those located in proportionately wealthier areas of the country, such as the North Cotswold and Bracknell foodbanks. As with Salisbury, where property costs are higher and take up proportionately more of the family income, these families can be more vulnerable to shocks to their budget. In 2011/12, 71 of 90 foodbanks cited low income as one of the top three reasons for referral (78%).

Joint written evidence from John Glen MP and the Trussell Trust

Hunger and food poverty

The Inquiry realised that it was important to differentiate between hunger and food poverty. Whilst the latter condition often has an important bearing on the likelihood of the former, the two terms are not synonymous with one another. As Bath and North East Somerset Council noted in its written submission, a person that falls within the food poverty bracket may not necessarily be hungry.

So how might we define and differentiate between these two phenomena?

We all know what hunger is. It is the immediate and sometimes prolonged sensation felt by an individual whose body is in need of food, and is most likely to occur when they cannot afford to feed themselves. The Inquiry found that a not insubstantial number of our fellow citizens are experiencing hunger in their everyday lives.

Although in many cases it was simply hunger that was being described, a large number of submissions extended their analysis beyond the immediate state of hunger, to look at the broader issue of food poverty. For example:

In Cornwall there are still vulnerable groups of individuals who, because of lack of finance, independent cooking facilities, a lack of local food shops, and a declining public transport system, find themselves in food poverty.

**Oral evidence from Kim Matthews,
St Austell's Community Kitchen, Cornwall**

A number of submissions shared with the Inquiry a concept of food poverty, set out by Dr David Barling, Professor Tim Lang and Professor Martin Caraher, suggesting it to be 'a worse diet, worse access, worse health, higher percentage of income on food, and less choice from a restricted range of foods.'

The Brighton and Hove Food Partnership agreed in its written evidence that food poverty, 'is not just about money but may be about food access, food skills or cooking or food storage equipment ...'

The Public Health Manager at Wirral Council set out in her evidence the various symptoms of food poverty: '*skipping meals, reliant on food parcels, restricted to a very limited diet and food routine, reliant on takeaways and frozen meals ...*'

In searching for an all-encompassing definition of food poverty, therefore, the submission made by the Public Health Nutrition Team at the Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust, built on the definition set out in 2005 by the Department of Health:

Food poverty can be defined as the inability to afford, or to have access to, foods which make up a healthy diet. Those experiencing food poverty may have limited money for food after paying for other household expenses; live in areas where food choice is restricted by local availability and lack of transport to large supermarkets; or be lacking in the knowledge, skills or cooking equipment necessary to prepare healthy meals.

**Written evidence from the Public Health
Nutrition Team, Central London Community
Healthcare NHS Trust**

The landscape of food assistance

The Inquiry found that support for people experiencing hunger extends far beyond the newly emerging wave of food banks. From the evidence it received, the Inquiry identified two broad types of provision:

- **Food assistance consisting, for example, of community care (meals on wheels), day centres and lunch clubs; and**
- **Emergency food assistance consisting of food banks and organisations providing food parcels on an ad hoc basis.**

The evidence suggests that demand for these two types of provision stems from two distinct groups:

Informal [food assistance] providers, such as soup kitchens, in Scotland, are used mainly by homeless people who also tend to have long-standing issues, such as substance dependency. Food banks, however, are mainly used by people who are housed but have little or no income, experiencing a one-off crisis.

Written evidence from Dr Nicola Livingstone and Dr Filip Sosenko

Food assistance providers, such as the Truro Homeless Action Group, generally provide hot meals on a set day each week for people living in, or at risk of long-term food poverty, whereas emergency food assistance providers generally offer between three and seven days' worth of food consisting of dried, tinned and other non-perishable goods, to people in crisis who are experiencing hunger.

Much of the evidence received by the Inquiry focused on the rise of emergency food assistance driven by the growth of, for example, the Trussell Trust food bank network. But many submissions noted how important it was for the Inquiry to remember that independent food assistance providers, such as lunch clubs and drop-in centres, have existed in this country for a long time, but that we had ceased to recognise them, let alone what their work told us:

The rise of the food bank movement and the Trussell Trust has drawn together small facilities or started new ones, but many of the older facilities [such as soup kitchens and lunch clubs] are still quietly there at their old informal ('below the radar') level ...

Written evidence from the Revd. Robert Hill, Bishop's Officer, Mission in Society, Diocese of Peterborough

The current situation in relation to hunger and food poverty is not new – indeed the partner organisations delivering the Sustainable Food Cities programme have been addressing these issues in their work for as long as the last 15 years.

Written evidence from the Sustainable Food Cities network

Many of the church organisations that submitted evidence to the Inquiry had regularly provided food assistance for more than two decades. The Prenton Methodist Church in Wirral, for example, has operated a weekly lunch club for 25 years and the Church of God in Birkenhead has run its weekly lunch club for 20 years.

Likewise, the Bradford District Welfare Reform Strategic Group said in written evidence:

We have had food banks and hot food providers in the Bradford District for decades. Traditionally these would have met the needs of the long-term homeless, vulnerably housed or those temporarily unable to provide for themselves or their families due to an unforeseen crisis

Written evidence from the Bradford District Welfare Reform Strategic Group

Nevertheless, whilst the presence of food assistance provision may be well-established in most communities, the Inquiry received evidence to suggest these schemes have had to become more active in recent years. Some well-established providers have recently developed new forms of emergency food provision, in order to keep up with the unprecedented levels of need they are encountering. This has prevented

some from using their entrepreneurial skills in new ways although the way they have developed food banks serves as a model for future developments in this area:

What we were set up to do in the first place wasn't to support people with no money at all because their benefits had been withdrawn. That wasn't what we were all about. We've been sucked in by accident. What we were about was helping people with deep-seated, long-term problems. We'd like to give the limited resource we've got to those people. But we're regularly supporting people with benefit delays for 6, 8 or 12 weeks, otherwise they'd have nothing.

Written evidence from Mark Goodway, Director, The Matthew Tree Project, Bristol

Many have had to develop de facto destitution services to plug the needs gap ... The provision of food banks, other emergency relief and destitution advice is not only an expensive additional service for third sector agencies, it also limits opportunities to engage in other work that could provide longer-term solutions (such as debt advice and support, employability support etc.)

Written evidence from the Advice Leeds Partnership

What do homeless young people need? Food and a warm shelter. In 2008 we gave out 26 food packs. In 2009 it jumped to 64. In 2010 it was 149. In 2011 there was a bit of dip to 79. In 2012 it was 261, and in 2013 it was 339. For the first six months only in 2014, we've given out 222 packs. This food bank doesn't raise any money for the KEY Project, it's a drain on our services

Oral evidence from Jean Burnside, Chief Officer, South Tyneside Churches Together KEY Project

Other examples include Nightwatch Croydon, a homelessness charity distributing food assistance, which saw an increase in the weekly number of clients from 7 in 1988 to 84 in 2013 – a large number of whom are working and have somewhere to live, but do not have enough money to live on.

The Sikh Federation UK estimates that around 5,000 meals are now served each week to non-Sikhs by Britain's 250 Gurdwaras, and the Catholic Church told the Inquiry that the frequency of parish collections for homeless shelters and other activities had 'increased significantly' in recent years, in response to growing need. St Anne's Roman Catholic Church in Birkenhead told the Inquiry that it has run a daily lunch club for 45 years, and yet it felt it was necessary two years ago to open a food bank to meet additional local need.

Food assistance is not new to this country. Churches and other voluntary organisations have, for decades, provided food assistance to those in need. But the current scale of demand for this form of provision is high and rising, and many providers have responded by adapting the nature of their provision to meet the changing needs of their local communities.

The rise of food banks in Britain

In contrast with food assistance providers, food banks are a relatively recent phenomenon in Britain. The Trussell Trust, for example, launched its first food bank in 1999 and established its network in 2004. Figure 1 shows us that, since then, Britain has experienced an explosion in the numbers of emergency food assistance providers. Almost every food bank and emergency food assistance provider submitting evidence to this Inquiry began operating only within the last decade.

There are now 420 Trussell Trust food banks operating in Britain. The Inquiry's evidence suggests that there may be at least as many food banks operating independently – meaning there are likely to be more than 800 food banks in this country – although the Church Urban Fund told the Inquiry in oral evidence that they believe there are now more independent food banks than Trussell Trust ones. This rings true in some parts of the country.

The Inquiry found, for example, that 21 out of the 35 food banks in Sussex do not belong to the Trussell Trust. Prior to 2010, just one food bank was known to exist in the county, and it belonged to the Trussell Trust.

In an ongoing piece of research submitted to the Inquiry, Professor Jon May, Professor Paul Cloke and Dr Andrew Williams charted the geographical spread of food banks in Britain's major towns and cities (see Table 1). Whilst in London the Trussell Trust accounted for 83 of 89 food banks, in the ten largest cities outside of London the proportion of Trussell Trust and independent food banks was much more evenly matched – with 80 Trussell Trust food banks, and 67 independents. In the ten smaller towns and cities surveyed, the distribution was even – with 18 Trussell Trust food banks, and 18 independents.

The Inquiry's evidence suggests that the majority of food banks have been running for less than three years. There are currently 22 food banks in Derbyshire, for example, compared to just the one in 2011.

Professor May, Professor Cloke and Dr Williams estimated that food banks themselves may account for only half of the emergency assistance providers in this country. They found that in the 20 towns and cities they sampled outside of London, food banks account for only half (50%) of all providers; and the Trussell Trust for just over half (54%) of all food banks.

Figure 1: The growth of the Trussell Trust network

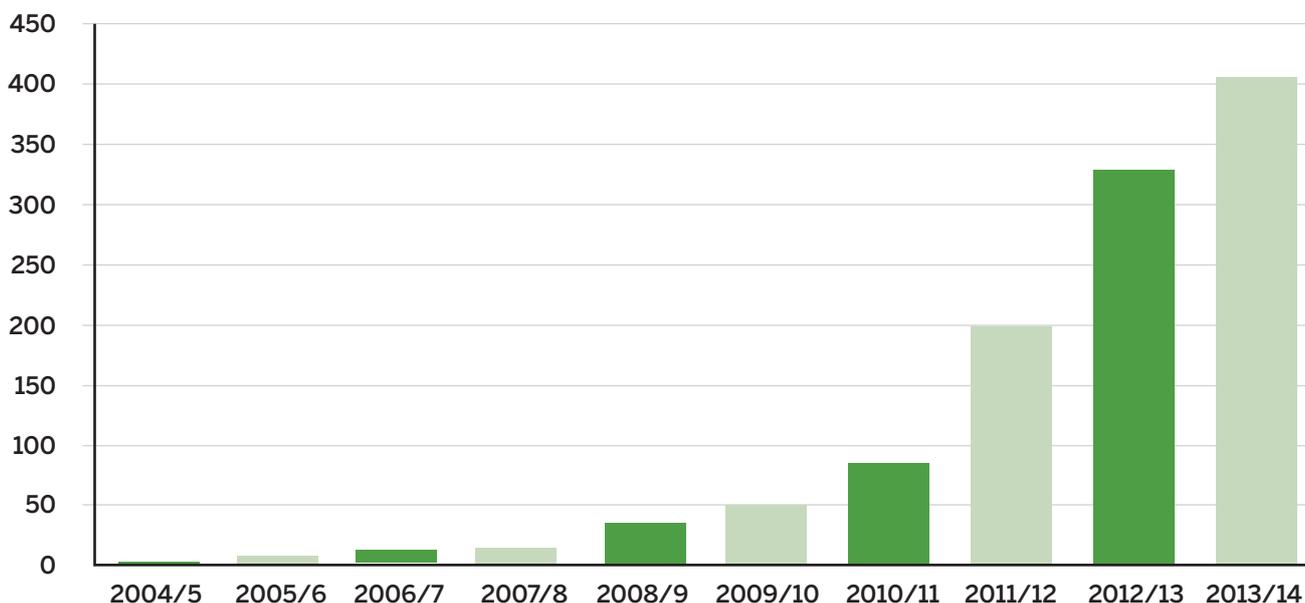


Table 1: Food bank provision in London, the UK's 10 largest cities and 10 smaller towns and cities

City	Population	Number of food banks
London	8,173,941	89
Birmingham	1,085,810	19
Glasgow	589,900	14
Liverpool	552,267	37
Bristol	535,907	18
Sheffield	518,090	15
Manchester	510,746	14
Leeds	474,632	8
Edinburgh	468,720	9
Leicester	443,760	11
Bradford	349,561	2
Southampton	253,651	6
Plymouth	234,982	1
Luton	211,220	5
Middlesbrough	174,700	6
Dundee	144,170	5
Newport	128,060	7
Worcester	100,153	2
Carlisle	75,306	2
Inverness	45,050	1
Aberystwyth	18,093	1
Total	15,088,719	272

On this basis it may be estimated, therefore, that there are more than 1,500 emergency food assistance providers currently operating in Britain. The Inquiry realised, nonetheless, that data on the scale of emergency food assistance in this country remains limited.

Later in this review, we take a more detailed look at the way food banks and food assistance providers operate in this country.

The birth of social supermarkets

The Inquiry received evidence about the emergence of a new 'social supermarket' model, separate from food banks, in which people on low incomes and in receipt of means-tested benefits can buy food at a greatly reduced price in a relatively normal shop environment, with a wider range of goods to choose from than a food bank.

Community Shop – the first organisation in Britain to operate along these lines – told the Inquiry that social supermarkets avoid the stigma of queuing for a food bank and that they seek to extend their provision beyond short-term emergency measures. In December 2013 the first social supermarket opened in Goldthorpe, South Yorkshire.¹

Once people have signed up as members, they are enrolled on courses providing, for example, budgeting and debt advice, employment and skills training and cookery classes. Representatives from seven organisations – including the local credit union and Citizens Advice Bureau – visit Community Shop to deliver services and speak with members. The Inquiry understands that 33 members have gained jobs through the employment and skills training course.

The goods sold in the shop would not otherwise be used because they are in damaged packaging, or are surplus to food retailers' requirements.

Community Shop is reportedly planning to open dozens more branches across the country. It is a subsidiary of the food redistribution company, Company Shop, whose main business includes operating 'residual stock' shops for the employees of major grocery retailers such as Tesco, Asda and Marks and Spencer.

According to the House of Commons Library, bakery products on sale in the main supermarkets for £1 are sold for 20p in Community Shop; cleaning products priced at £1.50 are sold for 39p; and smoked ham priced at £3 is sold for £1.80.

The option of buying food at a greatly reduced price can help to free up income to cover other household essentials.

The Inquiry was keen to see how this model might continue to develop in the months and years ahead, and what role it might play in alleviating hunger and food poverty.

Demand for emergency food assistance

Reports detailing the numbers of people relying on food banks have provided the most systematic attempts, so far, to estimate the extent of hunger and food poverty in this country. Oxfam and Church Action on Poverty estimated in May 2013 that over 500,000 people were reliant on emergency food assistance.² The Trussell Trust reported that it provided 128,697 people with emergency food assistance in 2011-12, 346,992 people in 2012-13, and 913,138 people in 2013-14.

The evidence presented to the Inquiry overwhelmingly suggests that demand for emergency food assistance has rapidly increased over the last decade. This upshot in demand was felt across the board, both by well-established providers and those food banks that had opened more recently.

It is clear that demand for emergency food assistance is increasing, and sometimes increasing dramatically. The Trussell Trust submitted evidence to the Inquiry showing how food banks that had been open for three years or more saw an average increase of 51% in the numbers of people helped in 2013-14, compared to 2012-13. A variety of food banks from across the country noted similar trends:

The two new food banks provide less than 10% of the overall emergency food in Oxfordshire, suggesting that the increase in use of emergency food assistance is not linked to an increase in the number of food banks.

Written evidence from the Oxford Food Bank

The Plymouth Food Bank, which opened in 2008, was used by 5,900 people in 2012; in 2013 that grew to 7,400 and their estimate for 2014 is 9,000. Similarly, Rhondda Food Bank, which was launched in 2009, fed 1,503 people in 2013 – a 30% increase on 2012. The Camborne, Pool and Redruth (CPR) Food Bank, which opened in 2010, provided 3,800 meals in January 2013, compared with 10,400 in January 2014. In fact, every food bank in Cornwall reported increases in demand over the past two years.

Milton Keynes Food Bank told the Inquiry that it provided 900 food parcels during its first year of operation in 2004-05. Yet, by 2013-14, this had increased to 14,375.

The Bradford Metropolitan Food Bank, another well-established provider, gave out 600 food parcels in 2007; in 2008 it was 700; this reached 704 in 2009; it then rose to 942 in 2010 and then up to 1,434 in 2011. Demand more than doubled to 3,586 in 2012 and again in 2013 to 7,860. The Food Bank told the Inquiry in its written submission that:

In the first few years we made up and gave out few bags, no more than 200 a year, and this was to support those who weren't coping with family life, were ill, abandoned, addicted or with mental health problems, and the small number adjusting to unemployment and crisis, but since then there has been a strong structural change that has entrapped far larger numbers.

Written evidence from the Bradford Metropolitan Food Bank

The Inquiry heard likewise in oral evidence that:

We had 2,200 plus names on our old database built up over more than 10 years. We had a new database designed for us in the spring of 2013. We have already added 2,200 names to that database in just one year.

Oral evidence from Malcolm Peirce, Director, ReadiFood

The Inquiry also received evidence of robust and growing demand for newly-established food banks and other providers of emergency food assistance, for example:

- **The One Can Trust in High Wycombe gave away 121 food parcels in 2011, its first year of operation. This rose to 850 in 2012, and again to 2,011 in 2013.**
- **In its first ten months of operation, from May 2013 to March 2014, Wandsworth Food Bank fed 1,551 people.**
- **The West Berkshire Food Bank fed 2,988 people in 2013, its first year of operation.**
- **The Hastings Food Bank, which opened in April 2012, fed more than 2,500 in the second half of 2013. Demand in 2013-14 was more than double that of 2012-13**
- **The Oswaldtwistle Food Bank in Lancashire first supplied up to 8 food parcels each week in November 2013, but by the end of its first two months alone this had more than doubled to 18 per week.**

The number of people in this country relying on food banks and other forms of emergency food assistance is unprecedented, and has increased significantly in recent years. The evidence received by the Inquiry suggests that this cannot be accounted for simply by the growth in the sheer numbers of food banks, as new and well-established food banks alike told the Inquiry that demand for their services has grown.

The vulnerability of people relying on food banks

The Inquiry was both touched and overwhelmed by the testimonies it heard from people experiencing chronic hunger and food poverty – many of whom had relied on food assistance or food banks. The experience of having to take up this ‘last resort’ option, often following days of hunger, had made people feel ashamed and humiliated. The adverse changes of circumstances that had plunged them to these depths had also taken a severe toll on their physical and mental wellbeing. The Inquiry learnt that the number of primary and secondary diagnoses of malnutrition in England rose from 3,161 in 2008-09 to 5,499 last year.

A number of submissions outlined how some people had become so hungry that they resorted, through sheer desperation, to stealing essential goods or scavenging through bins and skips behind food outlets, with sometimes tragic consequences.

I have had a shady past; I have slept rough for a period of time and even served a jail sentence for thieving things, just to survive. I've robbed out of skips behind Iceland and slept under the river bridge by Tesco's. That's how bad it got.

Written evidence from Alan McNickle, Resident of Alabare Place, Salisbury

During its evidence session in Cornwall, PC Helen Priestley told the Inquiry that shoplifting was the only high volume crime in Cornwall to have kept rising in 2014. She said:

We are concerned over the fact that although overall there has been a reduction in almost every type of crime, shoplifting has seen an 11.3% rise in Caradon and a 16% rise across the County in vulnerable towns... Alcohol and food, particularly meat, continue to be the most targeted items.

Oral evidence from PC Helen Priestley, Devon and Cornwall Police

The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults, published in 2010, carried reports from Tesco workers denoting how stealing had changed from sweets to sandwiches and clean underwear.³

Likewise in South Shields:

Shoplifting has been a big issue in the last three years, particularly from 40-60 year olds. It's now your essentials rather than your alcohol and your sweets that were stolen in the past. It used to be obvious why people were stealing – they were an alcoholic or a drug addict. But now people are taking the opportunity to steal staple goods.

Oral evidence from Nicky Gjørven, Duty Sergeant, Northumbria Police

The Inquiry found that the number of shoplifting incidents in Wirral increased from 1,642 in 2011-12 to 2,202 in 2013-14, and in the twelve months to December 2013 there was a rise across Britain to 317,000 shoplifting offences. Unlike shoplifting, the overall national trend has been for decreases in recorded offences in all categories. The ‘all other theft’ category was down 39%.

The Inquiry was told of one man in Birmingham who had made a mistake on his application for Jobseeker's Allowance. He received no money for twelve weeks. During the twelve weeks he was seen rummaging in the bins behind a chip shop. When the owner of the chip shop got fed up with him rummaging through the bins and phoned the police, the man was arrested for trespassing.

Likewise, the Alabare Centre in Salisbury told the Inquiry of cases in which people stole food from shops, and raided skips behind shops in the search for food. Magic Breakfast said in written evidence that it was aware of children and parents foraging in bins behind supermarkets.

These testimonies brought to the fore the stranglehold of desperation felt by growing numbers of people experiencing hunger.

Providers of emergency food assistance also shared with the Inquiry their experiences of the vulnerability of people relying on their services:

When I went to her house to drop in some food from my own cupboards it was like a scene from the nursery rhyme of Old Mother Hubbard.

Written evidence from Elaine Chegwin Hall, Care 4 Free, Greater Manchester

People, because they're not sure where their next meal is coming from will take platefuls... they're trying to fill their bellies.

Oral evidence from Revd. Keith Addenbrooke, Vicar, St Paul with St Luke, Tranmere, Wirral

People in need of food find themselves walking, in some cases six miles each way, to get a week's worth of food for their family.

Oral evidence from Mark Goodway, Director, The Matthew Tree Project, Bristol

The Oswaldtwistle Food Bank in Lancashire told the Inquiry that two single mothers, who had both had to rely on its services since their working hours had been cut, cried 'because they had been reduced to this level', and were 'ashamed' to be using a food bank. Their teenage children were 'too embarrassed to help them to carry the bags'. One of the mothers said she was in rent arrears for the first time in her life.

The Inquiry heard likewise from Coventry Food Bank that in small rural town communities, food bank clients had been put off attending a local distribution point because of the embarrassment of being served by someone known to them.

During its evidence session in Birkenhead, a local school governor shared with the Inquiry the experience of one lady who:

... told me last week that she had been fine until she lost her job, with no support she soon found she did not have enough money to meet her commitments. Good food was sacrificed and a few weeks later she was admitted to hospital suffering from malnutrition. She had eaten impoverished food for weeks and then not eaten for five days as she had no money to buy food.

Oral evidence from a Primary School Governor, Birkenhead⁴

A similar testimony was forthcoming in Salisbury:

I became self-employed working evenings. My partner was also self-employed. We weren't earning very much. We were both working very hard and yet couldn't afford basic things like electricity and gas. I remember being in Tesco and my bank card was declined because the bank had taken some charges for bills not paid. I left a whole week's shopping in the store and went to the car and cried. Receiving a food parcel from the food bank would ease the dire situation in our house and I would enjoy putting food away in the cupboards. It would override the embarrassment I felt of being a pregnant woman being unable to provide for her family

Oral evidence from Holly Billen, Salisbury

These particular accounts helped encapsulate the speed with which people on low incomes can all too often become trapped by hunger.

The Inquiry heard likewise how sometimes such extreme poverty can lead to a loss of life:

One of our clients was sanctioned. He had no money for seventeen weeks. He was scavenging in a bin, the lorry came, picked him up and he was crushed to death.

Oral evidence from Vince Hessey, YMCA Wirral

Awareness and supply of emergency food assistance

Food banks, as we have seen, are much more widely available than they were even three years ago.

Food understandably becomes a lower priority in household budgets when families face the threat of eviction or the imminent possibility of being cut off by their energy supplier, and the increased awareness and availability of food banks can help ease some of the pressure on households in this most unenviable situation.

Tom Benyon from the Community Emergency Food Bank in Oxford, which has provided food for over 11,000 people since 2008, told the Inquiry that the increased awareness of emergency food assistance to those families who struggle to make ends meet might help to explain why the demand for food banks has risen so dramatically:

There has been substantial publicity surrounding the rise of food banks in general, therefore people and referral agencies now know about the availability of the service, hence the marked increase in the number of applicants.

Written evidence from Tom Benyon, Community Emergency Food Bank, Oxford

Yet the Inquiry also received evidence to suggest that households had been developing alternative coping mechanisms in an attempt to avoid having to rely on emergency food assistance. One lady in Cornwall, who found herself in an all too typical scenario of choosing between 'heating and eating', said:

My son and I experience food poverty due to living on a low income. My monthly income, made up of my salary, tax credits and child benefit, is just under £1300, and this is to support myself and my son ... food is the largest and most flexible item of my budget. If unexpected costs arise such as my son buying his friend a birthday present, this usually comes out of my food budget ... I decided to turn off all the heating to reduce my electricity costs. For about 2 months we were living in a house which was below a healthy temperature. I chose food above heating as the need to eat well for good health is important.

Written evidence submitted to the Inquiry following its Cornwall evidence session

In addition, the Catholic Church said in its written submission that there is likely to be a large amount of 'hidden hunger', despite the presence of food banks, due to a variety of reasons – shame and the stigma of food banks; potential discomfort with the reality of the frequently church-based distribution; fear of the authorities for various reasons; lack of awareness of help available; and limited accessibility due to problems of travel costs or timings.

The Faculty of Public Health at the Royal Colleges of Physicians, argued in its written submission:

Food bank numbers are an inadequate indicator of need, because many households only ask for emergency food help as a last resort ... We view the rise of food poverty as an indication of the reversal of what was a long process of improvement in food availability and affordability since World War Two.

Written evidence from the Faculty of Public Health at the Royal Colleges of Physicians in the United Kingdom

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of food banks in this country, and the number of people relying on their help, over the past decade. The evidence to the Inquiry suggests that this process has accelerated in recent years, with a raft of food banks opening since 2012, mostly in response to what people perceived to be a growing need in their communities.

This increase in provision has emanated both from necessity and out of compassion, and organisations working with people in dire need will have become more aware of this provision. However, there also seems to be an element of 'hidden hunger' in households that do not visit food banks for various reasons.

Measuring the extent of hunger and food poverty

Income and expenditure

The Inquiry was keen to look beyond the statistics on food bank usage to gain a fuller understanding of the extent of hunger and food poverty in this country. In doing so, it found that there is currently no agreed way of measuring the extent of these phenomena.

One of the Inquiry's key assumptions centred around the relationship that exists between household income, expenditure and the likelihood of being exposed to hunger. But might we find in this nexus a way of actually measuring the numbers of people in this country who are hungry?

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said in 2012 that the relative affordability of food is a 'leading indicator' of the likelihood of a family having to go without food, and can be measured by the share of total consumer spending that goes on purchases of food and non-alcoholic drink for household supplies.⁵

By this measure, given that households are spending, on average, 17% of their income on food compared to 33.3% in 1953, we might conclude that they are less likely to be hungry now than they were in the immediate post-war period.⁶

Yet, while food is currently cheap in historical terms, the past decade has given rise to an unprecedented post-war phenomenon, in which the proportion of household income required to meet expenditure on food has risen. The proportion of household income spent on food and non-alcoholic drink increased from 16% in 2003 to 17% in 2011 (this includes a decrease by 1 percentage point to 15% in 2005 before increasing again in 2006). If we were to be guided by this measure alone, we could reasonably conclude that the likelihood of households experiencing hunger has risen over the previous decade – the first time this has happened since the Second World War.

The Faculty of Public Health at the Royal College of Physicians argued in its submission that households spending more than 10% of their income on food are likely to be in food poverty, as this was, until recently, a proxy indicator used to measure household fuel poverty. But further analysis conducted for the Inquiry by the House of Commons Library suggested that 13.7 million households would therefore be classed as food poor. The Inquiry did not believe that this would represent the most useful or accurate way of measuring food poverty.

Professor Elizabeth Dowler suggested to the Inquiry that money being 'absorbed' in other expenditure demands such as rent and utilities could provide a reasonable indicator of hunger and food poverty. When examining the expenditure patterns of the poorest households over the past decade, the Inquiry found that whilst the proportion of income spent on food is at the same level now as it was a decade ago, the proportion of income taken up by housing and energy costs has soared by 9 percentage points. This means that cuts will have been made in the quantity or quality, or both, of food purchases made by the poorest households. Looking at food poverty through this lens would suggest it has increased amongst poor households since 2003.

There is some evidence to suggest that the poorest households tried to manage their shrinking household budgets in recent years by making cutbacks in their food expenditure. Households in the lowest income decile cut their food budgets by £3.80 per week between 2006 and 2011, and yet this smaller cash total represented a higher proportion of their total expenditure, up by one percentage point over this period.

This trend is borne out by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' findings, which show that between 2007 and 2010, households in the lowest income decile on average bought less food rather than 'trade down'.⁷ The energy content of the food they bought fell by 8.7% between 2007 and 2010, as the poorest households tended to cut back on bread, cereals, biscuits, cake, beef, fruit and vegetables.⁸

Table 2: Household expenditure on food and non-alcoholic beverages
bottom three equivalised income declines

	£ (2011 prices)			% total expenditure		
	lowest	second	third	lowest	second	third
2006	41.1	41.4	46.9	15%	16%	13%
2007	39.1	44.7	46.1	15%	16%	14%
2008	38.8	43.0	48.6	17%	17%	15%
2009	38.4	43.0	46.8	16%	17%	15%
2010	36.9	43.2	47.1	15%	17%	15%
2011	37.3	41.5	47.2	16%	17%	14%

Key Indicators

The Inquiry heard how a set of indicators might be developed so as to more effectively measure hunger and food poverty in this country. A couple of existing estimates were brought to the Inquiry's attention.

Nourish Scotland estimated in its written submission that between 1 and 2% of people living in Britain received short-term emergency food assistance in 2013-14. It estimated also that at least the same number of people had similar experiences of hunger in a crisis situation lasting one or more days but did not seek help from a food bank, and that a larger group of the population experienced food poverty because their household income was not sufficient to buy adequate food for all household members once other essential expenditure items had been covered. In these cases, according to Nourish Scotland, people managed by eating less; and mothers went without food for one or two days a week so their children could eat.

In addition, Professor Dowler, Professor Martin Caraher and Hannah Lambie-Mumford discussed with the Inquiry the indicators used by the Poverty and Social Exclusion (PSE) project, and we cite this view partly to emphasise how wide the gap is between the scramble for many to survive at the bottom of society and seeing three meals a day as a definition of becoming food poor. Yet in its 2013 survey on living standards, PSE claimed that it had found widespread agreement on what constitutes a minimally acceptable diet:⁹

- Over 90% of respondents agreed that for children this means: three meals a day; fresh fruit and vegetables every day; and meat, fish or a vegetarian equivalent at least once a day.
- For adults, over 75% of respondents agreed this means: two meals a day; fresh fruit and vegetables every day; and meat, fish or a vegetarian equivalent every other day.

However, the report found that large numbers of people were lacking at least one of these items:

- Well over half a million children (4%) live in families who cannot afford to feed them properly.
- Over three and a half million adults (8%) cannot afford to eat properly. In nearly all of the households where there are children going without one or more of the food items, adults in the household are cutting back on their own food.
- In 41% of these households at least one adult 'sometimes' skimps on food to ensure others have enough to eat.
- In a further 52% of these households at least one adult 'often' skimps on food to ensure others have enough to eat.

These data would indicate that the number of people in this country who are at risk of going hungry may be in the region of four million.

The UK Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey, published in 2007, looked similarly at these issues.¹⁰

- **39% of respondents said they sometimes worried about running out of food because of money;**
- **22% reported skipping meals; and**
- **5% reported sometimes not eating for whole day because of money.**

It was suggested during the Inquiry's oral evidence session with academic experts that we might be able to gauge a fuller understanding of the extent of hunger and food poverty were such surveys to be commissioned on a regular basis, along similar lines to the United States Department for Agriculture Economic Research Service.¹¹

International comparisons

The Inquiry was keen to survey the food assistance landscape across other advanced Western economies to see what, if any, milestones could be identified in the development of the food bank movement. It then wanted to assess whether it would be possible to compare these findings with the rise of emergency food assistance in Britain.

Canada

The first food bank in Canada opened in 1981 in Edmonton, Alberta. Food banks were originally intended to be a temporary measure but the need for them continued and, over time, it grew.

