

step up to the plate

towards a UK
food and poverty strategy



The
University
Of
Sheffield.



Acknowledgements

Church Action on Poverty is a national ecumenical Christian social justice charity, committed to tackling poverty in the UK. We work in partnership with churches and with people in poverty themselves to find solutions to poverty, locally, nationally and globally. Further information can be found at www.church-poverty.org.uk. Registered charity number 1079986. Company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales, number 3780243.

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Executive summary

In this report we call for a cross-departmental government-led Food and Poverty strategy to address the underlying causes of household food insecurity in the UK, and its impact on the nation's health and wellbeing, educational attainment and general welfare.

- Evidence is emerging of the scale of the problem of household food insecurity and need for emergency help accessing food in the UK today. Whilst food charities are working hard to respond to these urgent issues in local communities, it is highly problematic for government to rely on these initiatives. What are needed are robust and comprehensive policy responses.
- In recent years there have been a range of reports and initiatives designed to influence policy debates, particularly the work of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger and Food Poverty, the Fabian Commission on Food and Poverty and the End Hunger UK campaign. However, this has yet to translate into a set of coherent policy responses.
- To date there has been very little government leadership on these issues. At least five Whitehall government departments have some level of engagement with the problem of household food insecurity, including Food and Rural Affairs (Defra); Business (BIS); Work and Pensions (DWP); Health (DoH); Education (DfE); Communities and Local Government (DCLG), but no one is charged with coordinating policy across government. More coordinated and concerted government action is very much needed. Indeed, the government is obliged to provide it under the commitments it has made to the United Nations to protect human rights, and more recently in the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Five key recommendations to enable government to develop a coherent response to household food insecurity are:
 1. **Appoint a minister or department charged with responsibility for coordinating a policy response across Government**, which also takes into account the role of local government, the devolved administrations, civil society and business.
 2. **Measure household food insecurity each year**, by adopting and using the internationally agreed definition of household food insecurity.
 3. **Free people from the threat of food insecurity**. Government should build a vision to ensure people can access and enjoy food in socially acceptable ways, not just today but next week and next month. Policy should address not only food crisis and minimum diets, but vulnerability, social acceptability and inclusion. Solutions need to be broad, ambitious and include all stakeholders.
 4. **Listen to people with first-hand experience of hunger** and use their experiences, as well as informed research, as the basis for policy. This would bring to the forefront of policy design the lived experiences of household food insecurity and frontline experiences of responding to them; as well as drawing on the increasing amounts of research on household food insecurity and need for emergency food provision.
 5. **Lead the way in ending hunger and household food insecurity**. What is needed is a strong and effective universal and entitlement-based approach, ensuring everyone can eat well and participate fully. To achieve this, government will need to play a leadership role – bringing all stakeholders together but taking ultimate responsibility.
- With these actions in mind, a first step towards achieving policy progress would be for government to coordinate the development of a formal Food and Poverty strategy, involving a range of stakeholders including Whitehall departments, devolved administrations, local government, civil society and business organisations and people with direct experience of household food insecurity themselves.

Why this report?

Since 2000 there has been a proliferation of charitable emergency food provision in the United Kingdom, which has expanded particularly fast since 2010. Whilst the provision of food to people in need by charitable organisations has a long history in the UK, the formalisation of this provision, and its facilitation and coordination at a national level, are unprecedented in this country. This growth in provision of food aid, and the scale at which it now operates, raise urgent questions about the causes of household food insecurity and the most appropriate responses to it.

This report draws on work published in the book *Hungry Britain: the rise of food charity* (Policy Press) to reflect on the nature of household food insecurity in the UK, the current charitable and policy responses and where we can go from here. It argues that what is urgently needed is government leadership on the issue and a coherent and meaningful policy framework which facilitates effective responses which address the root causes of household food insecurity in the UK. We recommend that in the first instance this takes the form of a government-led UK Food and Poverty strategy.

We come here on Mondays and Tuesdays, and sometimes on other days, and on Fridays we come for a meal and to see if there's a class on. We mostly come for the meals and to talk to people. If this place was not here, we'd have to find somewhere else. We'd need food from other food banks and things like that. There is a lot of support about. Sometimes we need and sometimes not. A bit of it is rising food costs. I suffer from anxiety and depression and we are both on ESA.

We end up with about £150 a fortnight between us, for everything. They've been putting the prices of food up quite a lot, we've noticed that, so it's really valuable having places like this.

The government could help us more, by giving a little more. The cost of food can be really difficult.

Food poverty and household food insecurity in the UK

Household food insecurity, food poverty and hunger are terms used increasingly frequently by policy makers, charitable organisations, NGOs, researchers, the media and the public. They are terms which we feel we somehow inherently understand, but in fact definitions and the use of these concepts in the debate can lack precision. It is important that policy makers and all stakeholders employ a clear and consistent articulation of the policy problem. Thankfully, there are established definitions of household food insecurity (see right) which can be adopted for policy development and analysis.

Unlike other countries, like Canada or the US, there is no regular systematic measure of household food insecurity in the UK. However, in the last year several pieces of research have begun to highlight the scale of the problem. Findings from the Food