In 2013, 32 years after its first food bank opened, there were 3,800 food assistance programmes in Canada – of which 800 were food banks. Over time, organisations that began as food banks have expanded to offer other types of services, such as education and training, community kitchens and gardens, group purchasing, and special programmes for particularly vulnerable people, such as the homeless, who are relying on their services. 39% of Canadian food banks offer skills-based programmes such as help with budgeting and home economics, and 52% offer classes on cooking and nutrition.

Close to 40% of food banks are run solely by volunteers aided through contributions from corporate sponsors, individual donations, community support, parent organisations and Foodbanks Canada. Foodbanks Canada is the national body representing and supporting food banks across Canada. Its membership serves approximately 85% of people accessing food aid across Canada.¹²

Foodbanks Canada reports that, each month, close to 850,000 Canadians (2.44% of the population) are assisted by food banks, with just over one third of those helped being children and young people. The Inquiry did not receive a similar monthly break down of food bank usage in Britain.

Yet, as in Britain, there is no single, typical profile of people relying on food banks in Canada. Those helped by Canadian food banks include people on benefits (50%), people in low paid work, pensioners and the disabled. 9.4% of people accessing a Canadian food bank each month do so for the first time.¹³

As the Inquiry found in this country, Foodbanks Canada says it is the widespread lack of income to cushion hard times that is the key factor that makes Canadian food banks so necessary.

Another similarity comes to the fore when we consider that, since 1991, the number of manufacturing jobs in Canada has dropped by nearly 400,000. Manufacturing currently accounts for 10% of Canadian jobs, whereas in 1991 it made up 16%.

Over the same period, the number of people employed in lower-paying retail, accommodation and food services jobs has grown by 38%. Nearly four million Canadians now work in sales and service jobs; they earn, on average, \$17,700 per year, compared to \$34,100 in manufacturing.

This year in Britain, there were 2.6 million jobs in manufacturing – accounting for 7.8% of all jobs in the economy – and 27.7 million jobs in services, accounting for 83% of all jobs.

In March 2013, half of Canadian food banks reported that they needed to cut back on the amount of food provided to each household to avoid running out of supplies. 8% of people asking for help were turned away or referred elsewhere because the food bank didn't have enough food. Likewise, food banks in Britain told the Inquiry that they face the prospect of running out of food if their donations dry up or demand for their services continues to grow.

One key lesson the Inquiry drew from its survey of Canadian food assistance was the case of Community Food Centres.¹⁴ The Centres are organised to help people with debt management, cooking skills and food growing. They are, above all, a welcoming space for people to spend time in. People who access the service are made to feel that they are being listened to and can get involved in and contribute to the activities at the centre, rather than simply being cast as the passive recipients of food assistance. Relevance to people's lives is one of the core principles underpinning its model of support to people in food poverty.

This review returns later to these themes when discussing the future of food assistance in Britain.

United States

The United States relies primarily on food stamps and a network of food assistance providers known as Feeding America, to help people experiencing food poverty.

Feeding America describes itself as America's 'leading domestic hunger-relief charity'. It helps secure food and funding for food banks and seeks to improve food security in each community it serves. Its food bank network supplies food to more than 46 million individual Americans (14% of the population) each year, including 12 million children and 7 million senior citizens. There is a national office as well as 200 local member food banks. Each food bank, with help from the national office, secures food from local manufacturers, retailers, farmers and government sources.

Food donors and organisations that distribute donated food are protected from civil and criminal liability for any harm caused by that food by the Good Samaritan Food Donation Act.¹⁵

The Inquiry received some evidence to suggest that similar legislation in Britain might free up our supermarkets and voluntary organisations to redistribute more surplus, fresh food:

No Good Samaritan Laws in the UK make it legally more attractive to dump rather than donate.

**Written evidence from Bruce Marquart,
The Upper Room, London**

We recommend that a 'Good Samaritan Law' should be put in place for organisations (including supermarkets and wholesalers) who provide food to food banks, charities and need individuals. This law would offer legal protection from being sued or prosecuted for unintentional injury or wrongful death due to the food provided by these organisations. Many food providers do not provide their waste food to food banks etc because they are concerned that they might be sued if someone gets sick from eating it.

Joint written evidence from food banks in Oxfordshire

But the Inquiry held ethical and practical concerns around the operation of similar legislation in this country. Further evidence would be required before a firm judgment can be reached.

Among members of Feeding America, 74% of pantries distributing food parcels,¹⁶ 65% of soup kitchens, and 54% of shelters reported that there had been an increase between 2006 and 2010 in the number of people relying on their emergency food assistance programmes.¹⁷

According to the 2010 study, *Hunger in America*:¹⁸

- **The Feeding America system includes approximately 33,500 pantries, 4,500 soup kitchens and 3,600 emergency shelters. Compared with 2005, this represents a 13% increase in the number of pantries, a 20% decrease in the number of soup kitchens, and a 14% decrease in the number of shelters.**
- **72% of pantries, 62% of soup kitchens, and 39% of shelters are run by faith-based agencies affiliated with churches, mosques, synagogues, and other religious organisations.**
- **As in 2005, 36% of households relying on Feeding America included at least one adult in work.**

- **46% of clients served by the Feeding America system reported having to choose between paying for food and paying for utilities. This compares to 42% in 2005.**
- **39% had to choose between paying for food and paying their rent or mortgage. This compares to 35% in 2005.**
- **Many programmes rely entirely on volunteers: 68% of pantries and 42% of soup kitchens have no paid staff at all.**

The United States Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides free meals and snacks to children from poor families during the school holidays. The SFSP works to reach children in need through sites operated by schools, public bodies, summer camps, day camps, churches, or other community organisations.

Another form of food assistance provision is the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). This scheme provides basic food parcels for low-income pregnant and breastfeeding women, other new mothers up to one year after birth, infants, children up to their sixth birthday, and pensioners on low incomes.

CSFP food packages do not provide a complete diet, but rather provide sources of the nutrients typically lacking in the diets of the target population. State agencies are responsible for establishing income guidelines for women, infants and children. They also store the food and distribute it to public and voluntary agencies for further distribution to their clients.

The most common and widespread form of help to families in danger of going hungry is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), otherwise known as food stamps. This scheme resembles the Healthy Start programme in Britain, which issues vouchers to pregnant women and new mothers who claim out-of-work benefits. 41% of households served by the Feeding America system in 2010 received benefits from SNAP, compared to 35% in 2005.

Germany

Food banks and church-run soup kitchens are the largest and most common providers of emergency food assistance in Germany.

It is estimated that there are around 1,000 food banks in Germany, of which 40% are registered providers. The others are maintained informally by voluntary welfare organisations, church institutions and other community organisations. Germany has been allocated 199 million Euros from the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived.

In July 2013, Professor Stefan Selke of Furtwangen University set out some of the key issues and trends relating to German food banks:¹⁹

- **The first German food bank (Tafel) was founded in Berlin in 1993.**
- **The rise in the number of food banks is often linked to Germany's welfare reforms.**
- **Over 50,000 volunteers across Germany are now involved with the collection of surplus food from supermarkets which is then offered to those in need by local organisations [the Inquiry found this to be a similar proportion of the population to those volunteering at food banks in Britain, which is estimated to be in the region of 30,000.]**

As with Canada, the German evidence reported the limits of the current methods used to respond to hunger. It was reported in January 2014 that food banks were turning people away because demand for emergency food assistance was outstripping the supply of donated food. Benefit recipients, asylum seekers, pensioners and university students are said to be most in need of help from food banks.²⁰

Some food assistance providers no longer offer food for free. Providers in the state of Baden-Württemberg charge 5 cents for a cup of yoghurt; bread costs 20 cents and a portion of fruit is priced at 30 cents. Food banks in Britain may be forced to confront this scenario if they are unable to broaden their sources of food away from donations.

A 'social supermarket' model began to emerge in Germany in the 1990s – with several dozen stores operating by the mid-2000s. Food is usually sold at around 25% of its retail price, and is almost all donated by local wholesalers and retailers. Some of the goods are near their expiry date and others are in damaged packaging.

In order to shop at one of Germany's 'social supermarkets', people must prove they are in receipt of benefits. Each eligible person who signs up is given a customer card that can be used only while they are still eligible for benefits.²¹

France

In 1984, a voluntary network of food distribution centres called Les Restos du Coeur (Restaurants of the Heart) opened to provide food assistance to people in danger of going hungry during the winter months. There are now 2,000 such centres.

France has drawn down its full allocation of 443 million Euros from the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived, to support its food assistance network.

An organisation called Epicerie Solidaires (Social and Solidarity Stores) also operates somewhere between a food bank and 'social supermarket' model. This form of food assistance was created in France in the 1980s as an addition to the above system of free distribution which is essentially meant for homeless or exceptionally poor people.

Social and Solidarity Stores are local convenience stores where people on low incomes can buy everyday goods for about 10-20% of their regular retail price. They are aimed at people who cannot afford to buy food in 'normal' supermarkets but who are reluctant to benefit from charity.

As with Community Shop in this country, the stores try to offer a variety of services and activities for their customers, including cooking lessons and employment support, to help 'rebuild links with society' and help people to 'realise their own value and competences'.

The idea is to be able to respond to specific situations, like an unexpected expense, an accident, or sudden loss of employment, so that a household is not tipped into severe poverty.

Most recent estimates suggest around 3.5 million people in France (5% of the population) rely on some form of food assistance.²²

Drawing comparisons

In correspondence with one of the co-chairs of the Inquiry, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions set the rise of food banks in the United Kingdom within this international context:

In the UK, the Trussell Trust figures indicate that they issued food to 900,000 people in 2013/14. Although this is a higher figure than before the recession, nonetheless, it remains lower than other countries. In Germany, a country that has long been associated with a comprehensive welfare system, and whose economy has been amongst Europe's best performers during the recession, Deutsche Tafel reported as early as 2009 that they were helping approximately 1.5 million people a week. Similarly in Canada, another country that has avoided the worst impacts of the recession, Food Banks Canada reported this year that in a single month over 800,000 people received food from a food bank. This figure was over 700,000 even before the recession, and this in a country with a population around half that of the UK.

Extract from correspondence between the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and The Rt Hon Frank Field MP

While the House of Commons Library advised the Inquiry that 'it is misleading to compare food bank usage in different countries', and that 'comparing the raw numbers or numbers per head of population between the UK and Canada/Germany is not really appropriate', it is still worth remembering the Secretary of State's comments given the frailty of the data in this country.

Table 3: The numbers of people relying on food banks in Canada and Britain in each year since 2005-06

Year	People fed by Foodbanks Canada	Annual change	People fed by Trussell Trust food banks	Annual change
2005-06	751,921		2,814	
2006-07	720,231	-4%	9,174	226%
2007-08	675,735	-6%	13,849	51%
2008-09	794,738	18%	25,899	87%
2009-10	869,948	9%	40,898	58%
2010-11	851,014	-2%	61,468	50%
2011-12	882,188	4%	128,697	109%
2012-13	833,098	-6%	346,992	170%

It is important to remember also, though, that food banks in these countries operate along different principles and have different referral systems. They are used in Canada and Germany as long-term facilities for those in need – individuals may use them over a period of years – and they do not require a formal referral to use the facility. Although food banks in Britain do not currently operate along these lines, the Inquiry made a series of recommendations as to how they might do so in order to provide more effective long-term assistance to people who are at risk of hunger.

As we have seen, in France and now Germany, some of the providers operate in deprived areas as shops, where people pay a reduced price for commodities. People in Britain relying on Trussell Trust food banks have to be referred by a frontline care professional such as a doctor, social worker, Citizens Advice Bureau or schools liaison officer, and the food banks are not designed for long term use. The closest comparable model, therefore, seems to be the emerging social supermarket.

The House of Commons Library advised further that the only statistically robust way to examine patterns in food bank use across countries is to examine the percentage change in use within each country. Data on food bank use in Germany has only recently begun to be collected. However, consistent data on Canada and Britain is available from 2005-06 onwards and is shown in Table 3.

This data highlights an exceptional characteristic of the demand for emergency food assistance in Britain. It is such a recent phenomenon, emerging only within the past decade, whereas demand in other advanced Western economies appears to have risen, stabilised, and become entrenched over an extended period of time.

Summary

The provision of food assistance to those in need is not a new phenomenon. It is a custom that has become deeply embedded in most communities over a series of decades.

Even so, people in wealthy, deprived, rural and urban areas alike have found themselves exposed to an unprecedented degree to hunger and food poverty over the past decade. As such, there has been a dramatic increase in the numbers of food banks, as well as people relying on their services, over this period.

Alongside the birth and rapid development of Britain's 'food bank movement', more well-established providers of food assistance have adopted new methods to meet what they perceive to be growing needs in their community. We have also seen pioneering models, such as the 'social supermarket' begin to emerge in this country.

It is the onset of these events within the past decade which sets Britain apart from other advanced Western economies, in which, as we have seen, such trends have become entrenched over the past thirty years.

To investigate the underlying causes of hunger and food poverty in this country

The key underlying causes of hunger and food poverty in this country are to be found in the long-term erosion of poorer households' financial buffer, coupled, for some, with a diminished ability to cope on a low income. Evidence submitted to the Inquiry suggests individuals and families are most at risk of experiencing hunger and food poverty when they lack either the practical or financial resources, or both, to deal with a crisis when it strikes.

Long-term trends in household income and expenditure

The Inquiry found that throughout the second half of the twentieth century:

- The overall combined proportion of household incomes spent on food, fuel and housing declined from 47.3% in 1953 to 36% in 2003
- The proportion of household income spent on food and non-alcoholic drink decreased from 33.3% in 1953 to 16% in 2003
- The proportion of household income spent on utility bills decreased from 5.2% in 1953 to 3% in 2003.
- The proportion of household income spent on housing increased from 8.8% in 1953 to 17% in 2003

Since 2003, however, food, fuel and housing costs have all increased at a greater rate than earnings, with food (46.4%) and fuel costs (154%) increasing much more rapidly than both earnings (27.9%) and overall inflation (37.7%). Housing costs grew by 36% over this period.

The impact on low-income households of this relentless rise in the costs of household essentials has been twofold. First, it has diminished the real value of earnings and social security benefits.

According to the House of Commons Library, in the decade to 2013:

- The real value of the National Minimum Wage increased in each year prior to 2007 and fell every year thereafter
- The real value of Jobseeker's Allowance fell by £3.55 per week
- The real value of Child Benefit for the first child fell by £1.80 per week
- Income Support is almost unchanged in 2013 compared to 2003
- Yet the real value of the state pension increased by £3.51 per week

More recently:

- Real median earnings declined by £34 per week between 2008 and 2013, from £451 to £417
- The real median earnings of full-time employees fell from £558 per week in 2008 to £518 in 2013, and for part-time employees from £171 in 2008 to £160 in 2013
- The real value of the National Minimum Wage fell from £6.46 in 2008 to £6.19 in 2013

- The real weekly earnings of a full-time employee working for the National Minimum Wage declined from £255 in 2008 to £242 in 2013, and for a part-time employee from £118 in 2008 to £112 in 2013
- The real value of Employment and Support Allowance fell by £4.15 per week between 2009 and 2013
- The real value of out of work benefits for a couple with two children fell by £14.78 per week between 2009 and 2014 – from £278.78 to £264
- The real value of out of work benefits for a lone parent with two children fell by £11.77 per week between 2009 and 2014 – from £234.47 to £222.70
- The proportion of household income spent on food and non-alcoholic drink also in 2003 increased from 16% to 17% in 2011 (this includes a decrease by 1 percentage point to 15% in 2005 before increasing again in 2006)
- The proportion of household income spent on housing increased from 17% in 2003 to 18% in 2011

Rich and poor alike have been affected by these trends. But rises in basic goods obviously affect the poor more severely as they spend a greater proportion of their income on these necessities. It seems doubtful that the poorest households will have had any way of 'trading down', as they may already have been relying on cheaper food items:

Households saved an average of 4% between 2007 and 2010 by trading down to cheaper products. This was accompanied by a change in shopping patterns with many switching to retailers such as Aldi and Lidl. While trading down to cheaper products has helped many people offset some of the food price rises, low-income households have not managed to trade down [as much], possibly as they were already buying cheaper products or shopping in these outlets.

Written evidence from Professor Martin Caraher, Professor of Food and Health Policy, City University London

Second, these trends have chipped away at poorer households' ability to save; more than half of all households with a weekly income of £300 or less have no savings. This represents a 10 percentage point increase over the last decade.

My experience of knowing many dependent upon social benefits – and low wages – is that, although the incomes help them to survive, they cannot save. In Scotland, a third of all households with incomes under £20,000 have no savings.

Written evidence from Bob Holman, Family Action in Rogerfield and Easterhouse (FARE)

Between 2005 and 2011, therefore, for the first time in post-war Britain, the overall combined proportion of household incomes spent on housing, utility bills and food increased each year:

- The overall combined proportion of household incomes spent on housing, fuel and food increased from 36% in 2003 to 40% in 2011
- The proportion of household income spent on utility bills began increasing in 2003 from 3% rising to 5% in 2011

According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies' 2014 Green Budget, between 2007-08 and 2013-14 the average price level faced by households in the bottom income quintile rose by 7.1 percentage points more than that faced by households in the top quintile.²³

Britain's poorest households spent 31% of their income on food, fuel and housing in 2003. This had increased by 9 percentage points to 40% by 2012. By contrast, the wealthiest households spent 13% of their income on food, fuel and housing in 2003. This had increased by 4 percentage points to 17% in 2012, meaning it was a little under half as steep as the increase in inflation felt by the poor.

What impact might we discern from these trends on the distribution of income?

The Department for Work and Pensions' Households Below Average Income: An analysis of the income distribution 1994-95 – 2011-12, published in June 2013, says that between 1995-96 and 2004-05 the proportion of individuals in absolute low income after housing costs fell steadily.²⁴ It stayed relatively stable between 2005-06 and 2009-10 before increasing by 1 percentage point both in 2010-11 and 2011-12 to 23%.

Similarly, the proportion of working-age adults in absolute low income decreased from 25% (8.5 million) in 1998-99 to 18% (6.3 million) in 2004-05, before increasing to 19% (6.7 million) in 2005-06 and to 22% (8.3 million) in 2011-12.

Again, the annual decreases in the percentage of working households in absolute low income from 1996-97 onwards stopped in 2004-05, and went into reverse from 2005-06:

- **The percentage of individuals living in absolute low income in households with one or more full-time self-employed decreased from 30% in 1996-97 to 21% in 2004-05, before increasing to 24% in 2004-05 and to 25% in 2011-12**
- **The percentage of individuals living in absolute low income in households where all members were in full-time work decreased from 7% in 1996-97 to 5% in 2002-03, then remained stagnant until a 1 percentage point increase in 2007-08 and a further increase to 7% in 2011-12**
- **The percentage of individuals living in absolute low income in households where one person worked full-time and the other worked part-time, decreased from 12% in 1996-97 to 5% in 2003-04, before increasing to 6% in 2005-06 and to 9% in 2011-12**
- **The percentage of individuals living in absolute low income in households where one person worked full-time and the other did not work, decreased from 35% in 1996-97 to 19% in 2004-05, before increasing to 21% in 2005-06 and to 28% in 2011-12**

Engel's law predicted that as household and national income rose the proportion of that income spent on food would decrease. This historic trend has been reversed in the past decade. The same holds for the proportion of income spent on utility and housing costs. It is probably the increase in this historic trend of prices of basic goods, and the withering away of low-income households' financial buffer, that helps to explain the rise and rise of food banks in our society.

The Inquiry's evidence suggests that whilst long-term trends in household income and expenditure have pushed large swathes of the population closer to crisis, they have spelt disaster for the poorest households.

Resilience – cooking, parenting and budgeting

The Inquiry found that, as well as lacking resources, a certain proportion of families may also lack the resilience to cope with life on a low income. They may have difficulties budgeting for a week's worth of shopping, for example, as whatever income there might be is devoted to other, non-essential items of expenditure or to paying off debt:

We can't guarantee that people will make sensible and wise spending choices. It's really difficult for all of us to make good decisions all of the time. But when you're poor you suffer for it more.

Oral evidence from The Rt Revd. Nicholas Holtam, The Bishop of Salisbury

Paying people enough to live on is key, but also there is a need to improve some core skills. We need to avoid teaching people how to be poor, but at the same time there are lost skills in shopping and cooking on a budget, particularly amongst young people.

Written evidence from Financial Action and Advice Derbyshire

We believe there is significant evidence that young people and younger adults lack the skills to make good food purchasing and preparation decisions.

Written evidence from North Northumberland Food Bank, Berwick upon Tweed

Whilst the Inquiry heard how many families manage to cope on a shoestring budget for extended periods of time, the evidence also suggests that a number of individuals and families are unable to prepare or cook decent meals from scratch:

[There is a] lack of food awareness in a family that might be able to provide. Sadly many parents lack food skills and an understanding of the link between good food and the ability of their child to concentrate.

Written evidence from Magic Breakfast

If you were poor in the past you wouldn't have had a very big margin, but what you probably did have was more resources on how to use that margin; more skills in using cheaper food and more knowledge about how to cook it. There's a whole raft of skills that people have lost. Part of that is budgeting and part is knowing how to make your money go farther. And in today's society, that's not easy.

Oral evidence from Alnwick Food Bank

The Food & Cornwall Systems Leadership Programme argued that there is a 'food skills deficit' in parts of the population at all ages that impacts on the ability of people to source, budget for and prepare healthy affordable food. Picking up on similar trends, the Cathedral Food Bank in Bangor said that:

We consider that lessons in cookery, nutrition and household money management should be compulsory for all. These should be given at the stage of education where they will be most effective for adult life.

Written evidence from the Cathedral Food Bank, Bangor

The benefits of such cooking courses were spelled out by Professor Martin Caraher:

The issue of stockpiling is one that we found in Liverpool where people, who had been on a cooking course, told us they built up stocks of dried and tinned foods to help them cope at the end of the month when money was short.

Oral evidence from Professor Martin Caraher, Professor of Food and Health Policy, City University London

The Salvation Army in Crook, County Durham, told the Inquiry in South Shields that it had recently started a new project called the Victory Programme. Each course has 20 participants who come for one morning a week over 6 weeks. They learn on this course how to cook simple meals, to budget and manage their money and also how to grow food as part of an allotment programme. The Inquiry was told that a significant number of those enrolled on the course have long-term mental health problems or physical disabilities. The programme seeks to reintroduce teaching, modernised for the present day, from the Dig for Victory campaign of the 1940s.

The evidence submitted to the Inquiry was broadly supportive of such schemes. Dr Jane Midgley, for example, from Newcastle University, told the Inquiry that:

... the opportunity to undertake food skills training would be one mechanism for supporting longer term needs associated with the range of emergency food assistance users.

**Written evidence from Dr Jane Midgley,
Lecturer in Planning, Newcastle University**

Summary

Long-term trends in the prices of the three basic utilities – food, fuel and housing – have eroded the real value of the National Minimum Wage and working-age benefits. In doing so, they have exposed low-income households to the likelihood of hunger and food poverty – particularly as food tends to be the most flexible item in one's household budget.

This increased vulnerability is compounded, for some, by an accompanying decline in the ability to cook and prepare meals on a limited budget.

To identify the circumstances behind the rising number of people requiring emergency food assistance in this country

People come with all sorts of complex needs. I get asked “what does a typical food bank client look like?”, and I can’t answer that. I’m always surprised by the people we have walking through the door.

Oral evidence from Louise Wratten, Manager, Salisbury Food Bank

Hunger can happen to any of us. It stems from low pay, lack of self-esteem, family breakdown, unemployment, addiction, mental illness, sickness or bad luck. Most of us can survive any one of these, many can survive two, but actually most of us can’t survive three together if they come together.

Oral evidence from The Rt Revd. Nicholas Holtam, The Bishop of Salisbury

The people who are least able, and for a whole variety of reasons are most disadvantaged, seem to be the people for whom life is made more and more complicated. When life gets difficult for you, it then gets more and more difficult.

Oral evidence from The Rt Revd. Mark Bryant, The Bishop of Jarrow

While the evidence suggests that few food banks share the same base of people relying on their services, and the patterns of demand differ across the country, the Inquiry identified two main sources of demand for food assistance and food banks in this country.

Going by Charles Booth’s nineteenth century study of poverty in London, we have here ‘the poor’ whose means may be sufficient but are ‘barely sufficient for decent independent life’, and ‘the very poor’ who live in a state of chronic want. Both of these groups were described by Leicester City Council, FareShare and Alan Robinson, the Manager of Greenwich Food Bank:

The emergency food providers contacted felt that in addition to providing for a ‘base level’ of long-term users with well-established difficulties, which included those suffering with homelessness, substance abuse, recent immigrants and asylum seekers and single males with income management issues, provision required over recent years had become broader including families and those who would previously have been regarded as more likely to maintain stable social conditions.

Written evidence from Leicester City Council

[There is a disparity between] first time hunger for families, low income working adults and the growing demand for emergency food aid parcels, and the people who are marginalised and suffering from long term hunger. These people are struggling to cook nutritious meals for themselves 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.

Written evidence from FareShare

The people that come to us, I tend to break into two groups – a benefit related group and a circumstance related one. The second one involves people with problems around mental health and abuse of some kind; our experience is that that group has always been there.

Much of the [first] group is driven by, for some reason or other, not getting their benefits in time. They find themselves in a position where they're not resilient to being without money; they don't have any savings; they've used up the calls on friends and relations, and find themselves in a position where they need to come and get food.

**Oral evidence from Alan Robinson,
Manager, Greenwich Food Bank**

i) Low-income families

Families and individuals on low incomes, to whom Booth may have referred as 'the poor', seemed to account for a large proportion of the recent surge in demand for emergency food assistance; they have rarely had much difficulty in putting food on the table in years past, but are now forced to confront an emergency situation they may not have faced, or even contemplated before. These are families who would previously have drawn on the protection of the financial buffer that rising real incomes for the poorest had provided. Now, the lack of a small surplus of income, even if only in some weeks of the year, exposes this group to all too quickly being exposed to a major financial crisis if there is a family illness, a large unexpected bill having to be paid, or the arrival of school holidays and the loss of free school meals.

Any one of these circumstances, which other families can more easily take in their stride, triggers, for our most vulnerable families, a period of days or weeks without food.

Lucy called Community4 to tell them that due to a power cut she had lost all of the food in her fridge and freezer. She had no money to buy more food for herself, her partner or her child for the rest of the week, as she would not get her next benefit payment until Friday ... Community4 were able to help Lucy on the same day she had called them.

**Written evidence from Community4,
Salisbury**

The Catholic Church noted in written evidence that since 2012 the profile of the people requiring emergency food support had changed, with the working poor now among the most vulnerable, and in desperate need of support.

The Leeds Food Aid Network charted similar patterns in demand:

Historically, food poverty in the city has been associated with people also experiencing or having experienced some form of homelessness. The main form of provision that has met this need has either come in the form of a food drop in where people access a meal or sandwich/soup, a street outreach/soup run or on a more informal basis. More recently, with the rise in living costs, including food prices, stagnant wages, a rise in insecure zero hour contracts and major changes to the welfare system many more people, who are not necessarily in immediate danger of becoming homeless, have been experiencing rising levels of food poverty. This has stirred a significant increase in food banks provision which has emerged substantially in Leeds since the beginning of 2013.

**Written evidence from the Leeds Food
Aid Network**

This pattern was replicated across large parts of the country, with the majority of people visiting Trussell Trust food banks in 2013-14 being working-age families. The Kirklees Food Partnership told the Inquiry that 994 food parcels were distributed to families in 2013-14, compared to 549 in 2012-13. Likewise, Staffordshire County Council said the number of lone parents in need of crisis support was now their greatest problem.

ii) Single households

The Inquiry's evidence suggests that in some cases, single people of working age, who may previously have 'scraped by' on a low income, now face a high risk of hunger and are increasingly likely to turn to food banks. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation submitted evidence to the Inquiry showing that between 2008-09 and 2011-12, the sharpest deterioration in living standards was felt by single people who live alone. They suggested also that the cost of meeting a minimum standard of living for a single person increased by 45% over the ten years from 2003, compared with a 30% increase in general inflation over the same period.

In particular, the number of younger people who live alone and fall short of an adequate standard of living increased from 29% to 42% in the three years to 2011-12. The numbers of those with less than half of what they needed rose from 9% to 25%.

North Northumberland Food Bank told the Inquiry that demand for its food parcels came predominantly from young, single adults. In addition, nearly half (47%) of all vouchers issued by the Wandsworth Food Bank in 2013-14 were to single households of working age, and this figure had 'risen rapidly' in the first half of 2014.

However, this pattern was not replicated across the whole country. Single people accounted for 48% of referrals to the St Austell Food Bank in 2013-14, compared with 58% in 2012-13.

The Inquiry was struck by how few single households of pension age have turned to food banks. Less than 1% of people relying on food banks in Coventry and across Warwickshire in 2013, for example, were aged over 65. The Inquiry received evidence suggesting that pensioners on low incomes were generally tided over by Pension Credit and had often faced many years of 'making do' – so they were used to cutting back out of necessity. The Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey, published in 2007, found that food insecurity was lowest for adults in retired households and highest for adults of working age living alone and single adult households with children.²⁵

Even so, the Inquiry was presented with some concerns that single households of pension age remain vulnerable to hunger and food poverty because they may struggle to get around, they could spend extended periods of time indoors on their own, and they may even find it difficult to eat.

While the number of older people using food banks appears to be relatively small, there are also well over 1 million older people in Britain who are malnourished ... Malnutrition risk factors increase significantly with age. These include, low income but also physiological changes, practical difficulties in shopping and cooking, cognitive impairment, poor oral health, swallowing difficulties, acute or chronic illness, social isolation and depression.

Written evidence from Age UK

iii) Individuals with deep-seated problems

As this review has shown, food assistance provision has long been in place to help individuals in the most chronic state of food poverty – individuals who face the daily prospect of hunger – to whom Booth would have referred as the ‘very poor’. But even well-established providers gave evidence of rising demand for their services. The People’s Kitchen in Newcastle, for example, which was formed in 1985 to provide food and companionship to people suffering mental ill health or addictions who found themselves homeless, told the Inquiry that demand for its services had risen by 40% in the past 4 years, and that ‘there is no sign of this abating’.

Likewise, FareShare told the Inquiry:

We must not forget people suffering from long-term hunger who are struggling to cook nutritious meals for themselves (due to ability, access or lack of knowledge) and are accessing services such as shelters for homeless people, day centres for older people, hostels for young people or refuges for women and children fleeing domestic violence.

19.6% of FareShare’s members are day centres; 15.7% are drop-in services; 15.4% supported housing; and 11.9% hostels. 4% are food banks; 4.7% are out of school clubs; 4.4% are school breakfast clubs; 3.5% are soup kitchens and 3.3% are community cafes.

29% of FareShare’s beneficiaries are homeless people; 13% have addictions problems; 10% are families.

Last year we saw a 41% increase in the number of charities receiving food from FareShare. 59% of our member charities have seen more people turning to them for food, whilst 42% are facing funding cuts. 70% also fear demand for their services will only increase in the future.

Written evidence from FareShare

The evidence submitted to the Inquiry suggests that following an initial visit to a food assistance provider, these individuals are likely to rely on this provision on a regular basis. The evidence also suggests that people with severe addiction problems are less likely to visit a Trussell Trust food bank, relying instead on other forms food assistance provision. They were most at risk of living in food poverty prior to the most recent recession and they will remain so in the years ahead.

The dynamics of shifting demand

Food banks and well-established food assistance providers – who have in the past couple of years felt the need to expand their activities to provide emergency food assistance – emphasised in evidence to the Inquiry the importance of reversing the recent trends in demand from low-income families, particularly those in work, so they could focus their resources instead on helping people with deep-seated problems who are most likely to experience persistent hunger and food poverty.

I don't think food banks will ever totally disappear, it's the scale that's the problem. There will always be people falling through the cracks, one way or another, who need help.

**Oral evidence from Peter MacLellan,
County Durham Food Bank**

I want to announce by 2017 that we are feeding fewer people because we are dealing with the underlying issues.

**Oral evidence from David McAuley, Chief
Executive, The Trussell Trust**

I would love to go back to just the 35 parcels a week. This whole explosion in demand has caused much of an issue to us because it is now the major operation within our small charity. We're at 122 at the moment – we'd love to reduce this and get back to 35 a week. So how can you affect the costs affecting people, in and out of work, who cannot stretch to the end of the week?

There will always be people who are needy for various reasons and need help. That's what we should be doing, but [we're not because of] the spike in demand that we are trying to address now with emergency food parcels. We need to go back to a situation where we can help quite holistically. But a lot of our efforts are now on feeding people in work and not being able to stretch to the end of the month.

**Oral evidence from Chris Cordrey,
ReadiFood**

There's a service that we provide because we have to do it, and a service we'd like to provide ... [Benefit-related problems are] a big portion of our work at the moment ... If we could get rid of all of that, and everyone's benefits are going smoothly and those who need help can go to the advice centre, we are then dealing with the other set of people who are where they are because of circumstances – lack of qualifications, mental health, family circumstances. We'd like to provide them with food when they first come in but then get them into programmes of supported volunteering, skills work and building them up to live sustainable lives. But right now we've got to focus on making sure people have got money in the bank, because people have zero pounds.

**Oral evidence from Amy Kimbangi, Tower
Hamlets Food Bank**

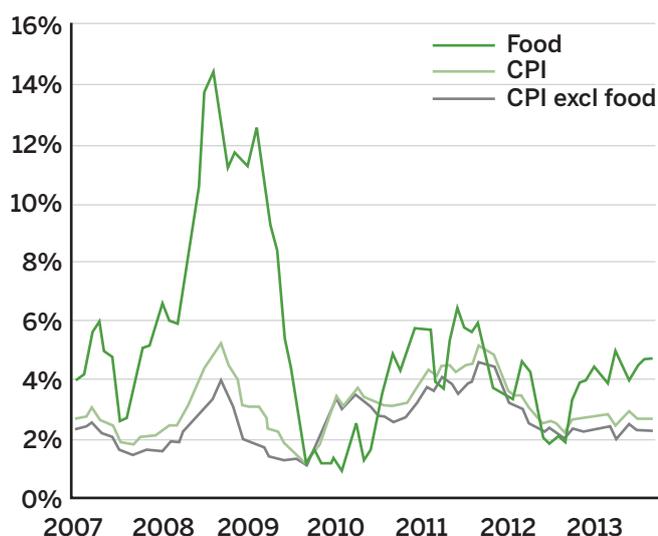
The remainder of this section seeks to address each of the key drivers behind the recent surge in demand for emergency food assistance.

Living costs and the poverty premium

i) Food

Between 2007 and 2013, food price inflation exceeded general inflation by an average of 2.1 percentage points, with evidence of particularly steep spikes between 2008 and 2010.

Figure 2: Annual inflation rate – food and overall CPI, January 2007 to September 2013



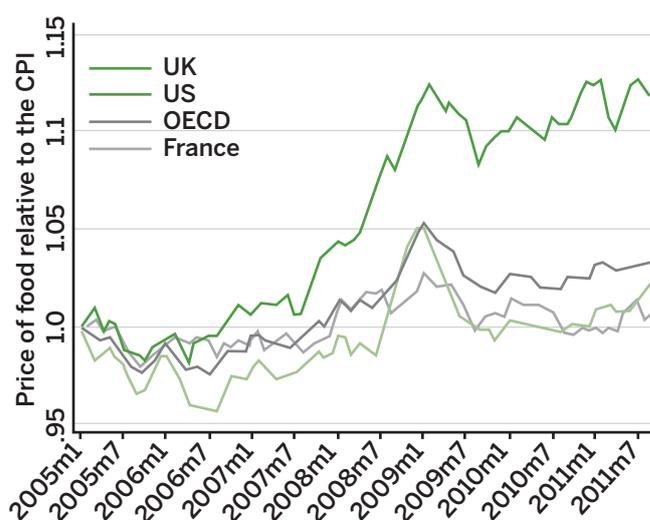
Source: House of Commons Library analysis

According to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, processed food prices increased by 36% between 2007 and 2012, followed by fruit (34%) and meat (32%).²⁶ The House of Commons Library says that these spikes are likely to be the result of a range of global factors including drought, rising demand from countries such as India and China for meat and other food products, increased oil prices, currency fluctuations, and export restrictions.²⁷

The Institute for Fiscal Studies identified a decline in the nutritional quality of food consumed over this period, partly due to more people shifting to processed food.²⁸ The Government's Child Poverty Strategy acknowledges that these changes have affected the poorest the most, and the OECD expects these global prices to remain higher over the next ten years than in the decade prior to 2007.²⁹

In addition, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, food prices in this country rose more sharply than in comparative economies, and this larger increase in the price of food relative to other goods persisted longer than in other OECD countries.³⁰

Figure 3: The price of food relative to CPI in France, the United Kingdom and the United States, since 2005



Source: The Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2013

The Inquiry welcomed the recent and sustained fall in food inflation, which fell 1.4% to a record low 0.3% in September 2014, but it remained concerned about the impact on household food budgets of stubbornly high and rising energy costs. In fact, evidence submitted to the Inquiry suggests hunger and food poverty cannot be viewed in isolation from fuel poverty and the costs of other key essentials.

ii) Gas and electricity

One of the biggest problems is the cost of fuel – heating and lighting your home. When we used to deal with financial statements and we were looking at people's debts, you could see they were probably living beyond their means and spending more than they should. Looking at it now, we're not able to find a pound a month. We look at their budget and there is nothing we can cut. When there's nothing to cut, that's worrying. A lot of that is the higher cost of fuel bills.

Oral evidence from Kirsty Field, Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureau

Evidence presented to the Inquiry suggests that many people living on low incomes regularly face a wicked dilemma between 'heating or eating'. The Children's Society told the Inquiry, for example, that more than three million families were likely to have cut back on food last winter so they could pay their energy bills. Many households may instead have prioritised the former over the latter:

A client came to see me. He lived in a council rented property which was a high-rise flat. He told me that he either could afford to pay for credit on his electric meter or he could buy food. He told me that he couldn't do both. The client told me that he suffers from arthritis and that the cold affected him greatly. He had to sit under a duvet in an attempt to stay warm.

Written evidence from Debs Banks, Debt Caseworker, Better Leeds Communities

In some cases, such families in acute poverty may find themselves in a position where they can neither heat nor eat:

We have families with no electricity and no gas. In the winter, when the children get home, there's not only no food but they're going home to a dark, cold house.

Written evidence from a Primary School Governor, Birkenhead

Some food banks expressed concerns to the Inquiry that some of their clients are unable to cook the contents of their food parcels at home because they cannot afford the fuel with which to cook it, or they may indeed lack any basic cooking equipment and facilities.

... few of our tins and packets were much use to those with no cooking facilities or electricity and we began to help those households by putting small sums of money on their gas or electric pre-payment account, where appropriate.

Written evidence from The Churches Housing Action Team, Mid Devon

Our staff ... had experienced service users being forced to hand back parts of their food parcels because they have been unable to afford the energy costs of heating the food.

Written evidence from The Alabare Centre, Salisbury

The Inquiry learnt that people on low incomes are hit disproportionately hard by the increasing costs of living, and in many cases this is due to the premium they pay on the basic goods and services they use. Research by Consumer Futures and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests that paying higher prices for utilities and credit can raise the cost of a minimum household budget by around 10%.³¹

Those who pay for their gas and electricity using prepayment meters (sometimes referred to as 'pay as you go', 'key' or 'token' meters) often face the highest energy costs as they are unable to access the best deals and tariffs available to direct debit customers. The average domestic bill for a typical prepayment customer in 2013 was £1,424, compared to £1,314 for those who pay by direct debit. This means that households pay a premium of 8.34% to use a prepayment meter.

Revd. Keith Addenbrooke, Vicar of St Paul with St Luke in Tranmere, Wirral, said in written evidence that he had had 'numerous callers at the Vicarage door' asking for money to top up their prepayment meters.

Analysis by the House of Commons Library suggests the average income of direct debit customers is £32,900. The average income of prepayment meter customers is £14,800.

Prepayment meters are used by 21% of part time workers, 57% of unemployed people, 28% of workers in semi-routine occupations and 29% of workers in routine occupations. Just 2% of higher managerial, administrative and professional employees use prepayment meters.

Direct debit payments are used by 80% of higher managerial, administrative and professional employees, 78% of lower managerial employees and 63% of pensioners.

The Inquiry found also that some prepayment meters are installed on a mandatory basis by energy suppliers when households have fallen behind on their bills. More than three quarters (76.5%) of the 70,000 prepayment meters installed for electricity, and the 62,000 (78.5%) for gas, in the first quarter of 2013 were compulsory installations to cover debt repayments. This has increased from 44% for electricity and 50% for gas in 2004.

The average debt owed on gas and electricity accounts increased by one fifth between 2012 and 2013. Customers repaying a debt on electricity owed an average of £448 in January 2013, and £477 on gas.

Debt may accumulate on a prepayment meter during the summer months, as there is a chance that standing charges will go unpaid while the heating remains off. In correspondence with one of the co-chairs of the Inquiry, a major energy supplier said, 'Standing charge is an issue which is likely to impact our prepayment meter customers who may not vend over the summer months and are likely to build up a standing charge debt as a result.'

Once they have paid off all outstanding debt, households must then pay a fee of at least £50 to their energy supplier to change their method of payment and wean themselves off a prepayment meter. Scottish Power, for example, charges up to £62.90, nPower £60, and SSE £52.

Revd. Dallas Ayling, Rector of Christ the King and Priory Chapel in Birkenhead, which opened up a soup kitchen in 2012, told the Inquiry:

I would want to raise once again the cost of gas and electricity cards and that some people get caught with a debt on the property they move in to. Some of the anecdotal evidence is that if there is a debt on the card much of any credit which is put on the card pays towards that leaving very little of it for the fuel needed. This is an expensive way of paying for fuel and with the costs having gone up, as I know for myself, this is affecting how much people can use towards cooking.

**Oral evidence from Revd. Dallas Ayling,
Rector of Christ the King and Priory
Chapel, Birkenhead**

Milton Keynes Food Bank provided evidence to support this claim, adding that the second most common reason for referral is personal debt, including a number of people who have built up arrears from high fuel costs, rising from 9% in 2004 to 18% of referrals in 2014.

iii) The Warm Home Discount

The Warm Home Discount was introduced in April 2011 and requires the major energy suppliers to provide £140 towards energy bills for some low-income, vulnerable households. Low-income pensioners automatically get this amount deducted from their energy bills. A broader group of working-age households may qualify for discretionary support. However, they must first apply. In these cases, even if they are eligible, the energy supplier is not obliged to provide the discount in every case, since the amount of support available is limited.

The Children's Society said in written evidence that almost two million children live in poor households that currently miss out on help through the Warm Home Discount. Many are excluded because their parents are in low paid work.

The Inquiry supported the continuation of the Warm Home Discount scheme as they believed it could be reformed to make an even greater difference to low-income households' budgets.

iv) Water

The Inquiry learned that poorer families living in smaller, cheaper properties may be paying more for their water supplies on a water meter compared with the previous system of rateable billing. On the other hand, single people or couples living in larger, more expensive properties could be paying more for their water under the old rateable scheme. They could, therefore, be better off with a meter.

A major water supplier provided the following information to one of the co-chairs of the Inquiry, on the impact of water meters in the region it supplies:

- **A water meter adds £60 to the bills for a family of three, consisting of, say, a mum and two children, living in a low rateable property**
- **A water meter adds £92 to the bills for a family of four, consisting of two parents and two children, living in a low rateable property**
- **A water meter adds £17 to the bills for a couple, or a lone parent with one child, living in a low rateable property**

On the other hand:

- **A water meter saves £102 for childless couples living in an average rateable property**
- **A water meter saves £59 for a couple with one child, or a lone parent with two children, living in an average rateable property**

Another major supplier estimated that around 45% of its lower income households are charged via a meter. Whilst two-thirds of its low-income customers pay less on a meter than they would have done on an unmetered charge, one third don't. Its metered customers pay slightly more per unit of water than the average unmetered customer – the additional cost amounts to about £60 per year on an average bill of around £470.

One major supplier acknowledged that 100,000 (40%) of its customers are experiencing higher charges as a result of being switched to a meter.

The general trend across the country is for more homes to be fitted with a water meter. Yet the Inquiry's evidence suggests that low-income families living in smaller homes may find their charges are higher on a meter than they would be on an unmeasured charge.

The Government's WaterSure scheme provides help to families in receipt of certain means-tested benefits, and with three or more children, who are struggling with their water bills.

v) Access to mobiles and the internet

Throughout the course of the Inquiry, a number of submissions demonstrated just how vital it is for low-income households to own a mobile phone and have access to the internet. Yet the Inquiry found that many vulnerable people were without both of these utilities, and as a result, were unable to access the support they needed to get their lives on track:

We've seen people who don't have a mobile phone or the luxury of having a laptop computer, and they struggle at the library to stand in queues waiting to access a computer to talk to [Jobcentre Plus] teams. It is an absolute shambles.

Oral evidence from Nigel Hughes, Chief Executive, YMCA Wirral

The Inquiry became concerned also that the cost of applying over the phone for jobs presents difficulties for some people claiming out-of-work benefits:

I put £10 every fortnight on my phone. If I'm not able to use my phone I get down the Job Centre but it's not always available because it's so busy. Otherwise it's the phone box. But that's expensive too.

Oral evidence from Alan in Salisbury

Concerns were raised also about the cost of calling Jobcentre Plus offices regarding a benefit claim:

The additional problem that came to light is that [a client] was given various numbers to phone – all 0845 numbers which are very costly from a mobile phone – she had no credit anyway and no prospect of any money coming in. In the past it would have been possible to call from the Jobcentre but apparently all the phones have been removed and that facility is no longer available.

Written evidence from the St Vincent De Paul Society, Whitstable

Whilst the Cabinet Office issued a directive in December 2013 mandating public bodies to phase out their higher-rate telephone numbers, the Inquiry found that the Department for Work and Pensions is still advertising such numbers to claimants.³²

Evidence presented to the Inquiry highlighted the need to improve the affordability of mobile phones to low-income households.

Ofcom has found that among those who have experienced difficulties paying for their communication services, payment issues are most likely to relate to mobile phones (75%). They found also that those who have experienced payment difficulties are more likely to be middle aged and on a low income. Half of this group have opted for 'pay as you go' as a method of managing their outgoings, so as to avoid being 'caught out' and falling into debt (or further debt).³³

Ofcom acknowledges that these individuals may face a premium by using 'pay as you go', as it could mean higher usage cost compared to a contract, as well as exclusion from cheaper contract deals and lower Direct Debit costs.

In addition, Ofcom found there was limited awareness among low-income households of cheaper deals, and only 26% of individuals on Income Support were aware of social tariffs available to help consumers on qualifying benefits access a landline.

vi) Debt and High Cost Credit

We have industries built around picking the bones of the vulnerable. If you walk up the West Road, where we are based, we have betting shops and fruit machines, we have pawnbrokers and payday loan companies. Behind that we have the loan sharks and all the rest of the evil aspects of society. And these people seem to cluster in areas of poverty because that's where they find their prey.

Oral evidence from Michael Nixon, Manager, Newcastle West End Food Bank

The escalation of personal and household debt is both a cause and a symptom of households' declining surplus income. The StepChange Debt Charity reported that a record number of people (507,863) contacted them in 2013. Over half the people seeking help were in work. StepChange reported also that payday loans had continued to cause 'huge problems' for people, and that the last five years had seen a worrying rise in the numbers of people struggling with arrears on household bills – the proportion of clients in arrears with their water bills, for example, rose by thirteen percentage points between 2009 and 2013.³⁴

People are, in some circumstances, taking out a loan or obtaining household goods through a home credit scheme in order to bridge what, at first sight, appears to be a temporary gap in their finances. In doing so, this initial gap all too often opens up into a chasm. The Children's Society told the Inquiry that 45% of families in problem debt are cutting back on food for their children in order to keep up with debt repayments at least once every three months.

According to the House of Commons Library, within the unsecured consumer credit market, around 32% (£51 billion) of lending in this country is provided by companies such as home credit stores, payday lenders and pawnbrokers.

Many people turning to such lenders will have already called on family and friends to lend a hand during tough times, and this same network of support may no longer be available once the next crisis arrives.

I've seen two people who travelled into Birkenhead to try to get loans from relatives, but they ended up knocking on our door for food bank vouchers.

Oral evidence from Nigel Hughes, Chief Executive, YMCA Wirral

The biggest source of credit within disadvantaged communities is family and friends. It is easy to see that as the finances of the whole community become squeezed this source of credit becomes restricted. Private sector provision of credit is often at exploitative rates of interest and may prevent the need for a food bank visit in the short term but may ensure it over the longer term.

Joint written evidence from the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church

This was exemplified by the experience of Marsha, from Nottingham, who was referred to a food bank after months of struggling to pay for a television and washing machine purchased from a high street home credit retailer – one that is frequently used by people on low incomes as it offers weekly repayment schemes. The Inquiry was told that she found it extremely difficult to maintain the weekly repayments, feed herself and her three children, and keep up with her usual household expenses. She therefore went without meals herself in order to feed her children and was diagnosed with chronic depression.

The Stockport Food Partnership told the Inquiry that one of the biggest causes of debt they encountered in 'regular families who generally manage their money well' was when one of their core appliances broke down and they had to 'rent' from the home credit market.

One home credit retailer has reported that its customer base grew by 23,900 to a total of 270,700 in 2013-14, with average revenue per customer growing by 12.2%. Its bad debt charges increased from £23.7 million in 2012-13 to £32.5 million in 2013-14, and its profits had more than doubled to £52.6 million since 2007-08.

Citizens Advice Scotland expressed concerns to the Inquiry around the high rates of interest on payday loans, as well as the charges and interest applied when customers are unable to make a payment, and the use of the continuous payment authority to take arbitrary amounts of money from customers' accounts without any warning. They argued further that a growing number of their clients were turning to food banks because of 'poor practice' from payday lenders.

The Alabare Centre in Salisbury told the Inquiry how one of its clients had been caught up in this situation:

A guy borrowed £140 from a loan shop. In order to get the loan you hand over all your personal information and bank details. They then took £300 straight out of the person's bank account, the person had no knowledge that that had happened, and you can imagine the repercussions; they empty the bank account and he faces charges. They take random amounts that appear to have no bearing on the amount borrowed and repaid.

Oral evidence from the Alabare Centre, Salisbury

Likewise, the Bishop of Chichester told the Inquiry in his written evidence:

A woman who had worked hard to balance her budget had to ask for help from Christians Against Poverty when a moneylender took her benefit income out of her account the second she received it. This left her penniless for two weeks until the next payment when the same happened again. Christians Against Poverty established there was no food in the house—she looked very gaunt, having not eaten properly for weeks. Christians Against Poverty collected and delivered a food parcel from the Food Bank later that day. A week later she looked so much better, and she told us the first thing she'd done was to invite her elderly mum over to tea—something she hadn't been able to do for a long time.

Written evidence from The Rt Revd Dr Martin Warner, The Bishop of Chichester

The Inquiry heard also 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. It appeared, in some cases, as though payday loan brokers had levied charges that were heavily obscured in their terms and conditions.

The importance of low pay

The Inquiry found that too many people earning the National Minimum Wage today are relying on help from food banks. The evidence submitted to the Inquiry suggests that up to one quarter of people relying on food banks are in work.

Among the examples received were:

- **Hastings Food Bank reporting that over half of its clients are in work**
- **Half of those using the West Northumberland Food Bank last year were in low paid work**
- **More than one third of Ely Food Bank's clients are in work**
- **Since it opened in November 2013, one third of people relying on the Oswaldtwistle Food Bank were in work**
- **19% of people referred to the Wandsworth Food Bank in 2013-14 were in low paid work.**

Wages are too low. I don't know what the answer to that is but it's a conundrum. In this area we get a lot of people in who are actually working – working in construction – around a third of people are working. People aren't earning enough to live on. They can't work enough hours because they're on part-time or zero hours contracts, and the minimum wage is too low.

Oral evidence from Heather, Volunteer, Salisbury Food Bank

It has shifted from the sticking plaster for the big bill that they didn't expect, or the car breaking down, to 'I cannot survive on my wages' for whatever reason; on zero hours or the minimum hourly rate, they just cannot survive.

Oral evidence from Don Gardner, Manager, Camborne, Pool and Redruth (CPR) Food Bank

High up as a cause of hunger in Flintshire are low and falling wages ... the average wages of workers in Flintshire fell by £57.49 per week in the period 2007-2012. During that same period, the National Average fall for the whole on the UK was £30.30.

Written evidence from Flintshire Food Bank

We have a large number of people on very low wages. Nuneaton does not have a lot of highly paid employment. Some of the employees at the hospital have had to supplement (their income) with foodbank on longer months.

Written evidence from Nuneaton Food Bank, incorporated into the submission from Coventry Food Bank

Talking to workers in the field, there is a general sense that a lot of working families, who have in the past managed, are now in trouble because wages are just too low and prices have gone up so much. They are managing on very tight margins.

Written evidence from the Cambridge Food Partnership

The Booth and Rowntree inquiries of the late nineteenth century showed that, for a substantial number of the working-class population, wages did not meet fully the contingencies of life. These inquiries came at a time when, according to an investigation carried out by Dr Larkins in South West Surrey, the weight of children fell with low parental wages.³⁵

Now there remains a view of what people should have in the form of a minimum income, some of the working poor appear to have fallen ever further below this standard over the past decade – and they will continue to do so if current trends persist. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation found, for example, that households supported by workers on the National Minimum Wage had, since 2008, fallen even further behind what they deem to be a minimum standard of income.

Home Start UK told the Inquiry in written evidence that, *'Even though at least one adult in the house is working parents are still unable to adequately feed their families because wages are so low or erratic'*. This was demonstrated in the following testimonies:

I have one baby and between me and my partner we have three small jobs ... we get minimum wage ... The only way we can get to the end of the week is to go to food banks. We don't want anyone to know that we have to go to the food bank but we never seem to get out of the trap ... we want to pay electric and rent but it takes all our money.

Anonymous written evidence submitted to the Inquiry during its Cornwall evidence session

Rebecca is 22 and crosses London by bus to work weekend shifts in a major retail chain, earning £56 a week. The journey takes three hours each way. She receives an extremely low JSA rate of £2.57 a week and she has a monthly food budget of £20.

Written evidence from Ann McGauran

According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), nominal wage growth below the rate of inflation has resulted in real wages falling for the longest sustained period since at least 1964.³⁶

Annual real wage growth averaged 2.9% in the 1970s and 1980s, then roughly halved to 1.5% in the 1990s. The rate slowed again to an average of 1.2% in the 2000s, and real wages fell by 2.2% per annum between Q1 2010 and Q2 2013. They are unlikely to recover to their pre-recession levels until 2018.

Low pay can, for many, all too often become a lifetime curse. The Resolution Foundation looked at the persistence of low pay in their report *Starting out or getting stuck?* (November 2013).³⁷ They found that of people who were in low paid work in April 2002:

- **18% escaped low pay over the next decade (these are the people who were in work and earning above the low pay threshold in April 2010, April 2011 and April 2012)**
- **27% were stuck in low pay and unemployment over the next decade (these are the people who only ever held low paid jobs in the Aprils between 2003 and 2012, including those who moved between unemployment/inactivity and low paid work)³⁸**
- **46% cycled out of and into low pay over the next decade (these are the people who escaped low pay at some point during the decade, but did not escape out of low pay for good, as they were not in higher paid work for April 2010, April 2011 and April 2012)³⁹**

Wages have struggled for a decade to keep up with the costs of living. The relentless rise in these costs has meant that wages – particularly those at the bottom of the labour market – are not currently sufficient to meet them. According to the Low Pay Commission, in RPI terms, the real value of median hourly earnings in April 2013 was lower than in April 2002.⁴⁰ For those at the bottom, prior to the Government's decision in 2014 to implement a new rate of £6.50 per hour, the National Minimum Wage was only worth the same as in 2004 and was well below its peak value in 2009. Public spending on tax credit payments to top up the incomes of low income families increased by 40% in real terms to £27.5 billion between 2003-04 and 2009-10.

The ONS argues that falling work hours and increases in non-wage costs such as employers' National Insurance and pension contributions at the time of the economic downturn in 2008 and 2009 may have acted alongside lower productivity to reduce real wage growth. The changing composition of the UK workforce since 2001 may also have had an impact on real wages, particularly the shift from higher paid workers in the manufacturing sector towards lower paid services industries.

The average weekly nominal wage for a services worker was £437 in 2010, compared with £524 for a manufacturing worker. Therefore, the transition of employment from manufacturing towards services between 2001 and 2010 implies a downward effect on average weekly earnings for the UK as a whole. This trend in employment again predates the recession of 2008-09:

- **Manufacturing employment fell by a yearly average of 4.5%, while services employment grew by 1.8% between Q1 2001 and Q4 2006**
- **The financial and insurances activities industry – which has relatively high levels of earnings – fell as a share of the workforce between 2008 and 2010, while the real estate activities and administrative support service sector – which is on average lower paid – rose**
- **The hotel and restaurant industry, with an average wage of £6.78 per hour, saw employment grow by 17.1% between 2008 and 2012 – the fastest employment growth in the economy came in the lowest paid industry**

Another symptom perhaps of the troubling events at the bottom of the labour market is the growth in self-employment, which accounts for 15% (4.6 million) of all jobs in our economy. Of the 1.1 million extra people who found employment between January 2008 and July 2014, 732,000 – or two thirds of the total – categorised themselves as self-employed. The StepChange Debt Charity reported that its self-employed clients, on average, have £24,328 of unsecured debt - £8,000 higher than people in full-time work and more than £10,000 higher than those in part-time work.⁴¹

Further evidence suggested the need for employers to take greater responsibility for boosting the pay packets of their lowest paid workers:

There is a big role for companies to understand they're employing people who provide for families as well as individuals, and to realise the benefits of the Living Wage in the non-tradable sectors, with a carrot and stick approach in campaigning for this.

Oral evidence from Will Higham, Save The Children

We would make a plea about a Living Wage. At the moment, we don't believe the National Minimum Wage is sufficient for people to rely on, and we're seeing an increasing number of people who are in full-time employment relying on us and relying on food bank vouchers.

Oral evidence from Damon Taylor, Chief Executive, Wirral Citizens Advice Bureau

For some people working for me, the Living Wage made the difference between their children sleeping in a cold bedroom of an evening and being able to switch the heating on.

Oral evidence from Nigel Hughes, Chief Executive, YMCA Wirral

Analysis by the Resolution Foundation suggests that whilst the United States and Canada have experienced a 'chronic breakdown' in the relationship between ordinary workers' pay and economic growth, Britain, France and Germany have recorded an 'acute one, just as severe as the breakdown identified in [the United States and Canada] but much more recently occurring'.⁴²

Children and schools

For the first time I have ever known we have had children crying at the end of the day as they did not want to go home to a cold dark home with no food. We had no option but to send them home. I have been in schools for 25 years and have never lost sleep before over the plight of our children before, which I do now.

Oral evidence from a Primary School Governor in Birkenhead

The Inquiry received a great deal of evidence showing how imaginatively schools try to protect vulnerable children from the consequences of the hunger they might experience at home. Schools submitting evidence to the Inquiry said that between one in ten and one in four children arrived hungry each morning. Most of the schools suggested that whilst low parental income is an important factor, children often go hungry because of a lack of routine and organisation at home. Some children who are entitled to free school breakfasts miss out because their parents cannot or do not get them to school on time, and others eat crisps, chocolate or biscuits on their way to school. Although the Government provides free fruit and vegetables every break time, the Inquiry's evidence suggests this initiative may often be undermined by the choices being made at other points in the day.

Evidence to the Inquiry also raised several issues around the effectiveness of free school meals in alleviating hunger. Parental employment status, for example, can adversely affect a child's free school meal status. Head teachers suggested a range of measures to improve, and in some cases extend, take up of food services, such as: streamlining the process for registering eligible children for free school meals; extending the School Fruit and Vegetable scheme to older pupils; subsidising breakfast clubs; extending free school meal provision to cover the school holidays; or rolling out free school meals to poor children whose parents are in work. Three issues, in particular, shone through in the evidence:

i) Registration for free school meals

The Inquiry found there are too many poor children missing out on the free school meals they are entitled to. In 2013, the highest under-registration rates of eligible children were found in: Bracknell Forest (38%); North East Lincolnshire (32%); Slough (32%); Wokingham (31%); Surrey (29%); Warwickshire (29%); Richmond upon Thames (28%); Sutton (27%); Bath and Bexley (26%); Bromley (25%); Buckinghamshire (25%); North East Somerset (25%); West Sussex (25%); Bedford (24%); Herefordshire (24%); Poole (24%); Merton (23%); and Suffolk (23%). This raises some important questions around the plight of poor children in relatively wealthy parts of the country.

Bedford Drive Primary School in Rock Ferry, Wirral, told the Inquiry:

A major stumbling block is around free school meals and who is entitled to them. This information is known to the benefits agency but not to schools. If we suspect a pupil is entitled to free school meals it can involve some delicate questioning of the parent as to whether they are eligible and, if so, why they are not claiming.

Written evidence from Bedford Drive Primary School, Rock Ferry, Wirral

The Department for Education told the Inquiry that it has developed a free school meals 'Eligibility Checking System', which enables local authorities to check very quickly whether a parent can claim free school meals, by linking benefits information from the Department for Work and Pensions, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and the Home Office.

Some local authorities have used this automatic system to great effect in maximising the take-up of free school meals.

Sunderland City Council, for example, told the Inquiry that it launched its free school meals 'opt out' initiative in December 2011, based on a similar project in Liverpool, in which the Council wrote to families identified as being eligible but not claiming free school meals, telling them that they were entitled to this service and that they would not need to make a claim unless they opted out. Schools were also kept informed by the local authority. This initiative saved poor families in Sunderland £370,180 per year.

The Council informed the Inquiry of the continued success of this 'opt out' scheme. As well as taking the onus off families, according to the Council, it increases the likelihood of take up, as the meal is automatically provided to the school for the child.

In correspondence with one of the co-chairs of the Inquiry, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council said that since it had begun using its Housing Benefit/Council Tax Reduction Scheme records and Department for Work and Pensions information to automatically check for, and register eligible pupils, overall uptake of free school meals had increased to 89%, compared to the national average of 83%. The Inquiry heard that similar developments had taken place in Halton Borough Council.

ii) Holiday hunger

In a major study on the feeding of school children, M.E. Bulkeley wrote exactly a century ago that:

The discontinuance of the school meals during the holidays has been shown to undo much of the benefit derived during the term time, and it entails unnecessary suffering on the children ... The experiments made by Dr Crowley at Bradford in 1907, and by the Medical Officer of Health at Northampton in 1909, not to mention the testimony offered by numbers of teachers as to the deterioration of the children physically during the holidays, prove conclusively the need for the continuation of the meals, if the children are not to lose much of the benefit which they have derived during term time.⁴³

Yet, one hundred years on, there are some poor parents who dread the coming of the school holidays, and particularly the summer holiday, when their children cannot gain free school meals:

We raise the question of the need for the Inquiry to look at the feeding of young people during school holidays and in particular the long summer holidays. Who feeds those on free school meals during that time?

Written evidence from The Wiggly Worm, a food charity in Gloucestershire

The free school meals system takes financial pressure off parents and ensures the children eat well during the day, alleviating immediate hunger and improving attainment. The problem with the system is that it imposes increased financial pressures and quality of family life during the school holidays.

Written evidence from Bath and North East Somerset Council

School holidays, when low income families in receipt of free school meals have to buy much more food when the kids are off school. I've spoke to a few Mams whose weekly shop is 3 times what it usually is during school holidays.

Written evidence from West Northumberland Food Bank

Several food banks told the Inquiry they had identified spikes in demand during school holidays, when children no longer receive free school meals:

In the summer holidays, in particular, we see families facing the daunting prospect of six weeks without being able to feed their children. We saw a 45% increase in families between June and July 2013 due to the loss of the one wholesome meal a day which the free school meals provides.

Oral evidence from Louise Wratten, Manager, Salisbury Food Bank

There is a statistically significant increase in the use of HOPE+ food provision during school holiday periods.

Written evidence from HOPE+ Food Bank, Liverpool

Areas in both Yorkshire and Humber and in the North East report spikes in food bank usage around August, coinciding with the school holidays.

Written evidence from the Northern Housing Consortium

The Trussell Trust told the Inquiry that more than a quarter of parents surveyed who were suffering from some form of food poverty said they were unable to provide food for all the meals their children needed during the school holidays.

Professor Elizabeth Dowler said in written evidence that being able to afford the additional fuel to cook meals was another problem facing parents during the school holidays.

The Inquiry was told of some schemes that had sprung up to tackle the problem of 'holiday hunger'. Borehamwood Food Bank, for example, has started to provide family lunches in school holidays for children who struggle without free breakfast or lunch outside term time. Also:

A local church in Longley and Lowerhouses is cooking hot meals for children in that area over the six week holidays. The local residents are doing this for the children as they are aware the children will be missing out on free school meals.

Written evidence from the Kirklees Food Partnership

We heard from Chomp, who have run a lunch club for families during the school holidays for just over a year, that they have seen a significant rise in the number of families seeking food and social interaction during this time. They aim the club at children that rely on free school meals during term time.

Written evidence from the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership

Make Lunch opens up church kitchens for children who would have free school meals in term time but who lose out in the holidays.

Oral evidence from Colin Brady, Social Justice Programme Manager, Diocese of Salisbury

We have developed a school holiday programme, Magic Breakfast 365 which was tested in London and Yorkshire during one half term. We found that keeping schools open for breakfast club, morning cookery session and sports practice was incredibly successful, and met the needs of children who are unable to get the nutrition they need outside of term time ... We have piloted a scheme to feed hungry school children in the holidays. MagicBreakfast365 is ready to go, with investment.

Written evidence from Magic Breakfast

There is some work being done in the North East around holiday hunger, trying to link in with schools' summer holiday activities and trying to provide meals around that. In Birmingham too there is a 'holiday kitchen' with other services like Jobcentre Plus.

Oral evidence from Satty Rai, Policy Services Manager, Northern Housing Consortium

Work is underway with Sunderland's North Area People Board to identify opportunities and put in place activities that will tackle 'holiday hunger'. The Board is currently working with the voluntary and community sector to: provide bespoke holiday programmes for children and parents that are based around healthy eating; provide other holiday programmes that include a healthy lunch for all; identify planned holiday activities that do not include a meal, to explore how this provision can be included.

Written evidence from Sunderland City Council

Estimates from the House of Commons Library suggest it would cost in the region of £130 million to continue the provision of free school meals in primary schools during school holidays.

iii) School breakfasts

The Inquiry received evidence to suggest school breakfast clubs can be a useful way of alleviating hunger amongst children.

The Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty and the Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty in the Welsh Government, told the Inquiry how Wales led the way by introducing free breakfasts in primary schools in 2004. Now, under the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, Local Authorities are required to ensure that the provision of free breakfasts in primary schools continues.

However, in England, concerns were raised about the lack of take-up due to the chaos that had engulfed some children's home lives. One school in Birkenhead, in which just 7% of eligible pupils used the breakfast club, told the Inquiry in written evidence that:

Largely those coming to school hungry do so as a result of disorganised home life, late up, no food in the home, lack of structure and routine ... We see students eating on their way to school, and when this is the case it is often inappropriate food eg crisps, chocolate bars.

Written evidence from Birkenhead High School Academy

Another said:

We have a breakfast club in the morning but many children who would benefit do not attend because of the need for parents to be organised enough to get them there on time.

Written evidence from Cathcart Street Primary School, Birkenhead

One possible solution to this might be the provision of free school breakfasts, accompanied by home interventions from schools' pastoral staff to ensure children are able to benefit from this provision. A similar approach was outlined in relation to free school meals:

Systems could be introduced whereby the catering provider notify the Education Welfare Officer of any parents who fail to take up FSM which could be followed by phone calls home or home visits to offer support and guidance.

Written evidence from University Academy Birkenhead

Magic Breakfast delivers free food to schools through a combination of purchasing food and through in-kind donations of food from its partners. In its written submission, Magic Breakfast told the Inquiry that Quaker/Tropicana has agreed to support 250 schools for three years to August 2015, and to donate using 'low-code' stock (eg stock which is close to its use-by date and cannot be sent to stores).

Magic Breakfast said also that it is experiencing a higher demand for its services than ever before, and that school feedback includes improved attendance and punctuality; improved concentration and behaviour; and help to engage the 'hardest to reach' parents. The fundamental key benefit reported by schools is improved readiness to learn. Children are not only fed, but also settled and socialised.

iv) Free school meals for poor children in working families

All children aged between 4 and 7 years old now qualify for free school meals – an additional 1.5 million infant pupils receive free school meals following the introduction of Universal Infant Free School Meals in September 2014. But children aged 8 years and over whose parents are in receipt of working tax credits are not eligible to receive free school meals even though their income is below the national income eligibility level of £16,190. This is because all working tax credit recipients are automatically excluded from claiming free school meals even if their income is below the eligibility level.

Estimates from the House of Commons Library suggest that 1.5 million poor children are automatically disqualified from receiving free school meals because their parents are in work. These parents must spend £370 per year, on average, on school meals for each of their children if they wish them to have a hot meal in the middle of the day.

There remains a stigma in the minds of some parents. Some parents' working patterns mean the children drift in and out of being eligible [and there is] ignorance about how to claim.

Written evidence from Birkenhead High School Academy

Fiona Twycross AM, author of Zero Hunger City, proposed a comprehensive model which schools should adopt to best tackle child hunger:

I wanted to see that every school governing body should have a plan to identify and address hunger in schools throughout the school day and to support families in food poverty. This plan should include: engagement with the local borough's food poverty link worker; ensuring the availability of free breakfast, and maximising registration and take-up among all children who are entitled to free school meals ...

Written evidence from Fiona Twycross AM

The School Food Plan told the Inquiry that one of the benefits gleaned from the piloting of universal infant free school meals was the:

...ability for those families on low incomes to be able to seek work without being at risk of losing free school meal benefit (worth £400 a year)

Written evidence from Myles Bremner, Director, School Food Plan

Also raised in evidence was the issue of contracting out school catering services, and the impact both on the cost and quality of provision:

Once parents are registered almost all take up their free school meals. Uptake has greatly increased since the school began to run an in-house kitchen. This has been a very successful initiative.

Written evidence from Cathcart Street Primary School, Birkenhead

This issue of work incentives led the Children's Society to conclude that:

The government should ensure all children in poverty, including those in poor working families, can get a free school meal. The government should use the opportunity provided by the introduction of Universal Credit to provide a Free School Meal to all children in receipt of the new benefit.

Written evidence from The Children's Society

Benefit claims

The Inquiry was presented with a large amount of evidence highlighting faults in the current system of welfare provision.

Small amounts of money, at the right point, but delivered quickly would actually stop a lot of this ... The role of the welfare system, as a safety net, is that it needs to be there when people are in crisis. It needs to stop people from being left in the lurch, let alone put people in the lurch.

Oral evidence from Niall Cooper, Director, Church Action on Poverty

The evidence suggests that around six in every ten people relying on emergency food assistance do so because a problem with their benefit claim has left them with little or no money. The problems and uncertainties arising from the delay, interruption or sanctioning of benefit payments were given by almost every food bank as the most common reason for people relying on their services. The following submissions were emblematic of what the Inquiry heard time and again:

People are coming mostly because of the benefit delays and benefit changes. The ineptitude of the system is unbelievable. It is not user friendly. How are people expected to live with no money while claims are being processed?

Written evidence from Captain Paul Ward, Beeston Food Bank, Greater Nottingham

Frequently what starts as an ongoing but manageable problem, say loss of a job or the difficulty of living on benefits as a single parent, becomes rapidly exacerbated by problems related to the welfare system.

Written evidence from the Oxford Food Bank

There is a rapidly expanding gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. The 'have nots' are people in transition – from employment to underemployment or unemployment; from one form of benefit system to another, or frequent changes from one job to another. The transition from relative security to utter precariousness and vulnerability is a journey that many families are making through no fault of their own.

Written evidence from Alison Webster, Social Responsibility Adviser, Diocese of Oxford

Why is the situation worsening? Because the benefit system is archaic – when circumstances change, people's benefits are stopped and they can wait 4-6 weeks for money. This is not acceptable ... an ex-Army guy who had gone 11 weeks [without payment] and was living on the streets cooking on a makeshift brick-and-wood fire.

Written evidence from Rosie Rushton, volunteer, Northampton Food Bank

The widespread prevalence of such incidents, in combination with the long-term trends in household income, may help to explain the rising demand for emergency food assistance over the past couple of years.

Problems relating to benefit claims were cited as common problems by, for example, King's Lynn Food Bank (68% of referrals since 2012), Exeter Food Bank (57% of referrals in 2013-14), Milton Keynes Food Bank (51% in the first half of 2014), Coventry Food Bank (46% of referrals in 2013), County Durham Food Bank (around two thirds of its clients since opening in 2012) and ReadiFood (65% of its clients). 79% of YMCAs in England referring young people to food banks say they do as a 'direct result' of benefit delays and sanctions.

Manchester Citizens Advice Bureau and the Parsons Cross Initiative in Sheffield both said they had seen increases in the number of referrals made in 2014 due to benefit-related problems. Parsons Cross Initiative said that that 50.5% of their referrals in the first six months of 2014 were a result of 'benefit delays', 14.2% due to 'benefit changes', and 8.3% due to 'benefit sanctions'.

The experience of food banks between 2006 and 2011 is that this is not necessarily attributed to a particular welfare reform, but rather an inherent problem within the system: the welfare state has consistently struggled to respond fast enough to changes in individual circumstances, especially as checks must be carried out to ensure the change is correct. The cessation in payments that results from this process can be sufficient to cause hardship in situations where a family is reliant on welfare. It should also be highlighted that benefit change and benefit delay can be interlinked when a change results in a delay. A key problem that appeared from the early days was the welfare system was simply not capable of coping with the day to day changes in people's lives, and there was an inevitable lag between a change and a payment being made. This is an endemic problem and underlines the need for a more thoughtful and thorough approach to the administration of welfare payments to ensure the system is more responsive to rapid changes in family circumstances.

Joint written evidence from John Glen MP and the Trussell Trust

While benefit-related problems are not a new phenomenon, they may have become more significant in recent times. In 2006-07, benefit delays accounted for 34% of referrals to Trussell Trust food banks, and benefit changes were the cause of 5% of referrals. In 2013-14, 31% of the Trust's referrals were a result of benefit delays, and the proportion of referrals caused by changes to benefit payments had increased by 12 percentage points to 17% in 2013-14. In 2013-14, therefore, 48% of the Trust's food bank referrals were a result of problems with benefit claims, compared to 39% in 2006-07. The Trust told the Inquiry in its final evidence session that this increase had been particularly marked since 2013.

Some particular concerns were raised around the impact of Mandatory Reconsideration periods on vulnerable claimants. This process was introduced in October 2013 for claimants of Employment and Support Allowance who are found fit for work, but wish to appeal against the decision. The Department for Work and Pensions decides during this period whether claimants have grounds to appeal. Employment and Support Allowance is not paid during this period. Claimants must instead apply for discretionary support or make a claim for Jobseeker's Allowance.

Just this morning I've got a client who's had no money [for three months] since April. He failed his medical and put his Mandatory Reconsideration in, where they now decide whether he can appeal or not. He has really bad mental health problems and he cannot stick to the appointments he'd need to keep under Jobseeker's Allowance.

Oral evidence Austin Girdlestone, North East Council on Addictions (NECA)

The Inquiry was also made aware of charges of up to £50 being levied by GPs on individuals requesting access to medical records that are required to help them appeal against decisions relating to their Employment and Support Allowance claim:

The Jobcentre Plus will demand evidence from the client to prove they should be on ESA. So the client goes to their doctor, who says "we can't give you the letter unless you pay us a fee". Bearing in mind this person's got no money, we've got this horrific problem where someone in medical need can't prove it to the Jobcentre Plus.

Oral evidence from Mark Goodway, Director, The Matthew Tree Project, Bristol

There were some troubling examples of avoidable problems occurring in the administration of social security benefits and tax credits, which had had a detrimental impact on claimants:

In April 2012 [HMRC] taxed my only source of income incorrectly by 20% so when my pension was paid, I had to go into my bank and found it left me no money for food, and it took 2 months for [HMRC] to correct the mistake. I had to go to CAB and get a food bank form otherwise I would not have had any funding for food shopping.

Written evidence from a retired NHS Nursing Assistant

Some of the computer systems that the Jobcentre Plus staff have to work with means they can't see people's circumstances. They sometimes don't have those screens. We often have to phone the Jobcentre Plus to check people's benefit status and if they're on more than one benefit then the staff don't always have access to both screens.

Oral evidence from Kirsty Field, Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureau

The Inquiry was presented with suggestions on how food banks could reform their methods of data collection. Whereas much of the official data currently refers only to 'benefit changes' and 'benefit delays', the Inquiry was keen to differentiate between the wide range of different benefit-related triggers. The Inquiry heard that the Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau had managed to incorporate five different benefit-related categories into its data collection, covering delay, sanction, refusal, shortfall, and debt recovery from benefit. Likewise, the Parsons Cross Initiative in Sheffield was able to break down its data to show that since January 2014, 50.5% of its referrals were a result of 'benefit delays', 14.2% due to 'benefit changes', 8.3% due to 'benefit sanctions' and 1.5% where individuals and families have been described as having 'payment issues' or simply 'no benefit'. A recommendation was made to extend data collection along these lines across the board.

Nonetheless, two issues emerged more commonly than most in the evidence: delays and sanctions. Ely Food Bank claimed in written evidence that 'the majority of people presenting with food poverty caused by benefits issues tell of either a) being 'sanctioned', or b) suffering an intolerable delay in benefit claim processing.'

Likewise, the South Tyneside Communities Together KEY Project told the Inquiry in South Shields that 31% of emergency food had been handed out to young people whose benefit payments had been delayed, while a further 15% had been sanctioned.

It is to delays we turn next. As sanctions are determined both by policy change as well as administration, we come later to this in the Welfare Reform section.

Benefit delays

The Inquiry's very first oral evidence came in its Birkenhead session from Revd. Keith Addenbrooke. He may not have known it at the time, but his opening lines were almost a prelude to the colossal weight of evidence the Inquiry received on the adverse impact of benefit delays and errors on individuals' vulnerability to hunger:

We've seen new people quickly become regulars [at the food bank] because the time it takes to process applications for benefits leaves them with a serious cash flow problem and no resources on which to draw upon; and those irregularities are measured in months rather than weeks.

Oral evidence from Revd. Keith Addenbrooke, Vicar, St Paul with St Luke, Tranmere, Wirral

Likewise, the Trussell Trust handed out its first food parcel in this country to somebody struggling with benefit delays.

The Inquiry found the delay in the payment of benefits to be a key trigger behind the growing number of people relying on food banks. Indeed, a large amount of evidence submitted to the Inquiry said that lengthy delays in the administration, and subsequent receipt, of benefit payments can cause severe hardship for claimants. The evidence suggests upwards of one third of food bank referrals are due to benefit delays. County Durham Food Bank, for example, told the Inquiry in South Shields that 40% of its referrals resulted from benefit delays, and Eastbourne Food Bank said 32% of its referrals were due to benefit delays.

Problems relating to delays are the sheer length of time some claimants must wait for a payment to arrive, a low awareness of discretionary funds available to help plug this gap in household income, and some avoidable errors in the processing of some claims.

Laura McIvor, from Exeter Foodbank, and Dr Andrew Williams, from the University of Exeter, described such delays as the 'tipping point' that brings into play a wider set of issues, such as problem debt, that could expose some families to hunger.

If my benefits had been paid quickly, in full and on time I would have been able to meet my living costs.

Oral evidence from Jack Monroe

The welfare state is creaking, it's so inflexible. A big reason why people have got no money is these delays – weeks and weeks, months and months. I still can't get my head around how people are meant to live. These people aren't told about Hardship Payments by the DWP.

Oral evidence from Paul Finch, Hetton Loaves and Fishes Project

Such delays can range from a couple of weeks to a few months. Following its Birkenhead evidence session, the Inquiry found the oldest outstanding applications for Employment and Support Allowance at the Birkenhead Jobcentre Plus stood at 10 months, 8 months and 7 months. The Inquiry heard also how Bournemouth Food Bank had provided food to a young man with mental health issues for a period of five months when he had just £5 a week available for food while an error in his Housing Benefit was being sorted.

Research submitted to the Inquiry by Sheffield City Council put the average time between first contact with Jobcentre Plus and the first payment of benefits being made at nine weeks, and Alan Robinson from Greenwich Food Bank told the Inquiry that delays could last for 'anything from a few weeks to more than six weeks. We also have reports of papers being lost in Belfast which at best doubles the time.'

The Inquiry found that the Department for Work and Pensions does not currently collect information on the length of time taken for benefit payments to be made. The Secretary of State highlighted, in correspondence with one of the co-chairs, the improvements that had been made in the time taken to process new claims:

With regards to claimants waiting to receive their first benefit payment, I would like to point out that 92% of new claims to benefits are processed on time (within 16 days). This is 6 percentage points higher than in 2009/10. Furthermore, 88% of JSA claims are processed within 10 days.

Correspondence between the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and The Rt Hon Frank Field MP

Whilst the Inquiry welcomed these improvements, it was concerned nonetheless that the Department currently measures performance by Actual Average Clearance Time (AACT), which is the average number of days taken between an application being made and the date a claimant is notified of the decision on their claim. But this is not the same as the first payment arriving into the claimant's hand. The Inquiry was unaware of any alternative records showing when a first payment is made, but it did receive evidence of hardship even during the standard waiting period:

It's not uncommon for me to advise people who have waited a very short time ie perhaps within the DWP target time, and what that indicates is that these are people who simply can't manage even a wait until 16 days. Much more typical is people waiting perhaps 1 or 2 months.

Oral evidence from Martin Williams, Child Poverty Action Group

Even where the target time for processing a claim is met, this gap between need and payment can be a long time to cope without support. In other cases, claimants can be left without payments for long periods with little indication of when they can expect payment.

Written evidence from Citizens Advice Scotland

The Inquiry received evidence to suggest that some households may be left with no money while they await their first benefit payment.

Delays in tax credits from HMRC of 8-10 weeks can have a huge impact on families, particularly those who claim Working Tax Credit, who may lose almost all their income for 8 weeks plus. Single people on Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment Support Allowance are particularly badly affected, as when they make a new claim or change their claim they can be left with no income at all for 3-4 weeks.

Written evidence from Angela Ford, Cullompton Food Bank, St Andrews Church, Devon

The fact there might be a gap of weeks or months in between is not a people-centred approach. A people-centred approach would say the welfare system should ensure there's a continuity of income ... just to leave people dangling in the middle is not the sign of a good system.

Oral evidence from Niall Cooper, Director, Church Action on Poverty

Discretionary support is not automatically paid to claimants whose benefits have been delayed. Claimants must instead be aware that such support may be available to them, and understand how to apply for it and what the eligibility criteria are. But the Inquiry's evidence found, in many cases, this was lacking.

This lack of awareness took on even greater significance, in light of evidence showing how Jobcentre Plus staff do not necessarily inform claimants of their right to apply for Short Term Benefit Advance or other discretionary payments to fill the gap in household income while a benefits claim is processed.⁴⁴ Tom Sefton from the Church of England told the Inquiry that he had encountered particular concerns around the lack of awareness of help available through the Short Term Benefit Advance.

The Inquiry heard likewise that:

At every stage it's a lack of information, it's gatekeeping from hard-pressed DWP staff where taking the time to do a Short Term Benefit Advance means they don't meet another target they have, and also incorrect decisions often for administrative reasons.

Oral evidence from Martin Williams, Child Poverty Action Group

Unless you go to the Jobcentre Plus with all the information you need, you can't often access the support that's actually there for you. So things like hardship payments that people are entitled to when they've got a sanction, or Short Term Benefits Advances to cover the period when they've applied for benefit but haven't got it – those things are not proactively advertised to claimants.

Oral evidence from Amy Kimbangi, Tower Hamlets Food Bank

[A woman] had a baby and applied for Child Benefit. After waiting 4 weeks, the benefit office contacted her to say they had lost the baby's birth certificate and so she had to buy another, which cost her £12. The benefits office then wrote to say they had found the original certificate, but had lost her form. She had to then apply again and was told it would introduce a further 8 week delay.

Written evidence from Winston Waller, Whitstable Society of St Vincent de Paul

A 55 year old North of Scotland Citizens Advice Bureau client, who suffered with cancer and had had a stroke, had two applications for Employment Support Allowance lost by Jobcentre Plus in two months. As a result the client did not have any income for seven weeks and he needed a food bank referral.

Written evidence from Citizens Advice Scotland

Nonetheless, in 2013-14, 313,000 applications were made for a Short Term Benefit Advance. Of these applications, around 90,000 received an immediate payment of benefit. Of the remaining 223,000, around 79,000 were successful in receiving Short Term Benefit Advance of, on average, £57, and 144,000 were unsuccessful.

The Department for Work and Pensions has said it will issue communications to improve staff awareness of Short Term Benefit Advances, and to remind them of the circumstances in which an advance should be considered. When a new claim is taken, staff will be expected to make it much clearer to claimants when they can expect their first payment, and its likely amount. Even so, much of the onus remains upon the claimant to initiate an application for discretionary support.

The Inquiry heard anecdotal evidence of incidents whereby personal documents had been lost in the system while claims were being processed:

The Inquiry saw also that the sudden loss of tax credits and other benefits resulting from a change in household circumstances could lead to periods of at least one month, and often many more, with a heavily depleted household income. This had often been the case whereby families immediately lost all of their tax credits when they reported to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs that a partner was moving in to live with them in the same household:

One lady came to us who had been fine all her life. She had two young children and her partner had just moved in. She informed the agencies of this and whilst they were reviewing her benefit claim they cut off everything and she was left with absolutely nothing. They had always struggled before but always managed to find enough to feed the children. She was distraught that this was the first time she faced the prospect of picking the children up from school and not being able to feed her dinner. She was kicking herself for being honest.

Oral evidence from Louise Wratten, Manager, Salisbury Food Bank

Further evidence emerged during the Inquiry's Salisbury evidence session of one lady who has two children of her own and took on the care of two other children from her husband's previous relationship. Although he works they still rely on Child Benefit and Housing Benefit, but when the family suddenly increased in size, and were eligible for a larger payment, these benefits were stopped for eight weeks while the changes were processed.

The Inquiry heard likewise that:

My partner moved in and I claimed for working tax credits. I was told they would send me out a claim form which would take two weeks but I never received it so I rang them up for them to tell me they had forgotten to send me out a claim pack. I finally received one after 4 weeks and now I have to wait another 5 weeks to get paid. It's the same story with housing benefit: they didn't ask for the right information. I now am struggling to pay the rent.

Written evidence submitted on behalf of a client by West Cheshire Food Bank

When one considers the long-term erosion of low-income families' financial buffer, people who find themselves in the situation of, say, having their tax credits stopped often have no savings to fall back on, and are therefore at risk of going hungry.

The Inquiry encountered in its evidence similar difficulties facing people who were being transferred from Employment Support Allowance to Jobseeker's Allowance.

We see people who have been moved, not of their own volition, from ESA to JSA – initiated by DWP – but the penalty these individuals have is if they're selected to move from one to the other; one stops, there's a pause, and then the other one starts. That's totally out of the DWP's choosing and, all of a sudden, people are put in real difficulty.

Oral evidence from Alan Robinson, Greenwich Food Bank

Claimants similarly affected were those being transferred between different rates of the same benefit:

Ian has just had his disability category changed from, 'sight impaired' to 'severely sight impaired' (registered blind). He will be entitled to more benefits. However, the benefits he currently receives because of his sight loss have been stopped until his new benefits have been processed. This will take several weeks. Though the new benefit will be back-dated this is little comfort to Ian during those weeks he has to do without.

Written evidence from The Rt Revd. Nicholas Holtam, The Bishop of Salisbury

Again, given the long-term trends outlined in the previous section, evidence of such delays begs the question as to how poorer households are expected to cope once they fall over a sudden and unexpected cliff edge in times of need.

Welfare reform

We already had food banks before welfare reform. We were already referring customers to food banks. [But] referrals have increased across the board since welfare reform.

Oral evidence from Merseyside District Jobcentre Plus

The Government has implemented a series of reforms since 2010 to the up-rating of working-age benefits and the operation of sanctions, as well as eligibility for Housing Benefit, Council Tax reduction and crisis support. Following a brief summary of the overall effects of these measures, we assess here the particular impact of each reform on hunger and food poverty.

Overall effects

The Inquiry's evidence suggests that some households may have been left vulnerable to hunger by certain elements of the Government's welfare reform programme. Whilst the impact of these reforms on household budgets is documented here, the evidence from food banks suggests, nonetheless, that these reforms had less of a direct influence than the delays, errors and inconsistency in the administration of benefits, on the rising demand for emergency food assistance. The cumulative impact of welfare reforms may mean some claimants are affected by multiple changes to different benefits.

Referring to the period between 2006 and 2011, the Trussell Trust and John Glen MP suggest in their joint submission that, 'large-scale reforms to welfare system usually see an uplift in food bank referrals as the changes are implemented'.

Analysis commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions in June 2013 acknowledged that the adoption of CPI, rather than RPI, for the up-rating of most working-age benefits and tax credits, combined with measures to reduce housing benefit expenditure, and the focussing of tax credits on lower income families had 'overall resulted in a real terms fall in benefit income'. The 1% up-rating of working-age benefits had just come into force.

Evidence submitted to the Inquiry suggests that where people relying on emergency food assistance have been affected by these reforms, their effect has been to exacerbate existing hardship and chip away further at their shrinking real incomes, rather than act predominantly as the cause of having to rely on emergency food assistance:

Since welfare reform has come in, we have seen our numbers grow exponentially. It's not just people with addictions and homeless people. It's people who are now in that poverty trap, whereby you had £120 a week to live on, then £10-15 is taken off for things like the Bedroom Tax and Council Tax, so you've now got £100 to live on.

Oral evidence from David Selby, Hospitality and Hope Project, Brinkburn Community Centre

The third most common comment comes from the working low income group who have seen their wages remain static or reduce over the past few years while the cost of living, particularly fuel costs, have risen. After time this results in household expenses overtaking income. An effect often exaggerated by the 'Bedroom Tax' or the loss of council tax exemption.

Written evidence from Alan Robinson, Manager, Greenwich Food Bank

The abolition of council tax benefit means that 2 million families in poverty are now no longer exempt from council tax and the Social Sector Size Criteria (also known as the Bedroom Tax) has also placed additional strain on low income family budgets.

Written evidence from the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church

According to the distributional analysis which accompanied Budget 2014:⁴⁵

- **The combined impact of tax, tax credit and benefit changes in 2014-15 sees the largest single loss – 2.1% of net income – incurred by the top income decile. Households in the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth income deciles gain from the changes. The bottom two deciles both lose 1% of net income.**
- **The combined impact of tax, tax credit and benefit changes in 2014-15 reduces household expenditure in the bottom two expenditure deciles. The expenditure of households in the bottom decile is reduced by 0.6%. The largest single loss – 1.6% of net expenditure – is incurred by the top expenditure decile. Households in the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh expenditure deciles gain from the changes.**
- **The cumulative overall impact of public service spending, tax, tax credit and benefit changes since 2010-11 mean that household incomes will be 2.1% (£757) lower in 2015-16 than they were in 2010-11. Incomes in the bottom quintile will have reduced by 3.4% (£814) and the second lowest quintile by 1.8% (£489).**

Above all, the Inquiry's evidence suggests it is the sheer scale of the reform programme itself, as well as the acute financial vulnerability of low-income households affected by the reforms, having just kept their heads above water for the past decade whilst their financial cushion was being steadily worn away, which has turned a crisis into a catastrophe for many people.

Reforms in particular to Housing Benefit and the decision to localise Council Tax support have resulted in some households having to allocate money previously spent on food to cover these fresh shortfalls in their budget. Evidence to the Inquiry suggests fewer than one in ten referrals for emergency food assistance result directly from these reforms to Housing Benefit and Council Tax support. Between one sixth and one quarter of food bank referrals would appear to result from sanctions, although this remains a very rough estimate, due to the limitations on data.

Up-rating

The Inquiry's evidence opened up questions around the adequacy of working-age benefits, and, more specifically, their ability to shield poorer households, in particular, from the differential impact of inflation.

Changes to means tested benefits have also affected the incomes of many people in poverty. The level of benefits for families with children covers only around 60% of what the public considers to be a minimum standard of living. For out-of-work adults, benefits only cover 40% of this level ... Over the last five years, working-age benefits have deteriorated substantially relative to Minimum Income Standards.

Written evidence from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

... benefits, which constitute an essential part of poorer families' incomes, have been cut significantly. Child benefit, for example, will have lost almost 15 per cent of its real value over the course of this Parliament as a result of uprating decisions.

Written evidence from the Child Poverty Action Group

Sanctions

Benefit delays can affect anyone. But sanctions appear to affect particularly vulnerable groups of people, such as those who find it difficult to leave their house, to open or read their mail, or respond to phone calls, over and above those to whom sanctions should be applied. A sanction can leave single claimants with no money for weeks, or even months.

The [Hope and Hospitality] project was going really well until they brought in the sanctions. The pressure from having no money is really starting to bite now.

Oral evidence Austin Girdlestone, North East Council on Addictions (NECA)

Under the system of Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions which applied until October 2012, a claimant could have their benefit stopped if they failed to meet one of the key conditions attached to the receipt of benefit, without 'good cause'. Sanctions were either for fixed periods, or of variable length.

Fixed Length sanctions of 1, 2, 4 or 26 weeks were imposed for a failure, without good cause, to attend or participate an interview or employment programme, or carry out a specific instruction from a Jobcentre Plus adviser. Payment of benefit continued in full pending a Decision Maker's decision on a sanction question. Varied Length sanctions of between 1 week and 26 weeks were imposed for failures to comply with basic requirements, such as refusing employment without good cause, or losing employment through misconduct. The actual period in each case was at the discretion of the Decision Maker who made the decision.

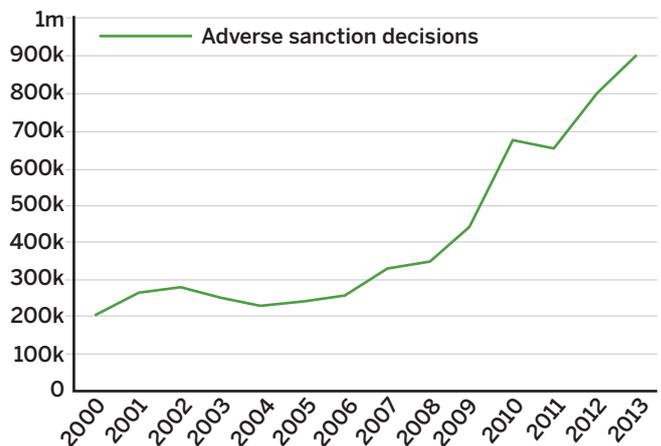
Three main changes were introduced in 2012: there are now three categories of sanction depending on the nature of the 'offence'; different fixed durations of sanction now exist for first, second and third offences; and the new sanction period now begins on the first day of the week in which the offence occurred, or the first day of the week following the date the claimant last received Jobseeker's Allowance.

Higher level sanctions are applied, for example, to those leaving a job voluntarily, and lead to claimants losing all of their Jobseeker's Allowance for a fixed period of 13 weeks for a first failure, 26 weeks for a second failure and 156 weeks for a third and subsequent failure. Lower level sanctions are applied to claimants who, for example, fail to attend an interview with their adviser. These sanctions lead to claimants losing all of their Jobseeker's Allowance for a fixed period of 4 weeks for the first failure, followed by 13 weeks for subsequent failures.

Intermediate level sanctions are applied to those who, for example, make themselves unavailable for work. They apply for 4 weeks following a first failure, rising to 13 weeks for a second or subsequent failures.

907,495 sanctions were applied to Jobseeker's Allowance claimants in 2013 – the highest for any twelve month period since 2000.

Figure 4: Number of sanctions applied to Jobseeker's Allowance claimants



It is difficult to estimate what proportion of people relying on emergency food assistance do so because they have been sanctioned, as many food banks incorporate 'sanctions' within their 'benefit changes' category, which also includes several other benefit-related issues. Data on sanctions is not often collected on a standalone basis.

But the Inquiry received enough evidence to suggest sanctions have represented an important contributory factor behind the rising demand for food banks. Between 20 and 30% of people interviewed by Oxfam, the Church of England, Child Poverty Action Group and the Trussell Trust, for example, as part of a joint research project, were relying on emergency food assistance because they had been sanctioned. Also, around one in six people referred by the Citizens Advice Bureau to North Northumberland Food Bank had been sanctioned.

Whilst the Inquiry endorsed the need for conditionality in the welfare state, and remained supportive of the application of sanctions in the benefits system, it had a number of questions as to how fairly they are being applied in some cases.

The following two submissions typified the concerns addressed to the Inquiry:

The increase both in the use of sanctions within the benefit system, and the period of time a sanction is in operation for would appear from our experience to be affecting the more vulnerable benefit recipients, rather than the intended target of those seen to be “playing the system”. HOPE+ would point to the following:

- *Sanctions imposed for failure to complete sufficient job searches would appear to affect those least likely to either have regular access to a computer, or the capability to use one. Those dependent on public computer access (via libraries etc.) are often unable to complete the task in the time available.*
- *Those with learning disabilities or literacy issues, which are frequently not self-disclosed, are frequently incapable of meeting targets set for them.*
- *Those with a diagnosis of mental illness, especially depressive illness, are being penalised for late attendance at meetings/ health assessments. It is reported by our guests that such assessment interviews are often fixed for early morning, which is a cause of additional difficulty for those with depressive illnesses.*
- *That those whose benefits have been sanctioned attend HOPE+ having been signposted from the Job Centre imposing the sanction by way of a handwritten note. Whilst the note will give the name and address, at no point does it state we offer Food Bank provision. Anecdotally we are informed by guests that this information is relayed orally.*

Written evidence from HOPE+ Food Bank, Liverpool

- *Not meeting ever increasing ‘targets’ for the number of jobs applied for (apparently the target rose to over 15 fresh job applications per week)*
- *Not producing printed documentation of job searching: the clients rely on the free printer at the public library to print these documents, yet the printer was broken curtailing their ability to comply with the Job Centre requirements*
- *Being late for an appointment, caused by the bus running late or not turning up*
- *Missing an appointment (but the client did phone in), because either their client was ill or their children were ill. In one example the Job Centre staff apparently told the claimant that it was more important to report on time at the Job Centre than take their baby to an emergency doctor’s appointment*
- *Missing an appointment because it was impossible for the client to travel: the bus fare for the 7 mile journey is £3.50 (single) and the client had literally zero money*

Written evidence from Ely Food Bank

Research by Citizens Advice Scotland, published in July 2014, found claimants are not receiving notice of sanctions prior to their money stopping; sanctions are being imposed where claimants have good reasons for not meeting their requirements; and many clients seem unaware of their right to challenge decisions.⁴⁶

The Inquiry heard how one Employment and Support Allowance claimant with serious health problems was sanctioned in April 2014 for not turning up to a Job Club. He said this was because he had had to look after his young son at short notice, and that the sanction, which was still in place in early July, drove him to begging and stealing for food. Because of the sanction, he also temporarily lost his Housing Benefit.

The Inquiry heard also of a client relying on emergency food assistance, who:

... was made redundant and, while she was spending her time looking for work and waiting for replies to her job applications, she took up some voluntary work as a result of which she missed one of her weekly interviews at the job centre. For this single act of temporary amnesia [due to helping others], the DWP sanctioned her to four weeks with no receipt of benefit. Consequently, she had only the food bank to turn to for food, which she would not have had to do if the DWP had exercised a little charity.

Written evidence from Flintshire Food Bank

Two further examples were presented to the Inquiry during its Salisbury evidence session; Bob told the Inquiry he was sanctioned for writing information on the wrong line when he filled in a form to fulfil his Work Programme requirement. Because he hadn't written his job search information down correctly, he was sanctioned. Similarly:

Most of the sanctions, to be fair, are reasonable. Some of them, though, are completely unreasonable. One person was claiming JSA. He was told on 4th May that he had to apply for a job and that he had up until 10th May to do that. He tried to apply on 6th May. The job had been removed from the jobs site. So he went to Jobcentre Plus and told his worker that he had tried to apply for it, but it had been removed, and then he was sanctioned. He was sanctioned because his worker at the jobcentre had not completed the form properly to explain the reason for him not applying for the job. That was a 12 week sanction and it's just not acceptable.

Oral evidence from Louise Davis, Project Manager, The Salisbury Trust for the Homeless

Concerns were raised in evidence to the Inquiry about the effectiveness and fairness of the mechanisms by which Jobcentre Plus captures and relays information to people in very difficult positions. The Citizens Advice and Law Centre in Derby told the Inquiry, for example, that:

Letters issued from the Jobcentre are difficult to understand, often incorrect or meaningless or sometimes non-existent even though they are legally required. In sanctions cases, for example, it appears that the sanction is often applied before any decision has been issued, leaving the claimant unclear as to what is happening, why and what they can do about it.

Written evidence from the Citizens Advice and Law Centre, Derby

For claimants who have been sanctioned, there is no entitlement to discretionary help in the form of a Hardship Payment until the fifteenth day of the sanction period, unless the claimant is classed as being in a vulnerable group.

Guidance issued by the Department for Work and Pensions states that a 'hardship interview' – which people applying for Hardship Payments need to attend – should take place within 24 hours of the request for Hardship Payments being made. Furthermore, it states that where a decision is made that a person satisfies the hardship conditions, action should be taken quickly to ensure payment arrangements are made.

The then Minister for Civil Society emphasised this point in oral evidence to the Inquiry:

If claimants demonstrate they cannot buy essential items, including food, as a result of their sanction, they can then claim a Hardship Payment. The bottom line is no claimant should ever have to go without essentials as a result of a sanction. There are mechanisms in place to ensure that people don't fall through the cracks.

Oral evidence from Brooks Newmark MP

The Department for Work and Pensions expects claimants to receive a Hardship Payment, if appropriate, within three days of a request being made. There are no targets in place for the processing of these applications.

Additional concerns were raised around the impact of sanctions on claimants' entitlement to passported benefits, such as Housing Benefit. If an individual's Jobseeker's Allowance has been stopped their Local Authority may stop payment of Housing Benefit and Council Tax support to reassess the person's entitlement.

A particular challenge is individuals whose Housing Benefit claim is stopped as an indirect result of a sanction. Whilst this should not happen, it is a frequent occurrence leading to large rent arrears. Because housing expenses take up such a large part of their income, these rent arrears often take many months to repay and may result in extensive periods of food poverty.

Written evidence from Homeless Link

The Independent Review of the operation of Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions validated by the Jobseekers Act 2013, conducted by Matthew Oakley, advocated measures to improve communication with claimants on what is expected of them, reasons as to why a sanction has been applied, the reconsiderations and appeals process and how they can claim Hardship Payments where appropriate.⁴⁷

The recommendations made in the Independent Review, which were all accepted by the Government, would have covered only 174,000 of the 580,000 sanctions imposed on Jobseeker's Allowance claimants between October 2012 and June 2013, as they applied only to claimants taking part in certain welfare-to-work schemes.

Housing Benefit

Some submissions noted that housing costs have continued to rise whilst support to cover these costs has been restricted and, for some of those in work, wages have failed to cover shortfalls in rent. There was some concern that this will have exposed some households to hunger.

The Local Housing Allowance was capped in April 2011 at the 30th percentile of local private sector rents, as opposed to the 50th (median) percentile. The entitlement to up to £15 per week over and above rent that claimants were entitled to if their rent was less than their Local Housing Allowance rate was removed, and national caps on rates were set at £250, £250, £290, £340 and £400 per week for the shared accommodation, one-bedroom, two-bedroom, three-bedroom and four-bedroom rates respectively. In January 2012, the shared accommodation rate was extended to include most single adults without dependent children aged between 25 and 34, even if they are not living in shared accommodation. Local Housing Allowance rates are now increased in line with CPI, rather than in line with local rents. Since April 2013, Housing Benefit for working-age people in the social rented sector has been reduced by a fixed percentage of their eligible rent if they are deemed to be under-occupying their property. The reduction incurred under this 'under-occupancy penalty' is 14% for one extra bedroom and 25% for two or more. This latter measure will have had more of an adverse impact on household incomes in areas where the supply of one bedroom homes is particularly limited, such as Merseyside and parts of the North East of England.

While there was little evidence to suggest the 'under-occupancy penalty' had been influential across the board as a key trigger for reliance on food banks, the Inquiry did receive some evidence of the personal hardship it had caused:

John, 58, is on ESA and on Disability Living Allowance (DLA) at the lower rate. In February he was faced with the prospect of paying £44 a fortnight in bedroom tax. For him, the budget that's been hit is the one for food. He then had to turn to the food bank for help.

Written evidence from Ann McGauran

Research conducted by Ipsos MORI found that in response to being affected by the 'under-occupancy penalty', 32% of affected tenants had spent less money on food. In addition, one quarter of tenants affected by the 'under-occupancy penalty' who reported regularly running out of money said they went without meals to cover the shortfall. The research found also that 69% of affected tenants claimed never to have been in rent arrears prior to April 2013, but that half of these said they had been in arrears since then.⁴⁸

Some of the evidence submitted to the Inquiry suggests that the discrepancy between stubbornly high and rising rents, and the wages and taxpayer-funded support to meet those housing costs, is an important issue affecting household food budgets. The cost of renting in England and Wales rose at twice the pace (1.6%) of earnings (0.8%) in the twelve months to November 2013.⁴⁹

As Sam Royston from The Children's Society told the Inquiry:

Housing costs are absolutely crucial. What we have seen is rapidly increasing housing costs. One of the concerns is that, as a result of reductions in housing benefit – for people in the social and private rented sectors – people are not becoming homeless but they are making cutbacks on their expenses around the edges in order to make up a shortfall.

**Oral evidence from Dr Sam Royston,
Head of Policy and Public Affairs,
The Children's Society**

Council Tax support

The Inquiry is aware that for a large number of low-income households Council Tax has become an additional expenditure item, following the localisation of Council Tax support. The Resolution Foundation calculated in January 2013 that a typical single parent working part-time for the National Minimum Wage, and whose children did not receive childcare, would face increases in their annual Council Tax bill ranging from £96 to £446.⁵⁰

Those unable to pay their Council Tax may face court fees and bailiffs' fees, serving to compound an already difficult situation for some households. According to written evidence from Taxpayers Against Poverty, three million Council Tax liability orders were issued in England Wales in 2012-13. The StepChange Debt Charity reported that the proportion of clients with missed Council Tax bill payments increased from less than 10% (around 12,000) in 2009 to over 25% (45,000) in 2013.⁵¹

Again, though, there is little in the way of direct evidence to suggest this development has itself triggered an increase in the number of food bank referrals.

Crisis Loans and Local Welfare Assistance

The Social Fund was introduced in 1987 to provide money for people in need who, due to various unforeseen circumstances, found themselves in a short-term financial emergency. Crisis Loans were paid from the Social Fund by Jobcentre Plus to families in such situations.

In the decade leading up to 2010-11, gross annual expenditure on Crisis Loans more than trebled from £65.3 million to £228.3 million. The number of applications almost trebled over the same period from 1.29 million in 2000-01 to 3.42 million in 2010-11. The number of awards increased from 930,000 in 2000-01 to 2.65 million in 2010-11.

In response to this growth the Government reduced the rate paid for living expenses from 75% of the benefits rate to 60% from April 2011, with a further reduction to 30% in April 2012. The number of repeat awards was also limited in April 2011 to three (for general living expenses) in a rolling 12-month period, and from July 2011 repeat awards for the same expense in a 12-month period were no longer allowed.

The average Crisis Loan award decreased from £83 in 2010-11 to £64 in 2011-12 and £59 in 2012-13. As a result of these measures, gross annual expenditure on Crisis Loans fell from £228.3 million in 2010-11 to £133.3 million in 2011-12 and again to £103.2 million in 2012-13.⁵²

In April 2013, Crisis Loans and other interim payments were replaced by Short Term Benefit Advances, which, as we have seen, are designed to cover the gap for those experiencing financial difficulties between a benefit claim being registered, or updated, and the subsequent payment being made. The average Short Term Benefit Advance award in 2013-14 was £57.

The remainder of the discretionary Social Fund was devolved to Local Authorities in April 2013 through Local Welfare Assistance schemes.

National data showing the level of expenditure on these schemes is not yet available, but Age UK told the Inquiry they 'appear to be far less effective at helping those in need', and Sam Royston from The Children's Society said in his oral evidence:

Too many families don't know about Local Welfare Assistance. When you speak to families they have a low knowledge of Local Welfare Assistance ... A lot of areas also have complicated application procedures. Whilst you can get £100 in a minute with Wonga, you spend a whole day in some cases filling out forms for Local Welfare Assistance.

**Oral evidence from Dr Sam Royston,
Head of Policy and Public Affairs,
The Children's Society**

Further analysis by The Children's Society suggests that the total funding for Local Welfare Assistance schemes has been reduced by £150 million in real terms compared with equivalent expenditure on the discretionary Social Fund in 2010, and that more than 80% of Local Authorities are using this funding to provide benefits in kind through goods and services, rather than direct cash payments to applicants.⁵³ Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council told the Inquiry that most (45%) of its Local Welfare Assistance awards in 2013-14 were food related. It suggested further that if this funding were to cease, 'we fear food bank referrals could increase.'

The Inquiry's evidence suggested that Local Welfare Assistance schemes could help to prevent poorer families in crisis from having to rely on emergency food assistance, and there was a strong desire for this funding to be maintained beyond the current financial year:

Local Welfare Assistance is due to cease as a designated budget from April 2015 and to be subsumed into overall grant provision. The Council has yet to establish in what manner the grant appears within the grant formula, therefore long-term planning and assurances of future funding is compromised as a direct result of this. The Council would recommend that Local Welfare Assistance as a direct ring-fenced budget is identifiable and targeted to facilitate these aims.

Written evidence from Leicester City Council

The Inquiry heard in Salisbury that 70% (2,000) of the 2,800 requests made to Wiltshire Council for Local Welfare Assistance in 2013-14 were successful. The majority of awards were made to 25-35 year olds. Half of all awards were food-related, one quarter consisted of fuel top-up payments, with the remainder of awards made in the form of goods such as mattresses and recycled furniture. The total value of awards made by Wiltshire Council in 2013-14 came to £155,000.

The Claimant Commitment

The theory that people sit down with an adviser and agree a contract is fine. I'm not sure that's the reality.

Oral evidence from Niall Cooper, Director, Church Action on Poverty

The Claimant Commitment, formerly the Jobseeker's Agreement, is designed to set out the duties a claimant must fulfil in return for their benefit payments.

Based on the concerns raised by a large number of respondents, the Inquiry believed that the one-sided emphasis on claimant responsibility, and neglect of the claimant's rights or the responsibilities of Jobcentre Plus, may put some claimants at greater risk of being sanctioned as they are likely to struggle to fulfil their obligations without support from Jobcentre Plus.

The Inquiry found that, in rural and deprived urban areas, in particular, there are barriers such as travel costs and limited bus services that may serve to limit the ability of claimants to look for work and attend interviews:

Somehow [our clients] have to save £6.50 for the bus fare to Hereford when they have to sign on at the Job Centre, which can be quite a struggle. If they are called for a "job interview" or "training session", they may end up borrowing money for the fares, knowing that the Job Centre will reimburse this.

Written evidence from the Kington Community Larder, Welsh Border Region

In this rural county and diocese the cost of transport is enormous, from Ross to Hereford it is £5.50. In Shropshire from Craven Arms to Shrewsbury where clients have to sign on it is £9.60. Some of our clients have to get to other areas for training, and even though I understand travelling is reimbursed, they still have to pay the fare in the first instance which often they do not have.

Written evidence from the Very Revd. Michael Tavinor, Dean of Hereford

The Jobcentre Plus Flexible Support Fund can be used to help people move closer to, or into work, by covering claimants' travel expenses for job interviews and some appointments at Jobcentre Plus under the terms of their Claimant Commitment. But the Inquiry heard that claimants are often unaware of this discretionary support being available to them:

I was interested to hear about the Jobcentre Plus paying for somebody's travel if they need to go. Why don't they advertise that fact? Why don't they tell people these things? It seems there's a lot of stuff out there that people can get; it needs to be more transparent. People need to be told what they are able to claim and what they are entitled to, rather than just fumbling around and just stumbling across something they might be entitled to.

Oral evidence from Louise Davis, Project Manager, Salisbury Trust for the Homeless

The Inquiry heard that some claimants, particularly those with the most substantial barriers to work, are struggling with the 'online-first' job search activity they must fulfil as part of their Claimant Commitment. The Inquiry heard also about the inadequate training received by some claimants enrolled on the online skills courses made available to those facing such difficulties. It received evidence in Salisbury suggesting that such courses may only consist of one session with limited, if any, one-to-one guidance. As a result, claimants did not pick up the required skills and subsequently faced the prospect of being sanctioned for failing to apply for enough jobs online:

I haven't got any computer skills, all the jobs expect you to apply online. I was sent to learn how to use a computer once. They sat me in front of one and said "Off you go". I didn't know how to switch it on or use the mouse; I didn't know what to do. I wanted to learn but they didn't teach me. They didn't have the time with people coming in all the time. You can sit there for half an hour waiting for help – the session is only two hours.

Oral evidence from Jerry, a client receiving food assistance at The Alabare Centre

The Inquiry also received evidence suggesting that access to job search facilities is now more restricted within Jobcentre Plus, despite claimants being encouraged to register with the online Universal Jobmatch system and to use this, along with a telephone, as their main job search method.

Manchester Citizens Advice Bureau reported in its written submission that 50% of its clients said they did not have access to the internet and/or did not feel confident about using online services. A further 25% only had internet access through their phones, which is both expensive and difficult to use for, say, form filling.

The Inquiry was also told of a single woman living alone on benefits in an estate on the Kent coast. Her Jobseeker's Allowance was stopped because she had failed to log on to a particular website. She had no internet access at home and had to use facilities at the library. The computers at the library were much in demand and her time there was restricted. It was not always possible for her to gain access as often, or as long as was necessary, for her to fulfil the demands set by Jobcentre Plus.

The Department for Work and Pensions has removed 781 job search points and 1,406 telephones from Jobcentre Plus offices since 2008, but it increased the number of available computers to 2,411 in 2014. It is forecasting that 8,307 computers will be available in Jobcentre Plus offices by April 2015.

Summary

Against the long-term weakening of poorer households' ability to absorb shocks, the Inquiry encountered in its evidence a wide range of triggers behind the growing reliance on food banks and other forms of food assistance. Chief among these were those experiences with the benefits system which, in some cases, had left people with no money whatsoever.

Financial problems arising from the delay between making a claim and receiving one's first benefit payment were most likely to push households into the arms of their local food bank. A sudden loss of benefit or tax credits from an existing claim has likewise pushed a number of individuals and families to the brink of hunger, whether due to a change of household circumstances or from being sanctioned.

Aside from the delayed receipt or sudden loss of benefit, some poorer households may have struggled when being asked to find additional monies from a shrinking budget to cover more of their rent and, perhaps for the first time, Council Tax payments.

In cases where additional help may be available on a discretionary basis, through Short Term Benefit Advance or Local Welfare Assistance, this help sometimes fails to reach those in need because they are not told of their entitlement. For those who do claim, for example from the Flexible Support Fund, its effectiveness is limited because it only pays out in arrears to claimants, who, in the meantime, are likely to have met the extra outgoings on, for example, bus fares, from their food budget.

The accumulation and collection of debt on high-cost payday loans and goods bought on the home credit market can also trigger reliance on food banks, as can detrimental changes to one's working hours or indeed the loss of one's job – although the Inquiry's evidence suggests that even being in work is not necessarily enough to lift households free from hunger, due to the trends in earnings and living costs outlined in this section.

For families with children, the loss or absence of free school meals can also bring into play the need for emergency food assistance.

To discover the food choices and other forms of support available to clients when using emergency food assistance; and to consider the effectiveness of emergency food assistance in meeting immediate and long-term needs, and the possibility of these schemes becoming permanent features of the welfare state

The Inquiry encountered enormous flexibility in the landscape of food assistance provision. No two providers the Inquiry met were the same – each had adapted its provision depending on its own local circumstances, demand and resources. This flexibility was particularly evident in the sources and types of food offered to individuals; the way this food was prepared, served and distributed; the criteria individuals needed to fulfil in order to receive this food; and how providers went about trying to address individuals' immediate and long-term needs.

The closest the Inquiry saw to any standard form of provision was in the Trussell Trust network – but even here there was some room for manoeuvre depending on local circumstances. The Inquiry was interested to learn about the Trussell Trust's plan to roll out a 'food bank plus' model within the next five years, an idea to which this review returns later.

Food banks continue to adapt each day to new circumstances. They are very much in a state of flux.

The predominant method of distribution used within the food bank movement is to provide a 'food parcel' containing three days' worth of emergency food supplies, that an individual can take home with them. Yet some providers told the Inquiry that they allow clients to choose from a list of foods or to create their own 'shopping list', to maintain a sense of choice and dignity:

Importantly (for a person's dignity) clients choose their own food. We do not do pre-packaged food parcels.

Written evidence from Mark Goodway, Director, the Matthew Tree Project, Bristol

As part of our policy of treating people with as much dignity as possible we do not pre-pack our food parcels. Each week a food order list is put together detailing the food we have available.

Written evidence from the Todmorden Food Drop, Calder Valley

The Inquiry found also, particularly in rural areas and heavily deprived urban areas, that food parcels may be delivered directly to individuals at home. Food banks often did so in response to seeing people arriving at their doors with a referral voucher but no money to catch the bus home to their village. Some food banks offered to pay their fare for them. The Trussell Trust told the Inquiry that 24% of its food banks offer home distribution to people relying on their services.

A research project conducted by the Harrogate and Ripon Centres for Voluntary Service in July 2013 recommended that providers of emergency food assistance should make links with organisations in their area that work with vulnerable groups, including those who struggle to leave their home, to find ways of getting food parcels to those in need.⁵⁴

The Inquiry heard likewise that:

Another issue is physical access to emergency food provision; organisations providing emergency food assistance in the North East were and are primarily orientated to the main conurbations and towns leaving some concern about provision and access for rural residents.

Written evidence from Dr Jane Midgley, Lecturer in Planning, Newcastle University

From the beginning we recognised that people in crisis would not be able to reach a central food bank and therefore a network of volunteer drivers was set up to take food to people's homes, particularly in rural areas where there is little or no public transport.

Written evidence from Liskeard and Looe Food Bank

Research in the rural areas has led to the food bank purchasing a van for mobile distribution to isolated communities.

Written evidence from Flintshire Food Bank

Even in urban areas, witnesses told the Inquiry of their wish for maximum flexibility in meeting need:

We chose to set up our own project rather than join the food bank because we felt that we could meet a need quicker by always being available to provide emergency boxes of food. We take these boxes out to the people ourselves, 90% of the time on the same day we are advised of the need. We can then assess the need and see what they or we can do to sort out the problem.

Oral evidence from Phil Edwards, St Peter's Church, Rock Ferry, Wirral

Some food assistance providers, including FoodCycle, told the Inquiry they try to use their food assistance provision to tackle loneliness and isolation felt by some of their clients by, for example, serving hot meals in a communal setting to encourage people to eat together.

The provision of meals, rather than food parcels, was seen as a good way to engage people such as single young men, and to develop a sense of community which then had other benefits for those coming to eat.

Written evidence from Manchester Citizens Advice Bureau

Well-established food assistance schemes such as lunch clubs and day centres also play a key role in supporting elderly and vulnerable people. The Inquiry found the food on offer at these facilities tended to be fresher, and was readily prepared for people to consume:

Some organisations cook meals on their premises. This, in some instances, also responds to emergency food need, but more often serves the purpose of preventing the need for emergency food assistance.

Some of the organisations that provide fresh food have the dual objectives of: 1) reducing food waste and 2) providing food to people who need it. Arguably these organisations should remain in place even if food poverty is eradicated, as a means of redistributing good quality food that would otherwise go to waste.

In organisations where meals are served, food assistance is more fully integrated into other services. This model provides other benefits beyond those provided by food banks, particularly opportunities to build community and share skills.

[The Inquiry should] consider encouraging the development of a model of food assistance which integrates the provision of food into organisations which provide other forms of support.

Written evidence from the Oxford Food Bank

Tackling immediate hunger

As with the relationship between the workhouse and the 'casual poor' of Victorian England, reliance on food banks appears today, for the most part, to be a short-term measure to tide low-income households over in an emergency.

Between May 2013 and March 2014, an average of 1.6 vouchers were issued by the Wandsworth Food Bank to each client, indicating that most people using the food bank were not repeat users. In 2013, 82% of people relying on food parcels from The One Can Trust in High Wycombe needed three parcels or fewer. Similarly, 64% of people using the Exeter Food Bank since February 2014 did so only once. Across the Trussell Trust network there has always been an average of 2.5 parcels per client – suggesting that the food bank model functions primarily to cover a household's emergency needs during a short crisis period.

Most food banks are designed to address short-term hunger and help people out of crisis. They have become the new shock absorbers in people's lives. An invaluable form of support available to people relying on emergency food assistance is the warmth, companionship and friendliness of people who staff and volunteer at food banks. The Inquiry encountered this from every food bank it visited.

But for some people the shocks come so thick and fast, that emergency food assistance alone will not, and cannot, provide a long-term solution. The Milton Keynes Food Bank, for example, openly acknowledged that 'we do not offer a solution to any of the longer term needs or underlying causes of food poverty or food insecurity'.

The Inquiry heard that a growing number of people face recurring crises and are returning intermittently to their local food bank for emergency food assistance. The Children's Society said in evidence that some food banks they surveyed had reported allowing increasing numbers of visits per year per family due to persistent demand, and in the period since February 2014, 9% of clients have used Exeter Food Bank three times, and a further 9% four times or more. The Trussell Trust told the Inquiry that the numbers requiring more than four food parcels used to be between 3 and 4%, but had now climbed to 10%.

The Inquiry heard likewise across the board:

We've had to increase our provision from a week's food three times in six months, to a week's food six times in six months. And we've done that for two reasons: one because they need it; and two, because we want to help them out of their situation.

Oral evidence from Don Gardner, Manager, Camborne, Pool and Redruth (CPR) Food Bank

Chaotic families keep coming back to us because they are vulnerable. They're only allowed to have one crisis a year and three food boxes. It isn't realistic.

Oral evidence from the Alabare Centre, Salisbury

Food by itself from disparate organisations whilst kind, good and right, is not the answer... We make no evident change to lives ... By simply giving we do not help people help themselves.

Written evidence from the St Jeanne Jugan Trust, Leeds

Food banks were initially established to meet emergency need. This need has now developed into a chronic problem, which cannot be solved in the short-term with just three food parcels. There is a growing recognition that limited parcels are not enough, nor do they respect the dignity of the recipient or grow the capacity for the individual to become self-sufficient. The current food bank model is not effective in meeting the long-term needs of those in food poverty.

Written evidence from The Catholic Church

The Inquiry received much evidence to support these arguments. A research project in Bromley, in which 40% of interviewees had used a food bank five times in the last three years, demonstrated that their vulnerability to hunger was a long-term problem which the food bank provision had not alleviated. The Todmorden Food Drop observed of its clients that 'it is no longer the situation that people only need food on a short-term basis whilst their benefits are sorted out', and the Matthew Tree Project in Bristol told the Inquiry that whilst 35% of its clients attended for one week only, 44% attended for four weeks or more. The replication of these trends further afield led food banks in Penzance and Okehampton, for example, to continue supplying some people for longer than the recommended three parcels.

The Inquiry found that many food banks have dedicated a lot of time and resources to trying to mitigate what they perceive to be short-term crises with three food parcels and a listening ear. The Inquiry was keen to salute the work of these providers who have stopped hunger reaching a catastrophic scale in this country. But their solutions remain short-term; they do not provide long-term solutions to food poverty. There is evidence of an increasing number of 'repeat' cases whereby individuals have deeper issues that extend beyond a single food parcel.

During its visit to Salisbury, the birthplace of the organisation, the Trussell Trust told the Inquiry it now realised that these three bags should be just the start of a more intensive series of steps to help people out of food poverty. The Inquiry heard also about its recent pilot of cooking courses and co-location of welfare benefits, debt advice and other services in its food banks.

The evidence suggests that, overall, food banks are relatively effective at tackling short-term hunger, but people's needs often extend beyond three bags of food. Evidence submitted to the Inquiry suggests a large number of individuals and families require more long-term support if they are to escape hunger and food poverty.

A large number of evidence submissions insisted that the track this country has taken in relation to food banks is both undesirable and unsustainable. HOPE+ Food Bank in Liverpool, was concerned that:

Should such numbers be maintained, then we will support around 12,000 people with emergency food provision in our second year of operation, quite apart from our additional areas of support. The issue of quite how to sustain such numbers; both in terms of food provision, logistics and transportation, and volunteer numbers and support is something that we are yet to find answers for.

Written evidence from HOPE+ Food Bank, Liverpool

North Northumberland Food Bank was adamant that what they saw as:

... the emerging model of donations and food banks filling gaps left by a retreating state is not sustainable in the long term. My organisation and those others involved in the food bank are all under pressure to find time and resources to support the food bank. There are real cash costs to us in providing accommodation and staff time and we are unlikely to be able to absorb these over the long-term.

Written evidence from the North Northumberland Food Bank, Berwick-upon-Tweed

Exeter Food Bank was concerned likewise that:

The food bank's original role as a short-term provider of emergency food has been significantly challenged in recent months by the scale of growth and the duration of time during which people need support. This is a concern to Exeter Food Bank both operationally and ethically.

Written evidence from Laura McIvor, Exeter Foodbank, and Dr Andrew Williams, Department of Geography, University of Exeter

The Bradford District Welfare Reform Strategic Group set out the stark challenges facing food banks:

The majority of food banks are run by volunteers, some have part-time staff. All are struggling to access the funding they need for the aspects of their service which have cost (rent and utilities on storage and distribution premises, cost of purchasing staples they don't receive in large enough quantities from donations). All have either seen donations drop (perhaps due to the increasing number of food banks establishing) or donations have remained stable or increased but not at a level sufficient to meet the increasing demand.

Written evidence from the Bradford District Welfare Reform Strategic Group

Food banks are therefore at a crossroads. Two pieces of evidence, in particular, put forward the stark choice confronting the country as to the function we might wish food banks and other providers to fulfil in our society:

Food banks are going to be here to stay for quite some time. I'm completely split over it. On the one hand food banks are evidence of a community that's come together to provide for its neighbours. It's very often one of the only ports of call for very desperate people who need food in their cupboards. If someone's reaching out to give them just a little, of course they're going to take it ... food banks are quite often the only help that some people will get, or a gateway to more help. I would be petrified if tomorrow all food banks were closed down. On the other hand I think the need for food banks in our country is a disgrace.

Oral evidence from Jack Monroe

Evidence suggests that there may be two lines of development in the embedding of food banks within the welfare state in Britain. In the first instance, philanthropic food banking could become increasingly part of the welfare state, should local assistance schemes formalise referrals to food banks as part of their provision, and if practices become embedded and localised systems of formal and informal support develop. On the other hand, food banks may remain distinct philanthropic initiatives but find themselves working in the absence of the welfare state. This possibility is raised by the potential for the abolition of Local Welfare Assistance schemes, continued reductions in social security entitlements, and failures to rectify inadequate procedures and processes.

Written evidence from Hannah Lambie-Mumford, University of Sheffield

The Inquiry also encountered a third option. Food banks and other providers have shown they can use food as a gateway to help solve more deep-seated problems afflicting people experiencing hunger. A large amount of evidence suggested a twofold revolution is required to ensure food banks and other providers can make a lasting difference to the lives of people experiencing hunger who, for whatever reason, have fallen below our national minimum. The first involves securing a reliable source of decent food to give to people in need – we turn to this in the next section of the review. The second needs to incorporate a wider range of services, and move perhaps towards a 'one stop shop' model referred to by some as 'food bank plus', to help people escape hunger before it tightens its grip on their lives.

Overcoming hunger and food poverty

The Inquiry found that a significant number of people relying on food banks do not have the means, capabilities or self-esteem to interact with official processes and organisations:

Food banks provide a strong connection with vulnerable people whose experience and needs are often not heard clearly enough by statutory services.

Written evidence from Sheffield City Council

Food may be a secondary justification for the emergency food provision activity ie building trust with homeless, both new to the streets and entrenched to initially engage and potentially keep user in contact with housing and other public agencies.

Written evidence from Dr Jane Midgley, Lecturer in Planning, Newcastle University

When you're at the bottom, grabbing hold of the bottom rung of the ladder is a huge task in itself ... Often the people who find that things do improve do so because someone has taken the time to sit alongside them and help them through the paper work for benefits.

Oral evidence from Revd. Keith Addenbrooke, Vicar, St Paul with St Luke, Tranmere, Wirral

With this in mind, many of the food banks the Inquiry spoke to expressed a willingness and indeed enthusiasm to be able to offer a wider range of goods and services to their clients, in order to help them out of food poverty.

We are greatly aware that many of our clients lack self-esteem, have difficulties in literacy and numeracy, have difficulty in completing forms or using ICT. We are actively trying to address this. Also we are exploring possibilities for help with budgeting and teaching clients how to grow vegetables and cook simple, healthy meals.

Written evidence from the Kington Community Larder, Welsh Border Region

There are two connected aspects to any food poverty solutions: crisis work dealing with immediate hunger; and longer term work on how to live on less money on an ongoing basis.

Written evidence from the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership

Such goods and services may also include clothing, advocacy and advice on welfare benefits, help with mental health and wellbeing, representation from Citizens Advice Bureaux, credit unions and debt advice. The Jubilee Food Bank in Sheffield told the Inquiry that it aims to use Public Health funding to match fund a joint bid between Sheffield Citizens Advice Bureau and Sheffield Food Banks to increase the availability of advice for food bank users in the next 12 months.

For those who told the Inquiry they already provided these extra goods and services, this was seen to form an important part of their provision. The Inquiry heard, for example, that some food banks gave out 'start-up' boxes, including essential kitchen items (tin openers, tea towels, and cutlery) to ensure that those who are in temporary or new accommodation and relying on emergency food assistance have the utensils necessary to cook and eat with.

We don't just put food in people's bellies. It's actually about sitting down with them and giving them something to do. It's putting them on courses and giving them hope. We don't just deal with food. We deal with people's emotions, their clothes, their furniture, their maths lessons – every single problem you can think of.

Oral evidence from Community Spirit Wirral

Providers are increasingly looking to adopt this model of longer term support to try to meet individuals' complex circumstances and better mitigate the types of crises afflicting them. In the past year, for example, Exeter Food Bank has seen a marked increase in the duration of some clients' 'crises', a period in which they struggle to access other forms of support.

The Inquiry heard how some providers were trying to provide proactive employment support to help their clients get back on their feet. Chapter 1, a food assistance provider which has built relationships with local retailers in Manchester to provide employment, told the Inquiry that:

Marks & Spencer have given full-time jobs to 2 of our residents. Pret A Manger, who support us with food, have also given 4 of our lads an apprenticeship which in 2 cases led to a permanent job in their shop in Manchester.

Written evidence from Pauline Gaye, Chapter 1, Manchester

One of the issues addressed by some food banks is their clients' ability to cope on a low income. The evidence suggests there is a great deal of help needed by some individuals and families, who may lack vital budgeting and cooking skills, if they are to develop the required level of resilience to help prevent them from slipping back into food poverty in future. The Inquiry was told of the frustration among some food banks across West Yorkshire who believed there were not enough long-term solutions on offer.

But the Inquiry did encounter several examples of good practice across the country. The Matthew Tree Project in Bristol told the Inquiry that:

Food is a flag to say someone is in real need. Over time we build relationships with each client to find out what the barriers are. As the charity has developed we've added extra services based on what our clients want. We've now got life skills coaching in cooking and budgeting. We provide the food as long as someone's in need but we provide the extra help to help them become independent.

Oral evidence from Mark Goodway, Director, The Matthew Tree Project, Bristol

Evidence from Together Liverpool found that an increasing number of food banks in Merseyside offer debt advice and some offer credit union services. St Peter's in Rock Ferry, Wirral, for example, noticed that many of its clients had ongoing financial problems and required longer-term assistance. It is therefore looking to set up a debt advice project with Christians Against Poverty. Others offer cooking classes:

How do we move beyond crisis and towards dignity and choice? ... The crisis isn't going away anytime soon, we all know that. So we're trying to introduce structure and choice. We target our supply to minimise waste. We create a four day menu that comes complete with recipes, and we do cooking courses in our own food hubs.

Oral evidence from Robbie Davison, Can Cook

Truro Food Bank told the Inquiry it had begun organising 'Eat Well, Spend Less' practical cooking courses, as part of a Trussell Trust pilot project, consisting of training people to shop and cook on a small budget, as they had found many young people now living on their own had no cooking skills. To supplement this they published a booklet of simple recipes from a food box, prepared by a well-known local chef. This has since been taken up by the Local Authority which has published a more detailed booklet of recipes under the title 'Eat Well, Spend Less' and one of their volunteers is helping them arrange further cooking courses.

Food Newcastle also gave an example of a project whereby two short cooking skills courses were provided for individuals in the local community who were using food banks. An additional project is now being targeted at recent and current food bank users, as well as those at risk of using food banks. The free six-week course includes varied sessions on:

- Nutrition education/practical cookery
- Small scale food growing
- Portion size guidance
- Food storage and waste reduction
- Shopping skills and budgeting
- Meal planning

An excellent example of such an approach came from the Fir Vale Food Bank in Sheffield. Since 2013, it has been working in partnership with Green City Action, a community allotments group, which visits every other Thursday afternoon to help food bank users engage with food growing, understanding of soil and making planters from recycled materials. They use a section of a church garden as a mini-training allotment to grow strawberries, broad beans, lettuces, herbs, onions, garlic and potatoes.

The Matthew Tree Project aims to open Bristol's first Good FoodMarket selling locally produced food on a 'stepped' pricing model through a membership scheme. Those on low incomes will have a class of membership that affords them discounts from the normal price and this will be preloaded onto their membership cards to be automatically applied at the checkout. To shop at the Good FoodMarket everyone will be required to become members and all membership cards will look the same.

These examples, and many others submitted to the Inquiry, demonstrate the potential for food banks to evolve and provide constructive, local solutions to food poverty.

Bill Gray from NHS Scotland urged the Inquiry to recognise the importance of these longer-term solutions, and did not want to see them subsumed into emergency, short-term projects:

Central to our experience has been local initiatives using food as a means of inclusion and empowerment from older people to people with learning disabilities ... the efforts of homeless organisations to use food in a move away from a hand out to a hand up has ramifications for the challenges currently faced by those distributing food parcels.

The current focus on alleviating the need for emergency food aid, and anticipated growth in demand in the future, highlights a clear risk that community food aid activities are diverted from creating sustainable change for people experiencing food poverty. 'A hand up, not a hand out' resonates with the aspirations of community food initiatives to tackle food poverty within communities. Creative and constructive community food responses, which are based on a model of food plus, are building capacity within communities and contributing to a fairer, healthier Scotland.

Written evidence from Bill Gray, Community Food and Health (Scotland), NHS Scotland

Complex personal and family crises in low-income households can be incredibly difficult to resolve. Once they become exposed to hunger, some people may face an enormous struggle to escape its clutches. The Inquiry's evidence suggests that food banks and food assistance providers have the potential to evolve in a way which can help people plot such an escape route.

Food Bank Plus

The Inquiry heard how a growing number of food banks are, or are at least considering the possibility of running 'food bank plus' models, in which a range of services are co-located under one roof to enhance the support available to people following a personal or family crisis.

The 'food bank plus' model is developing along the following lines:

Food Bank Plus is a signposting food bank area where we have housing officers, we have Samaritans because there are people who don't know where to turn, we have a job club, we have a benefits agency, we have a befriending agency and we have pastoral care from the church. They're all there on food bank day. We don't give people a card and say 'go and see them, Friday week' – they're actually there and they can talk to people now. And that, hopefully, will help those families move away from the poverty that they would still be in if they were to fall off my wall in six weeks' time. I believe this is the way to go forward.

Oral evidence from Don Gardner, Manager, Camborne, Pool and Redruth (CPR) Food Bank

There's also someone [located in Tower Hamlets Food Bank] from the Local Authority who can assist with applications for the Local Welfare Assistance and has an immediate link to Housing Benefit. In that model it's not uncommon for someone with a benefit problem that's caused them not to have enough money for food to walk out at the end of the day not just with a food parcel but potentially with a £45 crisis grant.

Oral evidence from Martin Williams, Child Poverty Action Group

Our five-year business plan is to bring all these [benefits advice, debt and housing] agencies together to actually try and address the underlying reasons why people are coming to food banks. If we can educate them how to manage their finances, and get advisors in every food bank in the UK, not just Trussell Trust ones, in front of the client to get them the support they need, we could address this issue ... We've highlighted through our trial in Tower Hamlets that the three most consistent problems given are benefits, problem debt and housing. If we can solve those problems we can probably solve 60-70% of our clients' issues ... we're going to try and put welfare advisers, debt advisers and Housing Benefit advisers in every food bank across our network.

This is not about the Trussell Trust doing things, this is about the Trussell Trust opening our food banks to allow them to work out of our food banks; so we're bringing organisations that are already there together for one holistic one stop shop ... It's more than signposting, it's an introduction. When we signpost people, although it's effective, it's not totally effective. Some of the people never get to where we send them to. We have the relationship and we're going to use that relationship to introduce them to another body, sit with them for a couple of meetings and then that other body can take over with welfare, debt issues etc.

Oral evidence from David McAuley, Chief Executive, The Trussell Trust

Given the range of issues that are faced by Tower Hamlets residents, ie high levels of deprivation, vulnerable adults, mental health illnesses, domestic violence and child poverty to name a few, we designed a project named 'food bank plus' which is in essence the co-location of services into the food bank session to better support our clients, given the reasons they are referred to our service.

Written evidence from The Rt Revd Adrian Newman, The Bishop of Stepney

If food banks are to be effective, the evidence suggests they must be tied up with other forms of support that get to the root of the problems facing individuals and families who are hungry.

The Inquiry heard from some providers who opted from their outset for this mode of provision.

The idea for a Food Bank Plus was obvious, since the needs of people trapped in food poverty are often diverse and complex. The need to involve not only the city centre faith communities, but partner agencies able to provide advice and assistance directly, rather than via signposting and future appointments, was also obvious: research has demonstrated that those trapped in financial crisis are frequently unable or unwilling to follow up on signposted advice.

Written evidence from HOPE+ Food Bank, Liverpool

In addition to food, some of the food banks provide information about how to cook food; benefits and council tax advice, debt/budgeting advice, career advice, signposting to other services; computer access and newspapers ... Several organisations are co-located with other organisations such as advice centres and children's centres. In some cases, clients who initially come only to get food then start using the other facilities, and vice versa. In other cases, co-location makes it easier for people to get multiple forms of assistance in one location, and for multiple supporting agencies to work collaboratively.

Written evidence from the Oxford Food Bank

The Inquiry heard also that Lambeth Borough Council has begun funding its local advice network to provide debt, housing and benefit advice surgeries in each local food bank so that, when they are open, those attending could access on the spot advice to deal with any issues that might have driven them to seek help.

The Inquiry was told that being part of a 'Community One Stop Shop', housing Citizens Advice Bureaux staff and an Employment Adviser, had enhanced provision at the Broomhouse Foodbank in Edinburgh, for example. The appeal of this approach is now becoming evident in other Local Authorities:

There is the potential for services (such as welfare rights) to be better integrated with food bank provision to meet need ... A number of food banks expressed concern at access to welfare rights advice. In one case a sessional service had been withdrawn due to cuts, while others noted that people in crisis would have to start queuing at 7am in order to stand a chance of being seen by their local CAB.

Written evidence from Sheffield City Council

The idea of 'food bank plus' is being seriously explored. As well as offering food provision, the scheme would involve a worker visiting family homes to try to get to the root cause of the problem. This reflects a move towards helping people to help themselves rather than just giving handouts.

Written evidence from The Rt Revd. Christopher Forster, The Bishop of Portsmouth

Collaboration, and even co-location, between food banks and other services would improve the overall package of help for users. And the creation of a Newcastle Food Bank network can only help provision.

Written evidence from Food Newcastle

People use food banks at a time of crisis. They use food banks when other strategies have been exhausted and they do so at a point of last resort. In terms of bringing services together and having access points for people who may need to access lots of different services, that's a model to be welcomed.

Oral evidence from Rachael Orr, Head of UK Poverty Programme, Oxfam

Providing low cost, fresh produce and education along with information on accessing other services in collaboration with food banks would provide a more sustainable and productive option and help empower people to make positive change rather than have to always rely on handouts.

Written evidence from Lee Martin, Chair, East London Food Access

The benefits of this approach are most likely to be felt by those families who have been kicked to the bottom and are struggling to lift themselves out of food poverty. This scenario was spelt out in oral evidence by Diane Kilgour, who runs the Clacton hub of FoodCycle:

We have the hard core unemployed and unemployable; and then we have the other ones that have hit hard times – lost jobs, lost homes – it's almost two tier. They need to be treated differently. You need to do other things to help the hard core. These people need a reason to get up in the morning. You need a food bank in lots of areas, but tied around that food bank you do need to put something into it ... The ones that are struggling with life don't keep appointments with psychiatrists, don't go to the hospital. Giving food has got to be tied up with a lot more. It's not enough just to give food.

Oral evidence from Diane Kilgour, Hub Leader, Clacton-on-Sea FoodCycle

Food & Cornwall believed that such an intervention would be most effective when using a combination of behaviour change approaches, group work, goal setting, nutrition education and support with using telephones and computers. They agreed that these interventions appear to have a larger effect in individuals with pre-existing health conditions.

What this means to people in practice, was set out in written evidence by Bridging The Gap, a social enterprise based in North Devon:

We offer an open access day centre for vulnerable people in our community. This could include people suffering from homelessness, substance misuse, poor mental health, poverty or offending behaviour. People come to us for a variety of reasons but initially most come in a state of crisis. Our aim is to deal with the immediate needs first, most often the need for food, clothes, shower etc. and then reach the underlying reason for their current situation with a view to supporting people towards independence. As part of our service we provide a free hot meal every day we are open. The free meal is an essential part of our service to the vulnerable in our community and is often an initial point of engagement.

Written evidence from Bridging The Gap, North Devon

The appeal of such provision was set out in evidence from by FoodCycle, FareShare, and the Oxford Food Bank:

To just walk into a Mind centre has a stigma attached to it. I probably wouldn't walk in there. If I know there's a free meal there and I've met a buddy who's going to go, I'm going to walk in. I sit down, I have the meal and there's people who sit and talk with me and I start to feel comfortable. You start to build social capital with those people.

Oral evidence from Mary McGrath, Chief Executive, Food Cycle

If you're homeless or a drug user, you don't necessarily go to a centre to get help. You go because you're hungry. Once you are there, it is key that the other support services are available and that you have access to it while you are there. The word gets on the street that that place has decent food.

Oral evidence from Mark Varney, Director of Food, FareShare

The majority of our member charities are required to prepare and serve food onsite to their beneficiaries, as opposed to giving them a food parcel to take away. This food plays a critical role in enabling charities to engage with their clients and the offer of a hot meal is often what brings them in in the first place. Once through the door these charities offer support to help clients tackle wider issues, including homelessness, drug addiction or domestic violence. It is vital we do not just address hunger but the causes of why an individual is struggling to feed themselves and their family.

Written evidence from FareShare

At Oxfordshire Mind's facilities, the daily meal is a nice, social ritual, like in a family, anchoring their activities

Oral evidence from David Cairns, Chairman, Oxford Food Bank

'Food Bank Plus' appears to be formed out of a desire to try to provide a better service for clients. The Grange Baptists Drop-In Centre gave an apt description of this ability to 'reach the hardest to reach', during the Inquiry's Birkenhead evidence session:

We're a voluntary service so we don't have to ask any questions – we're not government-bound. So we're very able to be completely open and that encourages them to come and talk to us about their problems. It's usually about how to get somewhere to live, how to get somewhere they can feel secure.

Oral evidence from Melanie McGee, Grange Baptists Drop-In Centre, Birkenhead

Denise Bentley, the manager of Tower Hamlets Food Bank, compounded this:

What the council learnt was that the most vulnerable people – those needing the most help and are the hardest to reach – come to the food bank. So what they decided to do was to employ someone to sit in our food bank to give housing benefit advice and to give a crisis grant donation to people they see who are in crisis ... The council, together with the CPAG, forms this triage that we've pioneered that is Food Bank Plus. So in week one, the person leaves with a solution and will probably not need to come back to us again.

Oral evidence from Denise Bentley, Tower Hamlets Food Bank

The Inquiry heard likewise in written evidence from The Strategy, a social enterprise which runs an engagement and outreach café to help people in crisis in Buckinghamshire who are struggling due to homelessness or an addiction, or both:

We aim to encourage people to seek the help they need and to engage or reengage with other support services provided in Buckinghamshire. Other support services have found most of our clients to be notoriously difficult to engage with, but we have found that the café setting and our approach has broken down barriers, allowing people to return time and time again and ultimately to access the help that they need ... relationships have been built with people who have previously refused to engage with any support service and this is largely due to the welcoming, non-judgemental atmosphere of the café ...

Written evidence from The Strategy, Aylesbury

This was borne out in the Inquiry's Birkenhead evidence session, in which Paul, a former food bank user who had previously suffered with severe addiction problems, said:

If you're an addict you'll spend your money on whatever you're addicted to. I see food banks as a first step towards recovery from that because they and other companies signpost you to other places. They give you the support to get through it. They take a person-centred approach. They have budgeting groups where you learn how to budget. It's now about getting the word out to the suffering alcoholic and drug addict.

Oral evidence from Paul, Birkenhead

The Catholic Church gave the example of Catholics for AIDS Prevention and Support, which provides food at every peer support group meeting in London, Manchester and Essex for people living with HIV. The Church said that 'it is clear a significant number of members attend primarily because a meal is provided; often the only meal that day.'

Summary

The Inquiry encountered a vast array of provision across the food assistance landscape. Some providers offer people three days' worth of emergency supplies in a food parcel; others allow clients to choose supplies from an open selection of donated food items. Providers in some areas deliver emergency food assistance to people's homes, while others serve hot meals on their premises.

The predominant objective which has accompanied the rise of food banks is to try to alleviate short-term hunger resulting from one or more of the issues outlined in the previous section. But the Inquiry picked up a certain willingness amongst a number of providers to contribute to more sustainable responses to hunger and food poverty.

The evidence submitted to the Inquiry suggests food banks and other providers could have a key role to play in helping individuals and families overcome personal and financial crises and the deep-seated problems that lay beneath them. There was almost no desire for food banks to take the place of statutory welfare provision in this country. The evidence suggests instead that there is a general acceptance of the need for more long-term interaction between food banks and vulnerable individuals, so as to help them overcome some of the deep-seated causes of hunger and food poverty when there is nothing, or little, in the way of statutory services.

To investigate the source of emergency food assistance providers' supplies – how much is supplied by consumers and institutions?

Food banks and other providers generally source their food from a combination of personal, commercial and church donations, as well as through partnerships with organisations, such as FareShare, that redistribute edible surplus food from supermarkets' supply chains.

The independent Wantage and Grove Food Bank in Oxfordshire told the Inquiry that its food is almost entirely supplied by individuals, although a local company has made donations, and the local supermarkets allow collection on their premises. Likewise the People's Kitchen in Newcastle said:

Our food comes from harvest festivals; individual donations; a large baker supplies daily bread, buns and a limited supply of pies and pasties; collections by groups; intermittent donations of canned or packaged food from retailers; left-over food from functions.

Written evidence from the People's Kitchen, Newcastle

The Inquiry also heard that the Oswaldtwistle Food Bank in Lancashire is supported by 11 local churches and is run by volunteers from these churches. Its initial supplies of food were provided by the Harvest Festivals at these churches. Now it is supplied by the congregations and by the local Tesco, Asda and Co-operative supermarkets who all donate food. It uses funds raised from the Duchy of Lancaster to buy bread and other fresh food.

Over 90% of the food distributed by the Trussell Trust food bank network is donated by the public through supermarket collections and private acts of giving. Likewise there are some independent food banks that rely on such donations. The Kington Community Larder, for example, on the Welsh Borders told the Inquiry in written evidence, 'Currently all the food distributed through the Kington Community Larder is donated by church members or the general public. No institutions are involved.'

The Inquiry detected some concern amongst food banks about an overreliance on donations; both in terms of the quality of food supplied and the reliability of future supply. Hopeful Hampers Food Bank in Bridport said in written evidence that '*relying solely on donated food would significantly diminish the dietary range of foodstuffs provided ... We feel that fresh fruit and vegetables provide a healthier diet than tinned or dried but can only provide these whilst the grant funding lasts.*'

It was felt that food banks must seek to secure alternative sources of food if they are to continue being able to meet local needs.

The Inquiry found also that some independent food banks were able to diversify their supply of food by building local partnerships. Derbyshire food banks, for example, are involved in sourcing fresh food from FareShare, local supermarkets, shops, and allotment societies, as well as through individual donations.

The Inquiry heard how Asda, Tesco and Sainsbury's had pioneered national action on the redistribution of usable surplus food. It heard also from the Oxford Food Bank, where enterprising individuals had struck up partnerships with their local Waitrose. The Inquiry was impressed by the commitment of staff in all of these national and regional initiatives, and this is discussed in more detail later in this review.

In their efforts to source and store food supplies, many providers have had to prioritise the need simply to provide food to cover an emergency, rather than the variety of food they offer. The Wantage and Grove Food Bank in Oxfordshire acknowledged that 'food choice isn't really considered. The food bank simply attempts to provide key essentials for people at a time of crisis within the constraints of health and safety legislation.'

Hence why, according to the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership, 'Our largest local food bank is concerned that any incentives on supermarkets to donate surplus food should favour the redistribution of food via organisations such as FareShare.'

The Inquiry heard from a number of food banks that their existing arrangements had limited the amount of fresh food they are able to distribute. The North Northumberland Food Bank in Berwick upon Tweed, for example, told the Inquiry, 'We do not provide fresh fruit or vegetables as we lack the resources and volunteers to manage use by dates'. The vast majority of food distributed by food banks is non-perishable – tinned, jarred and canned goods, pasta and rice:

The services currently on offer do what they can to provide nutritionally balanced foods but most are unable to offer much in the way of the amount of fresh fruit and vegetables recommended by the Government, for example, due to cost and the nature of the way their services operate which means there is a focus on providing dry goods with a long shelf life via the food banks and cheap foods in vast quantities for the hot food providers. Those involved in delivering the services would like to do more but feel that providing any food at all is the priority.

Written evidence from the Bradford District Welfare Reform Strategic Group

Nevertheless, some providers are searching for ways to overcome this. Truro Food Bank told the Inquiry that they had introduced a scheme of giving vouchers to the value of £5 which could be redeemed at a local greengrocers for fresh fruit and vegetables. It is one of the 23% of Trussell Trust food banks now providing at least some fresh food.

The Harrogate and Ripon Centres for Voluntary Service said in a 2013 research report that food banks in North Yorkshire had faced a number of challenges in addressing healthy eating, but that they had responded by linking up, for example, with local grocery stores which could provide a manageable amount of fresh food.⁵⁵

On a national scale, Tesco has pioneered methods of surplus redistribution and support for the Trussell Trust network through its National Food Collection.

Yet concerns were raised as to the effect of these national agreements on the ability of independent providers to negotiate locally with individual stores, and in particular the ability of independent food assistance providers to diversify their food supplies:

We are unable to persuade food retailers to regularly donate fresh food, even if we are their charity of the year.

We have been concerned for some time that a lot of edible produce is wasted and that we could put this to good use. The diet we provide is mainly made up of tinned goods, which whilst being nutritious and filling, does not provide adequate variety and health benefits.

Written evidence from the People's Kitchen, Newcastle

A large number of food banks and food assistance providers told the Inquiry that barriers around cost and storage prevented them from asking for donations of fresh food.

Some providers have attempted to broaden the range of food on offer by turning to organisations that redistribute edible surplus food from supermarkets' supply chains. The Inquiry heard from the HOPE+ Food Bank in Liverpool, that:

After some discussion on what we could provide our guests with, FareShare now supply us with fresh fruit and vegetables on a weekly basis in sufficient quantity to enable us to provide over two hundred people each week with fresh fruit and vegetables. FareShare also supply us with items often not included in individual donations such as breakfast cereal, pasta and curry sauces and toiletries.

Written evidence from HOPE+ Food Bank, Liverpool

Yet the Inquiry also detected some concern about the up-front costs involved in registering for such supplies:

One problem identified was that subscription based schemes for redistributing surplus food meant that small charities were required to find a relatively large amount of money from their resources to be able to receive the food.

Written evidence from Dr Jane Midgley, Lecturer in Planning, Newcastle University

One of the major problems identified with this sort of partnership is the logistical mechanism between the food industry, the food redistribution organisations and the food banks or food assistance providers. This is explored later in this review.

The Hastings Food Bank said it was giving out more food each month than was being donated, and that they were finding this 'difficult to sustain'. Likewise, the Bradford District Welfare Reform Strategic Group told the Inquiry that the demand they are seeing for emergency food assistance is larger and growing at a faster pace than their donations can keep up with. Professor Elizabeth Dowler agreed that the current model's 'rather ad hoc nature and its dependence on donations and on volunteers makes it vulnerable to not being able to adjust easily to changes in need, and few systems currently in place can deal effectively with sudden shifts in demand.' The Liverpool Social and Community Network suggested that at some point it might need to consider charging for the use of food banks. As we found earlier in this review, such scenarios have been borne out across other advanced Western economies where food banks have become more heavily entrenched.

The Inquiry also picked up concerns around 'giving fatigue', which might lead to situations where providers are unable to meet demand for their services, with individuals currently giving food 'with heavy hearts':

There is a sense [in the Trussell Trust] of "what happens if in two to three years people are immune to the food bank poster when they walk through Tesco on a Saturday?"

Oral evidence Hannah Lambie-Mumford, University of Sheffield

In our opinion the food model of donations is probably not sustainable long-term. Supermarket customers will not give indefinitely without good cause.

Oral evidence from Malcolm Peirce, Director, ReadFood

Summary

The Inquiry detected a potential fragility in the current model of donated food for the purposes of emergency food assistance. The evidence emphasised the need both to reduce demand for food banks' services and to put in place systems to ensure a more reliable and varied source of food for individuals who are hungry.

To examine the effectiveness and sustainability of our food model in providing universal access to healthy, affordable food in this country

The Inquiry found that, as well as lacking the resources with which to buy and prepare food, households experiencing food poverty and in danger of going hungry, generally encounter difficulties in accessing decent food. We outline in this section each of the faults the Inquiry identified within this country's food model; namely access to shops, concerns around the choice, quality and pricing of food, and the level of waste and surplus usable food.

Access to decent, affordable food

The Inquiry received evidence to suggest that poorer households have inadequate access to decent, affordable food. The Public Health Nutrition Team at Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust argued in written evidence that the area in which a person lives influences their ability to obtain a nutritious and adequate diet. The Inquiry heard similarly that:

In essence 'poor eating' is a feature for those on low incomes. This is due to limited choice, less access to land for growing, being time poor and poor transport access to shops. Related work on food access shows less choice and greater cost 'locally' for those on low incomes wishing to eat a healthy basket of food.

Written evidence from Professor Martin Caraher, Professor of Food and Health Policy, City University London

The Lancashire Food Partnership noted in its written submission problems around the *'limited choice of quality food in small local shops. For older residents the lack of mobility and funds disqualified them from the choice of supermarkets, often limiting them to local providers.'*

Likewise, the Oswaldtwistle Food Bank in Lancashire said that:

... the area has a very poor health record which is caused in part by the inability to provide a healthy and balanced diet with the budgets people are working with. Most of the discount shops are out of town and inaccessible to people without cars, bus fares are constantly rising, it is £3.10 return to the nearest town or a 3 mile walk so people are forced to use the local shops which tend to be more expensive and offer less discounts.

Written evidence from the Oswaldtwistle Food Bank, Lancashire

Dr Clare Pettinger from Plymouth University, added:

Many families experiencing poverty live in areas where public transportation isn't readily available or affordable and cannot afford to own a car. Many of these families will be forced to settle for higher-priced 'corner' stores rather than travel to the nearest large supermarket.

Written evidence from Dr Clare Pettinger, Faculty of Health and Human Sciences, Plymouth University

And the Cathedral Food Bank in Bangor, Gwynedd, said:

Food choices and availability are diminishing, especially for the poorer rural communities ... the poorer areas of the region are typified by a lack of available transport, either public or private, making it harder for these communities to have access to the cheaper offers at national supermarkets.

Written evidence from the Cathedral Food Bank, Bangor

Such areas could be described as 'food deserts'. According to Bath and North East Somerset Council, these are:

... areas where residents live 500 metres or more from an outlet that sells fresh and healthy foods. Food deserts emerged into culture because broad scale economy allows the food in supermarkets to be cheaper and cover a wide range; this reduced the number of smaller high street stores and increased their prices ... In Bath and North East Somerset 17,251 properties are located 500m or more from a local food store, and therefore these residents could be at risk of food poverty particularly if they have no means of private transport or infrequent bus links.

Written evidence from Bath and North East Somerset Council

Milton Keynes Food Bank told the Inquiry that it operates a mobile service on two days of the week, visiting some of the most deprived areas of Milton Keynes because, for people living in such areas, the range of food retailers and services provided locally appears to be limited. It said:

The shops tend only to offer high fat, high sugar, convenient and fast food products which are unlikely to be the healthiest or lowest cost options. More could be done to encourage a better range of food providers to be set up in such areas, including providers of fresh vegetables, fruit and healthier, affordable meal options.

Written evidence from Milton Keynes Food Bank

There was a strong determination in the evidence to turn around the workings of our food system to ensure food markets and retail outlets provide better access to decent, affordable food for all:

We need to repurpose the food system so that its primary role is to feed everyone well. This will mean more of a mixed economy of food, more intervention by government in partnership with civil society and an alignment of health, environment, agriculture and fiscal policies.

Written evidence from Nourish Scotland

There is overwhelming evidence that many people cannot access or afford a decent diet in the UK ... UK food security is not purely about producing more food or about food prices. It is about ensuring we can provide enough food to meet needs now and in the future; it is about whether food is being used for the right purposes, efficiently and not wasted; and whether it is made available, affordable and accessible to citizens ... The crucial question is whether we have a coherent, integrated farming and food strategy with policies that ensure we can all feed ourselves now and in the future. A comprehensive new food and farming strategy to ensure food production and distribution is equitable and environmentally sustainable, encouraging healthy diets for all UK citizens and which contributes to global food sovereignty.

Written evidence from Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland

A food model which provides universal access to healthy, affordable food in this country will be one that encompasses food production (agriculture and manufacture), supply chains and systems, and retail.

Written evidence from the Cabot Institute, Bristol University

Lee Martin, Chair of East London Food Access (ELFA), said in his written submission that such an approach would need to focus on improving access to food, the cost of food, food education, empowerment, and self-management. Within Hackney, for example, he said parents are given enhanced access to fruit and vegetables via stalls operated by ELFA in the grounds of six primary schools, serving over 400 parents each week. ELFA are also developing Family Buying Groups in partnership with four Children's Centres in the borough. One further innovation had also been set up:

ELFA operates Fresh Produce Stalls on estates and schools in Hackney, taking fresh produce direct to those that need it most. ELFA's Fresh Produce Stalls provide the option for people to buy as little or as much produce as they need, or can carry, or in fact depending on how much money they have that particular week or day.

Written evidence from Lee Martin, Chair, East London Food Access

Within this context, according to the Cabot Institute, local pilots may be making significant contributions to developing new food models. They cite the Good Food Plan for Bristol as one such initiative, and suggest the move of Public Health faculties back into Local Authorities has the potential to reconnect planning the built environment with planning for health environments. The Matthew Tree Project has played an instrumental role in the development of the Good Food Plan for Bristol. It outlined in its written submission the rationale behind, and the working of, this model:

If our food model was more balanced between local food production and the present dominant industrialised model, access to food would be achievable through various pathways, ie volunteering at a local food growing project in exchange for food.

UK cities [need] to become 'food secure' by way of a significant increase in local food production and retailing and less dependent upon imported food retailed through the centralised large supermarket chains.

FOODTURES relates to the development of a sustainable region wide network of outdoor ecological food growing sites and food processing production facilities that are designed to provide skills training, apprenticeships and employment for local people ... whilst at the same time contributing towards a significant upscaling of local food production.

An estimated 2,000 hectares of land in Bristol could potentially be used for food growing. This includes existing farmland and smallholdings, allotments, a proportion of council-owned empty land, a proportion of land within school grounds and private gardens and 20% of parks and green spaces if this could be made available.

Written evidence from Mark Goodway, Director, The Matthew Tree Project, Bristol

The Public Health Manager at Wirral Council cited Real Food Wythenshawe as an example of a programme that is making use of unused outdoor space and gardens to support behaviour change and help people to access low-cost, locally grown food: for example, one of its initiatives involves mapping, harvesting, preserving and distributing fruit from trees in the area, in order to demonstrate to residents that there is an abundance of cheap food on their doorstep.

Stockport Food Partnership looked in its written submission at local food growing schemes as one of the ways in which we might help address the flaws in our present food system:

Increase the allotment provision creating mini-allotments. Whilst growing-your-own isn't a comprehensive solution in its own right; the health and wellbeing element, community spirit, plus getting people out of the home reduces their household costs – less utilities etc. this may help some people create more balance in their lifestyles having a positive effect on their food security.

Written evidence from the Stockport Food Partnership

Food 4 Hull, Financial Action and Advice Derbyshire, and Michael Shaw, a member of Taxpayers Against Poverty, made similar arguments:

Enabling growing your own might be approached in a variety of directions – increasing the availability of allotments; making smaller allotments available with tools share and help and advice for new allotment holders; making it easy for community allotments/orchards to start up on unused land; skills-swap sessions on planting, tending, harvesting, saving seed, preserving your own produce and so on, and linking up local growers to exchange surplus produce.

Written evidence from Food 4 Hull

Promote local food growing and distribution. Councils and corporate land owners should be incentivised to make land available for growing produce to support local communities.

Written evidence from Financial Action and Advice Derbyshire

It would be naïve to suggest that all of Britain's food problems would be solved by people producing their own food but such a move could make a contribution. Nevertheless, there are significant barriers to such a course of action. Firstly arises the availability of land, especially pronounced for those in poverty ... In most areas there is a considerable waiting list for allotments. Whilst Local Authorities have a duty to provide allotments, there is, at present, no incentive to authorities to turn more land over to such purpose ... Radical thinking could allocate part of public parks to community food production. Unused land could be brought into cultivation by local authorities.

Written evidence from Michael Shaw, Taxpayers Against Poverty

The evidence presented to the Inquiry suggests a degree of local or regional co-ordination is required to encourage such initiatives as community food production and distribution, which are designed to boost food production and improve poorer households' access to decent, affordable food. Local Authorities, in particular, with their newfound responsibility for public health, alongside their traditional planning functions, would be crucial to the success of such schemes.

Waste and surplus redistribution

Concerns were raised to the Inquiry as to the impact of food waste on the cost of food on shop shelves. The Government acknowledged in its written evidence that *'tackling waste in the food system and in people's homes is key to make food more affordable'*, and Gleaning Network UK said in written evidence:

In recent years, food prices have experienced inflation and volatility, negatively impacting especially those of a low income. Food prices are a very complex phenomenon, and so there is rarely a straightforward relation between food waste and food prices. Generally, there are a number of ways food waste could increase food prices in the long-term. Food waste both creates artificial scarcity by taking food off the market, and places strain on scarce resources such as water, fertiliser and land, which act as agricultural inputs, driving food prices up. Finally, where it would be more efficient to reduce losses than to increase production, the lost efficiency drives prices higher than they should be.

Written evidence from Gleaning Network UK

The Inquiry was keen, therefore, to investigate the level of food waste in this country and the redistribution of edible surplus food to those in need.

Progress

The Inquiry received evidence of substantial progress made by the food retail and manufacturing industries, along with the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), to reduce the level of food waste both at the retail level and in stores' supply chains. In 2013, retailers sent 6% of food waste to landfill, down from 47% in 2005. Retailers have achieved this by developing re-use initiatives; implementing waste awareness programmes for retail staff; and segregating waste at store level before backhauling it to distribution depots:

We use a food hierarchy to manage food surplus and prevent it from going to landfill. This means we try to minimise surplus – for example by reducing to-clear foods close to their expiry date. If food cannot be sold, we offer it where possible to those in most need by donating it to charities. This is our overriding priority for all food which cannot be sold.

We have six 'dotcom' centres around London that provide groceries for tesco.com customers exclusively. As they are not open to visiting customers, we are unable to 'reduce to clear' which leads to higher levels of surplus food. This surplus food is currently split between that which is sold in a shop for colleagues and that which we deliver to our FareShare in our 'dotcom' delivery vans. Last year we donated 294 tonnes of food from our six 'dotcom' centres.

Since October 2013 we have been providing surplus food from our ten fresh food distribution centres to FareShare's distribution centres across the UK. Once the scheme is fully rolled out we expect to donate around 2,500 tonnes of food.

We are now working with FareShare and FoodCycle to map how we can roll out back of store donations across the country.

In Ireland we are using a pioneering food app, the Food Cloud, which has been co-developed with students from Trinity College Dublin, and which alerts charities, in real time, to the types and volumes of food available from our local stores for their use.

Written evidence from Tesco

We have established a market-leading partnership with FareShare and our suppliers to donate surplus stock 'overs' from our supply chain and use it to feed those that need it most, thus ensuring that perfectly good food does not go to waste.

This partnership began in June 2013 and since then over 528 tonnes of food have been donated, with Asda also covering the transportation costs.

[We are] offering the distribution route to our suppliers, in order to reduce waste from supplier production overs.

Through our Community Life programme, which aims to place our stores at the heart of their local communities, our stores are able to work independently to organise regular collections to provide support for local food banks, with many running permanent donations points for customers. In addition, last year we joined the Trussell Trust in organising two national focus weeks for customers to donate food.

Written evidence from Asda

Current situation

Nonetheless, a large amount of evidence identified, as a major fault in our food system, the amount of usable food still going to waste, recycling or anaerobic digestion, rather than being diverted to organisations that feed people in need who are hungry. According to the evidence submitted by Gleaning Network UK, there are three million tonnes of food waste arising at farm level.

It was estimated in the Inquiry's written evidence that the food retail and manufacturing sectors produce around 4.3 million tonnes of surplus food each year – 0.4 million from the former and 3.9 million from the latter. Around 3.7 million tonnes of this is sent to landfill, landspreading, thermal treatment or other destinations. Some 5,800 tonnes of surplus food is currently redistributed to organisations such as FareShare, whilst around 11,000 tonnes of surplus food is sold to organisations like The Company Shop who buy food for sale in secondary markets.

FareShare told the Inquiry that it believed up to 400,000 tonnes of surplus food could be fit for human consumption, and that the majority of food that becomes surplus is fresh, such as fruit, vegetables, meat and dairy products. One of its recommendations was for the Government to develop a way of accurately measuring the amount of surplus food that could be diverted to feed people in need. The Inquiry considered whether the Waste and Resources Action Programme could perform such a role and report its findings to **Feeding Britain**.

The Inquiry received specific examples of the ways in which the current system produces unnecessary surplus:

I had 9,864 Cornish pasties [offered to me] because the lorry was seventeen minutes late to Morrisons. That shouldn't happen. I was offered 30,000 spring greens the other day because they were going to be ploughed back into the field. I couldn't have them because I didn't have anywhere to put them. I was offered 10 tonnes of tomatoes from Kent because they were too big for Tesco.

Oral evidence from Don Gardner, Manager, Camborne, Pool and Redruth (CPR) Food Bank

Overall it seems that a much larger proportion of surplus food is diverted to donation in the United States than in this country. According to the House of Commons Library, comparing WRAP and FWRA data from 2013, the food sector in the United Kingdom diverts around 0.1% of surplus food for human consumption, and the retailers and wholesalers in the United States donate around 32%. This provides an indication of the order of magnitude of difference rather than directly comparable figures.

The European Commission has proposed that Member States develop national food waste prevention strategies and endeavour to ensure that food waste in the manufacturing, retail/distribution, food service/hospitality sectors is reduced by at least 30% by 2025.

Evidence to the Inquiry suggests one of the areas in need of urgent attention is the food manufacturing sector within retailers' supply chains. The British Retail Consortium told the Inquiry that only 8,000 tonnes each year of surplus food tonnage from 'back of store' is suitable for redistribution. Of the 4.3 million tonnes of surplus food produced each year by retailers and their suppliers, 91% arises in the manufacturing sector. These figures highlight the need for retailers and manufacturers to work together to tackle food waste in the supply chain.

Nonetheless, WRAP has identified the distribution of 'back of store' surplus food from retailers to charities as an important way of reducing food waste and achieving social benefits. Its Food Connection Programme, supported by the Cabinet Office, involved a trial in which FareShare and FoodCycle worked with several retailers to understand the barriers that stood in the way of redistributing surplus food to vulnerable people who are hungry, and sought to find practical solutions. The trial found that bakery and fresh produce were the highest categories of surplus food; charities can save money by substituting food they would have needed to buy and can provide healthier and more varied meals; and support from Third Party redistribution organisations can be of considerable value to retailers and charities in ensuring food safety and brand integrity. WRAP estimates around 19,000 tonnes is sent to anaerobic digestion each year by food retailers.

The Inquiry heard from food banks and other organisations that if they were able to access fresh surplus food at a reduced cost, or for free, they would be able to focus greater effort and more resources on supporting people with complex needs who require more intensive support. Local organisations serving hot meals to homeless individuals, for example, would be able to invest in support workers if less of their expenditure was devoted to securing fresh food. The Inquiry was keen, therefore, to examine measures that might increase the redistribution of usable surplus from retailers and manufacturers to organisations whose core purpose is to help people with long-term issues affecting their lives. The Inquiry was struck by the way some organisations can utilise food as a tool to engage with some of the most vulnerable people in our communities, as a first step towards rebuilding their lives:

In many cases, children are coming to our centres because they are hungry. Although they may come to us with hunger as their main concern, they often have other needs that we can, and need to, support them with.

Written evidence from Kids Company

We saved a charity 10% of their annual budget which meant they could keep someone in post, as another grant had been cut.

Oral evidence from David Cairns, Chairman, Oxford Food Bank

Food redistribution can often save huge amounts of money for homeless hostels and so on who are tackling food poverty more holistically and are, far from deconstructing the welfare state, using redistribution to free up money for other things.

Oral evidence from Martin Bowman, Gleaning Coordinator, Gleaning Network UK

Funds to pay for someone else's meals is understandably difficult to find. Surplus food is the only way the Upper Room can sustain its efforts to feed dozens of hungry people who walk long distances to our Shepherd's Bush church facility every day to get a substantial, hot meal.

Written evidence from Bruce Marquart, The Upper Room, London

[We have] no face to face contact with those who eat our food. It only supports the professional agencies, statutory, charitable or community led, which have a duty of care, and they can collect the bags they need from our depot, on the two packing occasions in the week ... we believe the provision of food bags by the professionals adds strength to their working relationship with those they support.

Written evidence from the Bradford Metropolitan Food Bank

If you can get more food out of the food system, which means charities don't have to buy food in order to feed existing people, then that really does bring benefits. Charities are having to buy food to feed people. If we could substitute that, there is definitely a net benefit.

Oral evidence from Dr Richard Swannell, Director of Sustainable Food Systems and Technical Lead, Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP)

If we can match those experiencing food poverty with the surpluses generated by the industry, we can make a significant difference to millions of people's lives ... Community Shop is the network of social supermarkets, operating as membership-based stores for working people on low incomes and in receipt of benefits. Members are enrolled on a programme of free, professional support available in their community, such as budgeting and debt advice, skills training and cookery classes.

Written evidence from The Company Shop

Sheffield City Council advocated the benefits of this approach:

The Community Shop uses 'waste' food from major producers and supermarkets and sells this at a low price but in addition engages with its users to provide support around tackling their broader income and employment needs.

Written evidence from Sheffield City Council

The Plymouth Fairness Commission has recommended the development of 'Social Co-ops' in disadvantaged areas which incorporate access to reduced cost food, advice on debt, food skills and eating well, such as the Community Shop model.⁵⁶

While some doubts were raised about a renewed focus on redistribution, at the expense perhaps of cutting down on waste, most of the evidence suggested the best strategy would need to include measures both on waste and the redistribution of usable surplus food. The then Minister for Civil Society, for example, told the Inquiry in oral evidence that 'a resilient food supply chain will always have some surplus', and Dr Richard Swannell said:

I don't see any tensions between increasing redistribution and cutting waste. The economic case is overwhelming. As soon as you measure, you want to do something about it. We won't get to a zero food waste system. That just won't happen.

Oral evidence from Dr Richard Swannell, Director of Sustainable Food Systems and Technical Lead, Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP)

Likewise, David Cairns from the Oxford Food Bank told the Inquiry in oral evidence that: 'There is always going to be waste in the food cycle – no matter how efficient the supermarkets are. So you've got to say 'why don't we take that and turn it into a positive benefit?''

Financial incentives

There is an incentive not to send food waste to landfill, as the standard rate of landfill tax has increased from £7 per tonne in 1996 to £80 per tonne today. Yet some submissions presented concerns around the lack of incentives for the food industry to send surplus food for human consumption. Indeed, the House of Lords European Union Committee concluded in a report earlier this year that:

There are fiscal tools available to support the redistribution of surplus edible food, ranging from VAT exemptions to tax deductions and tax breaks ... we recommend that the UK Government undertake their own assessment of how they might further promote the redistribution of food to humans by way of fiscal measures. Particular attention should be given to encouraging the redistribution of fresh, nutritious food.

House of Lords European Union Committee, Counting the Cost of Food Waste: EU Food Waste Prevention – 10th Report of Session 2013-14 (March 2014)

The Inquiry heard from Food Donation Connection how the United States Government has led the way in offering financial incentives to food retailers and manufacturers to redistribute their fit-for-consumption surpluses to food assistance providers and other voluntary organisations. Section 170(e) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code allows certain businesses to earn a tax deduction for donating food, and they can claim tax breaks on shipments of food if donated food is transported using spare capacity in delivery vehicles. American food retailers and wholesalers recycle more than half of their surplus produce, with one third of this being redistributed to food assistance providers and other voluntary organisations.

Government policy in Britain is to prevent waste. There is also a policy to deal with the waste that will inevitably be created. The Government has three preferred methods of dealing with food waste, which it ranks in order of greatest environmental benefit:⁵⁷

1. Anaerobic Digestion (AD)
2. Composting
3. Incineration with energy recovery

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs produced an AD Action Plan to tackle barriers to deployment of AD, build markets for digestate, and facilitate an increase in energy from waste through AD. Most of the 56 actions are now complete and others are in hand. One source of public funding to incentivise the use of anaerobic digestion is through the anaerobic digestion loan fund. The total value of this fund is £10 million. This provides loans of between £50,000 and £1 million to top up private funding for anaerobic digesters.

There does not appear to be any explicit legal or financial encouragement for retailers or manufacturers to divert their usable surplus food for human consumption:

There is a policy gap in terms of measures to incentivise food waste avoidance and pushing food waste up the food waste hierarchy, towards more beneficial uses such as redistribution for human consumption and feeding livestock ... Government incentives for diverting surplus food for human consumption are rare in EU countries, although governments in France and elsewhere are moving towards tax breaks for businesses that donate their food for charitable redistribution ... One method of moving food waste up the food waste hierarchy from anaerobic digestion to food redistribution is to offer tax breaks to food donors.

Written evidence from Gleaning Network UK

Critically a tax incentive or some form of incentive and encouragement for industry so that the economic hierarchy is consistent with the social hierarchy, where we have support for AD but on a level playing field.

Oral evidence from Mark Varney, Director of Food, FareShare

Yet the British Retail Consortium said in written evidence that even if it might make sense financially to redistribute usable surplus food, it is the logistical issues that present the greatest challenge to further redistribution taking place:

Our members report that it actually costs more money to divert food waste to anaerobic digestion and that redistribution is a much more economical solution; the challenge for retailers and charities is the small scale and the unpredictability of what surplus food will be available.

Written evidence from the British Retail Consortium

Logistical barriers

A number of submissions raised some important logistical barriers to further redistribution. The following issues were identified as principal barriers to the redistribution of usable surplus food:

Resources required from charities to regularly commit to visit stores to collect food when volumes and variety could fluctuate considerably; processes in-store that limit the range of food categories available for collection due to food safety concerns; and providing the resources required to facilitate the retailer/charity interface ... and broker relationships and oversee the process ... A key barrier is the time and resources needed from both charities and retail stores to both manage relationships and coordinate collections.

Oral evidence from Brooks Newmark MP

The manufacturers and suppliers are getting it wrong. Bread and cakes is all Sainsbury's want to give us. We don't even get any fruit or vegetables. Most of it, from what I gather, ends up in landfill. I went up to the Upton store yesterday, which is a large store, and was given nothing. It's a shame these stores can't get their act together and get it right.

Oral evidence from a volunteer driver, Bread of Life, Wirral

M&S want us to collect five days per week. It's that matching of charity partner with supermarket and finding the right way forward for both to be able to operate.

Oral evidence from Mary McGrath, Chief Executive, FoodCycle

Sainsbury's would like to have the unwanted food collected every day rather than once a week, so it is a question of organisational capacity.

Written evidence from the Cambridge Food Partnership

One of the big issues I have is when I approach the industry, saying "I like your food and we'd like you to transport it to one of our regional centres". They then say to me, "You want my food, you want me to pay to identify it and then pay to deliver it to you". It's quite challenging.

Oral evidence from Mark Varney, Director of Food, FareShare

An additional key barrier to food redistribution is the cost of transport. Moving bulk surpluses from one location to multiple sites so it can easily be absorbed by the voluntary sector is costly and complex ... When spare transport capacity is used for social food redistribution we believe these organisations should be given a tax incentive or support to grow this area and to minimise the freighting of 'fresh air'.

Written evidence from FareShare

Overall, the emergency food distributors in the city are heavily reliant on FareShare, which is struggling to meet demand on a regular basis and also wishes to change its delivery model to predominantly supplying fresh and chilled food – which most emergency food distributors lack the resources to store and distribute quickly. Large-scale arrangements with other suppliers have either not been arranged or have collapsed, for example a local linkup between Sainsbury's and a number of organisations failed to meet anticipated levels of supply.

Written evidence from Leicester City Council

Co-ordination and logistics were important issues in relation to the distribution of surplus food. Effective distribution requires readily available transport to collect and quickly distribute food which is perishable. Food retailers are sometimes not aware of the limited resources of voluntary organisations involved in providing food assistance, which means that they are not able to send volunteers to collect surplus food at a particular time each day. They may not have the transport available at the required time, or there may not be sufficient volunteers available to go out at the time specified by the supermarket. Voluntary organisations also have limited storage space to store donations of food and this may force them to turn down offers of food. These problems could be alleviated by improved networking and co-ordination between different voluntary organisations.

Written evidence from Manchester Citizens Advice Bureau

If we could tackle the barriers you increase the amount redistributed by 40%. The key issues are really around logistics and the relationship between the charity and the retailer concerned. Retailers would like to have a daily collection at a particular time with someone they recognise. That can be difficult for charities. Some supermarkets prefer collections at night. If we could have negotiations on keeping food in chillers over night for collection in the morning, it's much easier for everyone to organise ... Is there a will within the sector? I think so. We have built a level of awareness and commitment among the retailers.

Oral evidence from Dr Richard Swannell, Director of Sustainable Food Systems and Technical Lead, Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP)

Dates

The Inquiry received some evidence suggesting the need for reforms to the way food is dated, so as to reduce waste:

A more effective food labelling system and greater clarity for the public on the difference between use by dates and 'best before' dates. A lot of food is unnecessarily thrown away because of this, particularly items like fruit, vegetables and bread.

Written evidence from FoodCycle

A 2011 retail survey conducted by WRAP reported that 'display until' date codes on food packaging can reduce consumer understanding of both 'use by' and 'best before' dates, leading to food still with shelf life being thrown away.

In 2012, Morrisons reported that it would phase out dual date coding and move to the sole use of 'display until' on pre-packed produce. However, based on further research and customer feedback, the supermarket has opted to retain the 'best before' date and remove the 'display until' date.

Cosmetic standards

Some of the Inquiry's evidence also raised the need to re-examine the 'cosmetic standards' applied by retailers to fruit and vegetables:

Since the launch of our campaign, ugly fruit and vegetables have become the fastest growing sector of the fresh produce market and the NFU estimates that in 2012 this saved 300,000 tonnes of produce from being wasted on UK farms. A large UK grower recently told us that they have had 20% more of their carrot harvest accepted by retailers as a result of the relaxing of cosmetic standards.

Written evidence from Gleaning Network UK

Local relationships

The Bradford Metropolitan Food Bank highlighted in written evidence the need for a national retail commitment to support food banks directly with food at or near its sell by date. Yet the Inquiry also heard evidence of strong local relationships holding the key to successfully negotiating the challenges of redistributing usable surplus food:

It's quite important that the local relationships do have the autonomy that they have. We work with Asda and we've developed over three years a really strong relationship with Asda. It's their Community Champions you deal with as opposed to store managers.

**Oral evidence from Mark Goodway,
Director, the Matthew Tree Project**

Lidl works closely with us in providing overstocked and end-of-day fresh bread, fruit and vegetables on a daily basis.

**Written evidence from The Todmorden
Food Drop, Calder Valley**

As part of their efforts to reduce food wastage, Waitrose donate cereal with damaged external boxes to the food bank; M&S donate tins with misaligned labelling to us, as they cannot be sold in store. Links have been established with a 'Re-Use' project at Exeter University; unwanted non-perishable food is donated to the food bank at the end of term from student accommodation.

**Written evidence from Laura McIvor,
Exeter Foodbank, and Dr Andrew Williams,
Department of Geography, University
of Exeter**

Some supermarkets have a fairly bureaucratic system for making donations, which involves local supermarkets having to go through a central system to donate surpluses. This introduces delays, and is therefore a problem for anything that is perishable. [Food assistance providers] wanted to see local supermarkets able to make donations directly to local organisations ... There is clearly scope for greater networking and collaboration between organisations to provide a more secure and co-ordinated response to food need and some of the problems which underlie it.

**Written evidence from Manchester Citizens
Advice Bureau**

Waitrose told the Inquiry that it encourages all of its branches to donate surplus food within their local community. However, it said it is often a challenge for branches to identify volunteers and/or charities with the infrastructure in place to collect the food.

One of the strongest examples of best practice was the Oxford Food Bank, which picks up fresh food from a dozen wholesalers and supermarkets, and delivers it to about 60 charities, community groups and statutory agencies in and around Oxford, all of whom work to alleviate hunger and food poverty. Some of these organisations receiving food from the Oxford Food Bank cook and serve free or subsidised meals on their premises, and others distribute food parcels to individuals and families in need. Among those organisations receiving food from the Oxford Food Bank are soup kitchens, night shelters, and charities that support people with mental health problems.

The Oxford Food Bank slightly resembles the FareShare model, but it operates on a smaller geographic scale, picks up food from supermarkets as well as wholesalers, and does not charge either the food provider or the recipient. It is wholly funded by donations, including larger grants for vans and chillers, as well as many smaller direct debits from individuals in the Oxford area.

The Oxford Food Bank urged the Inquiry to consider mechanisms which would encourage suppliers and supermarkets to become involved with their local communities through redistribution of their usable surpluses:

We adopt a service attitude to the supermarkets and to our customers. We find that when we do that they are so cooperative. They don't have to worry about delivering things to us because we pick things up from them. Our customers don't have to worry because we deliver everything to them.

Oral evidence from David Cairns, Chairman, Oxford Food Bank

Employment

It was suggested to the Inquiry that it might wish to consider the role of surplus food redistribution in providing employment opportunities. FoodCycle's Pie in the Sky café in Bromley-by-Bow provides training and voluntary work to people looking to pursue a career in catering, and the Oxford Food Bank suggested that 'clients of organisations which alleviate food poverty can help to distribute the food'.

Likewise, the Matthew Tree Project in Bristol shared details with the Inquiry of its FOODTURES project, which aims to create employment in the production and distribution of low-cost food in Bristol.

Solutions

The then Minister for Civil Society argued in his oral evidence that local arrangements at a store level can work if the retail sector and the charities work together:

Opening hours of premises, transport of food, and minimisation of embarrassment associated with the need for emergency food provisions are all issues associated with the effectiveness of food provision. Solutions include delivery of the food, rotating premises, anonymous premises, good links with people who can pick up food on behalf of others, and engagement of the food bank clients in the distribution of food.

Oral evidence from Brooks Newmark MP

Dr Richard Swannell, Director of Sustainable Food Systems and Technical Lead at WRAP, told the Inquiry that they are now asking those working with food, 'how would you come up with an effective infrastructure that could take that food wasted at store level and see how much we can get back?'

The Leeds Food Aid Network told the Inquiry how it was putting in place such an infrastructure:

It can be very difficult for vulnerable people to access food, particularly when they have a mobility issue and are unable to travel very far. Throughout the rest of 2014 Leeds FAN hopes to be able to distribute more food through the new FareShare initiative to different geographical venues where there is no food aid provider nearby. We hope to activate this principle, particularly across the East of Leeds which is the poorest part of the city. It is hoped that organisations which are working in areas such as mental health, addiction, social care, One Stop Centres etc will be able to access a small amount of food from FareShare which they can then give out on an informal pantry basis to people who literally cannot access food from elsewhere.

Written evidence from the Leeds Food Aid Network

The Trussell Trust agreed that:

If they could work this out locally, and especially the big supermarket chains, where they could give us small quantities of food that we could pick up on a daily basis, then I reckon we could get more of our food banks to put those containers on.

Oral evidence from David McAuley, Chief Executive of the Trussell Trust

The Inquiry also received some suggestions as to how further redistribution could be funded:

The failure of the government to maximise its allocation of EU funding for the most deprived ... starves the third sector of requisite funds for emergency food relief and further limits its capacity to address longer-term difficulties concerning debt and employability.

Written evidence from the Advice Leeds Partnership

In Europe, FareShare equivalents redistribute up to 20 times more than we do in the UK. The 10% the UK is drawing down from the Fund for the Most Deprived is used by the DWP for employability programmes but we argue this can be better spent to increase the benefits of the FareShare model. If the £3 million, which the Government has drawn down from the Fund for the Most Deprived was diverted to food redistribution, FareShare would be able to more than double the amount of food diverted, double the number of people we help feed and save the voluntary sector £32 million per year.

Written evidence from FareShare

Officials from the Department for Work and Pensions informed the Inquiry that the United Kingdom's share of the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived:

...is not new money; the UK's FEAD allocation is deducted from our allocations to the structural funds: the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). It is not paid in addition to those funds. We therefore minimised the adverse impact on the structural funds by taking the lowest possible FEAD allocation.

Note from the Department for Work and Pensions following the evidence session with Brooks Newmark MP

Summary

Britain's food system does not provide universal access to decent, affordable food. The Inquiry received evidence suggesting that initiatives involving the local production and distribution of food may contribute to rectifying this situation.

A further fault seems to lie in the tendency of our food system to generate large quantities of surplus food – a large proportion of which goes to waste – while there are people in this country who are hungry. Despite the recent progress achieved in reducing food waste, the Inquiry's evidence highlighted the potential for more surplus food to be used as a means with which voluntary organisations could attempt to address hunger and food poverty amongst our most vulnerable citizens.

To consider approaches to improving household food security in this country

The Inquiry found that food banks are a presenting problem. They place a lens over a myriad of issues and crises in people's lives which appear to be driving them down to the bottom and beyond.

There are the chronic addictions and feelings of helplessness and desperation that tighten their grip on individuals – particularly those who haven't got any friends or family around them – which may leave them vulnerable to hunger and food poverty.

There also is a desperate need for a buffer zone that prevents individuals and families from being exposed to hunger by a personal or family crisis; a buffer which provides financial cover while people get back to where they need to be again, to what they consider to be their normal lives.

Much of the evidence submitted to the Inquiry echoed the sentiment of the submission made by the Catholic Church:

The aim should be to achieve food security for all in the UK. Household food security may be defined as households having adequate resources and access to be able to buy healthy, affordable food at all times.

Written evidence from The Catholic Church

But a key question emerged in evidence to the Inquiry; how do we get our public, private and voluntary sectors firing on all cylinders to help best tackle the myriad of deeper issues that lay behind hunger and food poverty? Or to put it another way, how do we make a virtue out of necessity?

Feeding Britain

We review here the evidence received by the Inquiry on the need for a 'Beveridge Plus' model, in which the state acts as an enabler rather than a mere provider in a mixed economy of welfare.

Today fresh political inventions are needed urgently ... in the domestic sphere to reconcile the responsibilities of the State with the rights and responsibilities of individuals. It is clear that the State must in future do more things than it has attempted in the past. But it is equally clear, or should be equally clear, that room, opportunity, and encouragement must be kept for Voluntary Action in seeking new ways of social advance. There is a need for political invention to find new ways of fruitful cooperation between public authorities and voluntary agencies.

Lord Beveridge, Voluntary Action: A Report on Methods of Social Advance (1948)

It was clear from the evidence submitted to the Inquiry, that hunger and food poverty cannot be eradicated alone by any private, voluntary or public institution. There was instead a general acceptance and, indeed, enthusiasm to square the Beveridgean circle of 'fruitful cooperation' in pursuit of this goal, as well as a desire to make a virtue out of necessity by opening up services around places and people.

The state needs others to help it think about how it cares, and to be in partnership with institutions to deliver a caring society.

Oral evidence from Canon Steven Saxby, London Churches Social Action

We don't see people as a number in a system. We see them as a real person. We have people with a real emotional attachment to the people they're helping. That's the difference you get in the third sector.

Oral evidence from David McAuley, Chief Executive, The Trussell Trust

Citizens and institutions taking responsibility is not an acceptance of the problem. We need to investigate other methods of improving existing infrastructure; supermarkets and food waste

Written evidence from Sandwell Council

Work should be rooted through the governmental departments and local authorities, but should not get stuck within public sector structures and processes. Equally, too much power has been given to the food industry and private sector to make decisions that affect our ability to create healthy sustainable communities. Communities must be supported to develop their abilities and co-produce change but not left to carry the burden – which is what food banks are now evidence of.

Written evidence from the Faculty of Public Health, of the Royal Colleges of Physicians in the United Kingdom

The evidence presented to the Inquiry suggests there is broad support for three particular interventions: social supermarkets, 'food bank plus' models, and local food networks to match needs and resources by, for example, redistributing usable surpluses.

Three such interventions emerged from the recommendations made by the Public Health Nutrition Team at the Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust:

- 1. For those on long-term low incomes – increase access to free social activities which include a nutritious meal. Community-based nutrition and budgeting programmes with an emphasis on improving nutrition on a low budget, rather than 'how to budget'**
- 2. For those in a short-term crisis – provide emergency relief and deal with the underlying problem**

3. **For those experiencing isolation – support internet access and IT skills; community transport to facilitate access to markets; identify food access issues in home visit assessments; food access and advice within existing support services.**

The previous sections outlined some of the outstanding independent voluntary initiatives, such as the Oxford Food Bank, which have established local networks to redistribute fresh, fit for consumption surplus food to local voluntary organisations helping to get people back on track. But concerns were addressed to the Inquiry that without greater guidance from government, surplus food redistribution would continue as a patchy arrangement between the food industry and voluntary organisations. Such an arrangement, it was felt, would fail to effectively tackle hunger and food poverty.

Tackling hunger and food poverty in partnership

There is currently no national body responsible for monitoring, overseeing, or responding to, the complex issues brought up by hunger and food poverty:

The reasons for the increased use of food banks are highly complex and multi-faceted... because we don't have a department for food banks, the Government doesn't really monitor the number of referrals to food banks or really the reasons why.

Oral evidence from Brooks Newmark MP

The Inquiry received a great deal of evidence emphasising the need for some form of national coordination, and for organisations from different sectors to work together to effectively tackle hunger and food poverty:

Given that the issue concerns a number of government departments, there needs to be a clear and coordinating national strategy for tackling this growing problem.

At the pan-London level the London Food Board should take on strategic responsibility for addressing food poverty in London – aiming for a Zero Hunger City.

Written evidence from Fiona Twycross AM

Let's look at this very simplistically. If we all agree that the balance for health plate is the best diet you can have; then see if we can map the proportion of that plate to our food chain supply across the UK in terms of production and manufacturing. This will identify gaps and weaknesses and a new food for Britain strategy can follow.

Written evidence from the Wiggly Worm, Gloucestershire

The resilience of people should be supported. Such efforts at food banks noted above to support or signpost to provision – such as financial education and debt management, cookery skills, employability skills such as IT and literacy and numeracy skills for adults – should develop into a coherent national provision with the aim of achieving less chaotic lives and greater potential for rewarding work.

In this regard accepting funding from the European Aid to the Most Deprived may be reconsidered as part of resilience provision.

Written evidence from the Catholic Church

The Company Shop told the Inquiry in written evidence that, in January 2013, WRAP launched a national Food Redistribution Industry Working Group. This group brought together representatives from across the sector, including industry bodies, retailers, charities and food manufacturers. But in March 2014, the work of the body ceased. It no longer meets. The Company Shop believed that ending this group was a mistake:

It did something that had not been happening before – it got organisations and businesses from across the food supply chain to talk about tackling food surpluses sustainably ... We recommend that the WRAP Food Redistribution Industry Working Group be set up once again, with the support of government. This will help stakeholders in the food supply chain to build the relationships needed to reduce surpluses, and reduce food poverty sustainably.

Written evidence from The Company Shop

Referring to FareShare and the Trussell Trust, the Leeds Food Aid Network said:

The relationship between the two nationally and their ability to facilitate collaboration between the many different components on the ground, could be key to seeing villages, towns and cities working more effectively together to tackle hunger and food poverty in Britain ... It is absolutely essential that everyone who is engaging in tackling food poverty seeks to help vulnerable individuals deal with their longer term needs.

Written evidence from the Leeds Food Aid Network

The Inquiry sought to construct such a model including, though not limited to these organisations, through the establishment of **Feeding Britain**.

Local and regional action

The Inquiry's evidence presented a strong case for self-contained local models consisting of local manufacturers, suppliers, food assistance providers and other voluntary organisations responsible for building people's resilience by pooling local resources to meet local needs.

Local networks of charities, churches, food retailers, allotment holders, colleges and local businesses should be created in order to provide a co-ordinated plan for the provision of free, fresh and non-perishable food. This should include other living essentials and focus on chronic local food poverty ... The development of volunteer mentors for food aid recipients should be encouraged.

Written evidence from The Catholic Church

Food banks alone cannot provide a comprehensive response; there is a need to improve links with wider support; a city wide and coordinated approach is needed; there is a lack of fresh food distributed through food banks ... We need a city wide strategic approach involving all agencies; a community voice and leadership is key; we need to develop food skills.

Written evidence from Sheffield City Council

There's a lot of good practice and examples, including community-run supermarkets etc, all of which offer opportunities for people on all incomes to be able to get good, healthy food and also to build up a local economy of producers and processors. These solutions are also socially inclusive.

Written evidence from Professor Elizabeth Dowler, Professor in Food and Social Policy, University of Warwick

Empower communities at the local level, in order for them to identify the obstacles that they face and the solutions that suit them best, is a first step ... Local Authorities and health services can help to develop joined-up local strategies, to collect better data, and to provide staff and facilities ... Towns and cities should build on strong evidence and coherent local strategies to reduce food poverty through economic regeneration and food system planning.

Written evidence from the Faculty of Public Health, of the Royal Colleges of Physicians in the United Kingdom

The Inquiry recommended that such models be developed under the **Feeding Britain** umbrella, with the ultimate objective of achieving a hunger-free United Kingdom.

A strong blueprint was proposed in written evidence by the Matthew Tree Project for the development of such networks:

If a suitable local food sector infrastructure can be put into place covering large scale food storage and distribution logistics; together with credible routes to the (mass) market then we believe the local food sector has great scope for expansion and this will in itself create a significant number of skilled and semi-skilled direct and indirect jobs.

Develop a logistical distribution system and network that can support a major increase in local food growing and production for sale into the local market. Resources needed: land for food growing; land on which low-cost food stores can be built; buildings to be used as a distribution centre with cold storage facilities, delivery vehicles and warehouse equipment; Buildings for roof top growing; planning permission; facilitators to teach citizens to grow and produce food.

Written evidence from Mark Goodway, Director, The Matthew Tree Project, Bristol

The Bradford District Welfare Reform Strategic Group suggested also:

Support and funding to establish a network of food cooperatives offering low cost food (including fresh food) to members on low incomes in local areas as an alternative to hot food providers and food banks.

Written evidence from the Bradford District Welfare Reform Strategic Group

Such local partnerships could enable organisations to pool their supplies, storage facilities, and vehicles to best meet local needs. The Brighton and Hove Food Partnership said that, 'existing groups could link better together to share expertise and information; underused facilities could be brought into use.'

David Cairns, co-founder and Chairman of the Oxford Food Bank, told the Inquiry that their model 'could easily be replicated anywhere else in the country. Our costs are low; we guarantee to donors that for every £1 they give us we will turn it into £25 worth of benefits.'

Similar examples were presented to the Inquiry of this devolved partnership approach in action.

The Inquiry received written evidence from the Devon and Cornwall Food Association (DCFA), which is a community-based infrastructure organisation that distributes food to a range of projects who work with people experiencing hunger. DCFA ensures that usable, in-date food does not go to landfill but is distributed to those most in need; it is not a food bank, and it issues food only to charitable organisations that feed the disadvantaged. DCFA receives surplus food from local food producers, farmers and supermarkets. It told the Inquiry in written evidence that it has so far saved 82 community groups across Devon and Cornwall over £250,000 on food, which those groups are now able to spend on their core aims, better serving the community.

The Leeds Food Aid Network told the Inquiry how it was developing such an approach:

We are currently becoming better coordinated through the new Leeds Food Aid Network. We hope to become more strategic in a number of areas including distributing food through FareShare to geographical areas which currently don't have food aid providers present ... Simultaneously, we are slowly moving forward in terms of relaying information and providing training opportunities for frontline workers to learn more about what provision is out there, which can assist people with their longer-term needs.

Written evidence from the Leeds Food Aid Network

The Inquiry became aware of the Sustainable Food Cities network, and was keen for such initiatives to be scaled up. This network is a new alliance of 32 food partnerships and food policy councils in cities, towns and regions across the country. The locally managed partnerships consist of representatives from the Local Authority, public health, local businesses and community and voluntary sector organisations, as well as local residents, who have come together to drive change in their local food system and improve sustainability across health, the environment and the local economy. They tend to have six objectives:

- **Promoting healthy and sustainable food to the public**
- **Tackling food poverty and increasing access to affordable healthy food**
- **Building community food knowledge, skills, resources and projects**
- **Promoting a vibrant and diverse sustainable food economy**
- **Transforming catering and food procurement**
- **Reducing waste and the ecological footprint of the food system**

A well-established example presented to the Inquiry was the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership, which was set up in 2003 as a voluntary organisation to deliver a range of community projects such as:

- **Cookery courses for beginners and those looking to teach others**
- **Helping people start new community gardens**
- **Tips and advice on reducing food waste at home**
- **Setting up community composting sites across the city**

The Welsh Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty and the Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty, told the Inquiry in written evidence

about the Welsh Government's Communities First programme – which is delivered through 52 Communities First Clusters. They provide activities such as workshops and short cookery courses, a healthy eating initiative, supporting individuals growing their own produce in tubs in their gardens, food co-ops, and encouraging community members to grow and eat their own food. A further feature of the programme involves around 350 food co-ops providing a range of fresh produce at affordable prices, and the locations of the food co-ops are prioritised to serve the more deprived areas of Wales. The Minister explained further:

A food co-op is a simple system through which people can access affordable, quality fresh fruit, vegetables and salad on a weekly basis at a local community venue. The food co-ops are run by local volunteers and work by directly linking the local community to local suppliers providing them with access to fresh produce at more affordable prices. A family regularly using their local food co-ops could potentially save around £200 per year. The Rural Regeneration Unit work with communities to set up and support food co-ops with the ultimate aim of empowering them to take ownership of their food co-ops and to eventually run them independently from the support the programme provides.

Written evidence from the Welsh Government Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty and the Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty

The roles and responsibilities of these local partnerships

According to the Inquiry's evidence, one function each local or regional partnership might fulfil is to become a centre of excellence:

Identifying peers/champions in the community who can help co-produce activities enabling families to grow and cook is important, and in Hull the proposed City Farm has the potential to be an interactive skills-share mechanism, acting as a key hub for training, knowledge, education and experience.

Written evidence from Food 4 Hull

These partnerships might also be resourced so as to buy up unused land for the purposes of food storage. According to the National Land Use Database, there are currently 589 sites, covering 751 hectares, of previously-developed land in Britain which are now vacant or derelict, whose previous usage was recorded as 'storage'.

Another function could be to learn from and implement examples of best practice to meet local needs. One example of food assistance specifically tailored to meet the circumstances of rural areas came from Colin Kaye, on behalf of the Feeding His People Farm Project in Leighton Buzzard:

We took on the challenge to find a more cost effective way of producing food for people in crisis. Not only could we provide food parcels more cost efficiently, we also saw the opportunity for other families to buy directly from the farm, allowing their money to go further. We believe that selling the produce at these reduced prices to families that were close to, or below the poverty line, has had an impact on reducing the number of emergency food parcels that are required. Every time we sell a meal, we transfer credit into our own food bank of one free meal.

Written evidence from Colin Kaye, Feeding His People Farm Project, Leighton Buzzard

Summary

The overriding message from the Inquiry's evidence was that, as well as taking immediate action to halt and reverse the rising demand for emergency food assistance, there is a need for both national and local coordination of resources to tackle more effectively some of the more stubborn, deep-seated aspects of hunger and food poverty, by using food assistance as a gateway to solve these problems.

The redistribution of surplus food to voluntary organisations working with vulnerable people was identified as an important component of such a strategy; as was the ability to match local resources with the needs of people who are hungry or living in food poverty, so as to provide them with a 'hand up' rather than a 'hand out'.

Annex A – Written evidence

1. 4Children
2. Advice Leeds Partnership
3. Advice Nottingham
4. Age UK
5. Aldi
6. Alison Webster, Social Responsibility Adviser, Diocese of Oxford
7. All Saints, St Mary and St Peter, Nottingham
8. Alvaston Food Bank – Revd. Judith Henderson Smith
9. Alvaston Food Bank – Revd. Mike Lowe
10. Andy Crooks, Bishop’s Chaplain, St Albans Diocese
11. Asda
12. Association of North East Councils (ANEC)
13. Bath and North East Somerset Council
14. Bedford Drive Primary School, Birkenhead
15. Beeston Food Bank, Greater Nottingham – Captain Paul Ward CA
16. Ben Warwick, Graduate Teacher of Law, Durham University
17. Birkenhead High School Academy
18. Birkenhead Jobcentre Plus
19. Bob Holman, Family Action in Rogerfield and Easterhouse (FARE)
20. Bradford District Welfare Reform Strategic Group
21. Bradford Metropolitan Food Bank
22. Bridging The Gap – Freedom Social Projects, North Devon
23. Brighton and Hove Food Partnership
24. British Retail Consortium
25. Cabot Institute, Bristol University
26. Cambridge Food Partnership
27. Can Cook – Robbie Davison
28. CAN DO 4:13, Birmingham
29. Canon Ed Saville, Lead Officer for Social Responsibility, The Diocese of Blackburn
30. Care 4 Free – Elaine Chegwin Hall
31. Cathcart Street Primary School, Birkenhead
32. Cathedral Food Bank, Bangor, Gwynedd
33. Chapter 1 Charity, Manchester – Pauline Gaye
34. Charing Cross Methodist Church, Birkenhead
35. Chichester Food Bank – Marguerite Saffrey
36. Child Poverty Action Group
37. Christ Church Birkenhead
38. Christ The King and Priory Chapel, Birkenhead – Revd. Dallas Ayling
39. Church Housing and Action Team, Tiverton
40. Church of God, Birkenhead – Revd. John Pemberton
41. Churches Together in King’s Lynn – Christopher Lindley
42. Citizens Advice and Law Centre, Derby – Amanda Leadbeater
43. Citizens Advice Scotland
44. City Harvest CIC, London – Mark Harvey
45. Community Emergency Food Bank, Oxford – Tom Benyon
46. Community Food and Health (Scotland), NHS Health Scotland – Bill Gray
47. Community Larder, Kington – Maureen Weston
48. Community Solutions, Lancashire Food Partnership
49. Community Spirit Wirral – Margaret Kenny and Mandy Upton
50. Community4 Housing Support, Salisbury
51. Company Shop
52. Crediton Foodbank – Susan Goode
53. Cullompton Food Bank, St Andrews Church, Devon – Angela Ford

54. Debs Banks, Debt Caseworker, Better Leeds Communities
55. Devon and Cornwall Food Association
56. Diocese of Chester
57. Dr Carl Walker, Principal Lecturer in the School of Applied Social Science, University of Brighton
58. Dr Clare Pettinger, Faculty of Health and Human Sciences, Plymouth University
59. Dr David Webster, Honorary Senior Research Fellow, Urban Studies, University of Glasgow
60. Dr Eoin Clarke
61. Dr Jane Midgley, Lecturer in Planning, Newcastle University
62. Dr Victoria J Burley, University of Leeds
63. East London Food Access – Lee Martin
64. Economy Committee, London Assembly
65. Elizabeth Campling, Registered Dietician, Eat Health
66. Ely Food Bank – Karl Relton
67. Emma Lewell-Buck MP
68. Emmanuel Church, Birkenhead
69. End Hunger Fast – Stephanie Neville
70. FareShare
71. Feeding His People Farm Project, Leighton Buzzard – Colin Kaye and Andrew Selous MP
72. Financial Action and Advice Derbyshire
73. Fiona Twycross AM, London Assembly Member
74. Fir Vale Food Bank, Sheffield
75. Flintshire Food Bank – Revd. Canon Alan Suter
76. Food & Cornwall
77. Food & Cornwall Systems Leadership Programme
78. Food Donation Connection, USA – John Pacitti
79. Food Newcastle
80. Food Plymouth – Richard Price
81. Food4Hull
82. FoodCycle
83. Friends of The Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland
84. Gavin Kibble, Operations Director, Coventry Foodbank, on behalf of the Diocese of Coventry
85. Gleaning Network UK
86. Gloucester Law Centre and Diocesan Synod – Chris Hill
87. Grange Baptist Church, Birkenhead
88. Greenwich Food Bank – Alan Robinson
89. Guy Miscampbell, Policy Exchange
90. Hannah Lambie-Mumford, Department of Geography, University of Sheffield
91. Hastings Furniture Service – Naomi Ridley
92. Heart of Mersey
93. HM Government
94. Holy Cross Catholic Primary School, Birkenhead, Merseyside
95. Homeless Link
96. Home-Start UK
97. HOPE+ Food Bank, Liverpool
98. Hopeful Hampers Food Bank
99. Inspector Dave Meredith, Devon and Cornwall Police
100. Isle of Man Food Bank
101. Jill Quayle, Chief Executive, Tranmere Community Project
102. Joint submission from Dr Nicola Livingstone and Dr Filip Sosenko
103. Joint submission from John Glen MP and the Trussell Trust
104. Joint submission from K. Purdam, E Garratt and A. Esmail, University of Manchester
105. Joint submission from Professor Paul Cloke, Dr Andrew Williams and Professor Jon May

106. Jubilee Food Bank, Sheffield – Chris Marriott
107. Julia Harrold, Health Trainer, Cornwall Neighbourhoods for Change
108. Julie Webster, Public Health Manager, Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
109. Kate Plant, Church in the World Officer, Cottingley Cornerstones Centre, West Yorkshire
110. Kellogg's
111. Kids Company
112. Kirklees Food Partnership
113. Lambeth Food Partnership
114. Laura McIvor, Exeter Foodbank, and Dr Andrew Williams, Department of Geography, University of Exeter
115. Leeds Adult Social Care - Sylvia Landells, Area Mental Health Senior Social Worker
116. Leeds Food Aid Network
117. Leicester City Council
118. Lewisham Borough Council
119. Lindsay Graham, School Food and Health Advisor
120. Liskeard and Looe Foodbank
121. London Churches Social Action – Canon Steven Saxby
122. Magic Breakfast – Carmel McConnell
123. Manchester Citizens Advice Bureau
124. Milton Keynes Food Bank – John Marshall
125. Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty and the Deputy Minister for Tackling Poverty, Welsh Government
126. Nightwatch Croydon – Jad Adams and Roger Davies
127. North Northumberland Food Bank, Berwick Upon Tweed
128. Northampton Food Bank – Rosie Rushton
129. Northern Housing Consortium
130. Nourish Scotland
131. Okehampton Food Bank – Dermot Seale
132. Oswaldtwistle Food Bank – Janet Johnston
133. Oxfam Cymru
134. Oxfam GB
135. Parsons Cross Initiative, Sheffield
136. PC Helen Priestley, Devon and Cornwall Police
137. Penzance Food Bank (CTIPA)
138. Portland Primary School, Birkenhead
139. Prenton Methodist Church, Prenton, Wirral
140. Primary School Governor (who wished to remain anonymous), Birkenhead
141. Priory Parish CofE Primary School, Birkenhead – Peter Faragher, Headteacher
142. Professor Elizabeth Dowler, Professor in Food and Social Policy, The University of Warwick
143. Professor Martin Caraher, Professor of Food and Health Policy, City University London
144. Public Health Nutrition Team, Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust
145. ReadiFood, Reading
146. Revd. Chantal Mason, Chaplain to the Bishop of Chelmsford
147. Revd. Robert Hill, Bishop's Officer, Mission in Society, Diocese of Peterborough
148. Rhondda Food Bank – Ralph Upton
149. Richard Bridge, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds
150. Riki Therivel, on behalf of seven Oxfordshire food banks
151. Sandwell Council
152. Sheffield City Council
153. St Anne's Catholic Primary School, Rock Ferry, Merseyside
154. St Anne's Church, Wirral
155. St Anselm's College, Birkenhead
156. St Austell Food Bank – Steve Williamson

157. St Catherine's Church, Tranmere, Wirral – Revd. James Terry
158. St James with St Bede Church, Birkenhead
159. St Jeanne Jugan Trust, Leeds – Suzanne Hart
160. St Paul with St Luke, Tranmere, Wirral – Revd. Keith Addenbrooke
161. St Peter's Catholic Primary School, Birkenhead
162. St Peter's Church, Rock Ferry – Phil Edwards, Treasurer
163. St Stephen's Church, Prenton, Wirral
164. St Vincent de Paul Society, Whitstable – Winston Waller
165. St Werburgh Church, Birkenhead
166. Staffordshire County Council
167. Stockport Food Partnership
168. Sunderland City Council
169. Sustainable Food Cities
170. Tauheedul Relief Trust – Yusuf Patel
171. Taxpayers Against Poverty – Alan Wheatley
172. Taxpayers Against Poverty – Michael Shaw
173. Taxpayers Against Poverty – Revd. Paul Nicolson
174. Terry Drummond, Bishop of Southwark's Adviser on Urban and Public Policy
175. Tesco
176. The Alabare Centre, Salisbury
177. The Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church (URC)
178. The Bay Food Bank, Whitley Bay, North Tyneside – Revd. Alan Dickinson
179. The Catholic Church
180. The Churches Housing Action Team, Mid Devon
181. The Children's Society
182. The Faculty of Public Health, of the Royal Colleges of Physicians in the United Kingdom
183. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation
184. The Link Christian Fellowship, Birkenhead – Pastor Mike Haynes
185. The Matthew Tree Project, Bristol – Mark Goodway, Director
186. The Matthew Tree Project, Bristol – Sue Baic and Sandy Johnson, Nutritionists
187. The Methodist Church, Sheffield District – Revd. Vernon Marsh
188. The Oak Community Project, Wirral
189. The Oxford Foodbank
190. The People's Kitchen, Newcastle – Peter Samuel
191. The Portland Food Bank – Dave Farmer
192. The Rt Hon Frank Field MP
193. The Rt Revd. Christopher Forster, The Bishop of Portsmouth
194. The Rt Revd. Adrian Newman, The Bishop of Stepney
195. The Rt Revd. Dr Martin Warner, The Bishop of Chichester
196. The Rt Revd. Nicholas Holtam, The Bishop of Salisbury
197. The Rt Revd. Richard Blackburn, The Bishop of Warrington
198. The Salvation Army Northern Divisional Headquarters
199. The School Food Plan – Myles Bremner
200. The Strategy, Aylesbury - Stacey Levy
201. The Todmorden Food Drop – Owen Page
202. The Trussell Trust
203. The Upper Room, West London – Bruce Marquart
204. The Ven. Luke Miller, The Archdeacon of Hampstead
205. The Ven. Stephen Robbins CB, Chaplain to the Bishop of Salisbury
206. The Very Revd. Michael Tavinor, Dean of Hereford
207. The Wantage and Grove Food Bank, Oxfordshire – Neil Townsend
208. The Wiggly Worm, Gloucestershire – Rob Rees

209. Together Liverpool – John Davis
210. Townfield Primary School, Oxton, Wirral
211. Tranmere Methodist Church, Wirral
212. Transform 4 Work, North Devon - Wendy Butler
213. Transition Falmouth – Phil Pearce
214. Truro Foodbank
215. University Academy Birkenhead
216. Waitrose
217. Wandsworth Food Bank – Alisi Mekatoa
218. Waste and Resources Action Plan (WRAP)
219. West Cheshire Food Bank – Alec Spencer
220. West Northumberland Food Bank – Sam Gilchrist
221. Wirral Christian Centre
222. Wirral Citizens Advice Bureau
223. Wirral Food Bank
224. Wirral Salvation Army, Birkenhead
225. Woodlands Primary School, Birkenhead
226. YMCA England

20 members of the public submitted evidence in a personal capacity.

Annex B – Oral evidence

Wednesday 9 April 2014

Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) research summit on 'Food Aid Provision in the UK'

Monday 19 May 2014

Visit to FareShare, Deptford

Friday 23 May 2014

Morning Session at Birkenhead Town Hall

- Anthony Zausmer, Posh Nosh
- Bob Gateley, Team Leader, St Catherine's Church Food Bank Distribution Centre, Tranmere
- Charlene Spencer, Project Manager, FareShare Merseyside
- John Sargent, Melanie McGee and Joan Steel, Grange Baptist Church, Birkenhead, accompanied by Ronnie Whitby, Abby Heywood and Dave Bennett
- Local Primary School Governor
- Margaret Kenny and Mandy Upton, Community Spirit Wirral
- Phil Edwards, Treasurer, St Peter's Church, Rock Ferry, accompanied by Erika Patterson, Liz Aston and Diane Matley
- Revd. Dallas Ayling and Denise Price, Christ The King, Birkenhead
- Revd. Keith Addenbrooke, Walter and Jenny Randle, and Paul Whitehouse, St Paul with St Luke Church, Tranmere
- Robbie Davison, Director, Can Cook

Afternoon session at Birkenhead Town Hall

- Councillor Phil Davies, Leader of Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
- Damon Taylor, Chief Executive, Wirral Citizens Advice Bureau
- Dave Horridge, Jobseeker's Allowance Lead Manager, Birkenhead Benefit Delivery Centre
- Gary Foulkes, Deputy District Manager, and Alan Murphy, Merseyside District Jobcentre Plus
- Helen Turner, Greater Manchester Public Health Network
- Julie Webster, Public Health Manager, Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
- Mark Payne, Benefits Department, Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
- Nicky Dixon, Senior Benefits Manager, Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council
- Nigel Hughes and Vince Hessey, YMCA Wirral
- Wendy Robertson, Coordinator, Life Expectancy Wirral, Diocese of Chester

Visit to Wirral Trussell Trust Food Bank

Friday 6 June 2014

Visit to Alabare Place, Salisbury

Visit to Salisbury Trussell Trust Food Bank

Main session at the Salvation Army

- The Rt Revd. Nicholas Holtam, The Bishop of Salisbury
- Colin Brady – Social Justice Programme Manager, Diocese of Salisbury
- Cllr Dick Tonge – Cabinet Member for Finance, Risk and Welfare Reform, Wiltshire Council
- Kirsty Field, Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureau
- The Trussell Trust and clients
- Alabare Christian Care and clients
- Community4 Housing Support
- Salisbury Trust for the Homeless, and clients
- The Pantry Partnership (Salisbury FoodCycle)

Monday 9 June 2014

House of Commons session on food waste and redistribution

- Dr Richard Swannell, Director of Sustainable Food Systems, Waste and Resources Action Plan (WRAP)
- Mark Varney, Director of Food, FareShare
- Mary McGrath, Director, FoodCycle
- Diane Kilgour, Hub Leader, Clacton-on-Sea FoodCycle

House of Commons session with independent emergency food assistance providers from the South West

- David Cairns, Chairman, Oxford Food Bank
- Mark Goodway, Director, The Matthew Tree Project, Bristol
- Malcolm Peirce, Director, Readifood
- Chris Cordrey, Readifood

Wednesday 11 June 2014

House of Commons session with charities and non-governmental organisations

- Niall Cooper, Director, Church Action on Poverty
- Bethany Eckley, Research Manager, Church Urban Fund
- Will Higham, Director of UK Child Poverty, Save The Children
- Dr Sam Royston, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, The Children's Society

Friday 20 June 2014

Visit to the Truro Homeless Action Group

Main session at the Millpool Centre, West Looe

- Food & Cornwall
- Farm Community Network
- The Carmborne, Pool and Redruth Food Bank and clients
- Neil Colquhoun, Chief Executive, Cornwall Citizens Advice Bureau
- PC Helen Priestley – Devon and Cornwall Police
- Liskeard and Looe Food Bank
- Churches Together, Looe and District
- Truro Food Bank
- Transformation Cornwall
- Mary Conway, Social Justice Worker, Roman Catholic Diocese of Plymouth
- Richard Price, Food Plymouth Steering Group
- Chris Hart
- Laura McIvor, Exeter Food Bank, and Dr Andrew Williams, University of Exeter

Tuesday 1 July 2014

House of Commons session with emergency food assistance providers from London and the South East

- Denise Bentley, Food Bank Manager, and Amy Kimbangi, Food Bank Project Coordinator, Tower Hamlets Food Bank
- Alan Robinson, Manager, Greenwich Food Bank
- Canon Steven Saxby and Sabina Williams, London Churches Social Action
- Winston Waller, Whitstable Society of St Vincent de Paul

House of Commons session with academic experts

- Professor Elizabeth Dowler, Professor in Food and Social Policy, University of Warwick
- Hannah Lambie-Mumford, Department of Geography, University of Sheffield
- Professor Martin Caraher, Professor of Food and Health Policy, City University, London

Friday 4 July 2014

Visit to South Tyneside Churches Together KEY Project

Main session at St Jude's Parish Hall, Rekendyke

- Alison Dunn, Chief Executive, Gateshead Citizens Advice Bureau
- Alnwick Food Bank
- Ani Sonam and Lila Barnett, Sure Start West Riverside, Newcastle
- Annie Bishop, Northumberland Disability and Deaf Network
- Austin Girdlestone, North East Council on Alcoholism (NECA)
- Carrie Brookes, Changing Lives (FareShare partner)
- Christine Briggs, South Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group
- Councillor Joan Atkinson, Lead Member for Children and Families, South Tyneside Council
- David Selby, Brinkburn Community Centre - Hospitality and Hope
- David Tomlinson, Paula Nelson, Craig Dowd (former client, now volunteer), Jo Hurst and one client, St John's Shildon
- Dick Donaldson, Streetcare Food Bank, Sunderland
- Diocese of Durham - Canon Sheila Bamber, Sunderland Minster
- Graham Darby, Home Group
- Graham Wharton and Gill Bedford, Salvation Army Sunderland
- Hannah Shepherd, South Tyneside Homes
- Ian Thompson, Chief Executive, South Shields CAB
- Jean Burnside, Ross Allen, Ian and Joan Taylor, and three former clients, KEY Project
- Jean Clarke, one client and one volunteer, Woodhouse Close Church Community Centre
- Jim Robertson, Church Action on Poverty
- John Marshall, Milton Keynes Food Bank
- John Temple, Isos Housing
- Karen Semianczuk, Welfare Rights Service Manager, South Tyneside Council
- Margaret Finch, Hetton Loaves and Fishes Project
- Marilyn Clark, Coordinator, South Tyneside Food Bank
- Michael Nixon, Manager, and Matthew King, Assistant Manager, Newcastle West End Food Bank
- Michael Thompson, Adult Social Care, South Tyneside Council
- Nicky Gjørven, Duty Sergeant, Northumbria Police
- Peter MacLellan, Director, County Durham Foodbank
- Representative from South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust
- Reti Winward, Gateshead Foodbank
- Revd. Alan Dickinson, The Bay Church Food Bank, Whitley Bay
- Satty Rai, Northern Housing Consortium
- The Rt Revd. Mark Bryant, The Bishop of Jarrow

- The Ven. Stuart Bain, Archdeacon of Sunderland
- Victoria Egdeell and Alan Rapley, Amble Food Bank
- Volunteers, New Hope Church Food Bank

Visit to New Hope Church Food Bank

Monday 7 July 2014

House of Commons session with Jack Monroe and Martin Bowman, Gleaning Co-ordinator, Gleaning Network UK

Monday 8 September 2014

Visit to FoodCycle, Bromley-by-Bow

Tuesday 9 September 2014

House of Commons session with Brooks Newmark MP, then Minister for Civil Society

House of Commons session with the joint research project conducted by the Church of England, the Trussell Trust, Oxfam and Child Poverty Action Group

- Jane Perry, Lead Researcher
- Tom Sefton, Adviser on Social Policy and Economics, The Church of England
- Rachael Orr, Head of UK Poverty Programme, Oxfam
- Moussa Haddad, Senior Policy and Research Officer, Child Poverty Action Group
- Martin Williams, Welfare Rights Adviser, Child Poverty Action Group

House of Commons session with The Trussell Trust

- David McAuley, Chief Executive, The Trussell Trust
- Adrian Curtis, Foodbank Network Director, The Trussell Trust

Thursday 13 November 2014

Visit to Community Shop, Goldthorpe, South Yorkshire

Notes

1. Introducing the 'social supermarket': Where even Britain's poorest people can afford the finest food (Independent Online, 9 December 2013)
2. Niall Cooper and Sarah Dumbleton, *Walking the breadline: the scandal of food poverty in 21st century Britain* (Oxfam and Church Action on Poverty, May 2013)
3. Frank Field, *The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults* (Cabinet Office, December 2010)
4. The Primary School Governor wished to remain anonymous
5. Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs, *Food Statistics Pocketbook 2012 – in year update*, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/183302/foodpocketbook-2012edition-09apr2013.pdf
6. <http://foodpovertyinquiry.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/fact-sheet-1-expenditure.pdf>
7. Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs, *Food Statistics Pocketbook 2012 – in year update*, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/183302/foodpocketbook-2012edition-09apr2013.pdf
8. Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs, *Food Statistics Pocketbook 2012*, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130123162956/http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/files/defra-stats-foodfarm-food-pocketbook-2012-130104.pdf>
9. *Poverty and Social Exclusion, The Impoverishment of the UK – PSE UK first results: Living Standards*, 2013
10. Michael Nelson, Bob Erens, Beverley Bates, Susan Church and Tracy Boshier, *Low income diet and nutrition survey: Summary of key findings* (Food Standards Agency, 2007)
11. Further information on the United States surveys can be found at www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/measurement.aspx
12. *Foodbanks Canada*, About us page as on 11 December 2013
13. *Foodbanks Canada, Hunger Count 2013: A comprehensive report on hunger and food bank use in Canada and recommendations for change*, 30 October 2013
14. The Public Health Manager at Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council provided details of this scheme to the Inquiry
15. www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-104publ210/pdf/PLAW-104publ210.pdf
16. We would recognise these pantries as providing a similar method of distribution to Trussell Trust food banks in this country
17. http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-facts/hunger-and-poverty-statistics.aspx#_edn11
18. Feeding America, *Hunger in America 2010 National Report* (Mathematic Policy Research Inc, January 2010)
19. LSE blog, *The rise of food banks in Germany is increasing the commodification of poverty without addressing its structural causes*, 11 July 2013
20. www.spiegel.de/international/germany/german-food-banks-and-soup-kitchens-struggle-with-demand-a-941661.html
21. 'A supermarket for the poor', <http://www.dw.de/a-supermarket-for-the-poor/a-1196434>
22. http://draaf.languedoc-roussillon.agriculture.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/cna_avis72_aidealimentaire_22mars2012_cle0711eb.pdf
23. Institute for Fiscal Studies, *IFS Green Budget 2014*, www.ifs.org.uk/budgets/gb2014/gb2014.pdf
24. Individuals are said to be in absolute low income if they live in a household with an equivalised income below a 60% threshold of median income in a specific year adjusted for inflation
25. Bridget Holmes, 'Food Security', *Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey*, vol. 3. (2007)
26. Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs, *Food Statistics Pocketbook 2012 – in year update*, www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/183302/foodpocketbook-2012edition-09apr2013.pdf
27. Emma Downing, Mike Fell and Steven Kennedy, *Food banks and food poverty* (House of Commons Library Standard Note, April 2014)
28. Rachel Griffith, Martin O'Connell and Kate Smith, *Food expenditure and nutritional quality over the Great Recession: IFS Briefing Note BN143* (Institute for Fiscal Studies, November 2013)
29. HM Government, *Child Poverty Strategy 2014-17* (Child Poverty Unit, June 2014)
30. Rachel Griffith, Martin O'Connell and Kate Smith, *Food expenditure and nutritional quality over the Great Recession: IFS Briefing Note BN143* (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2013)
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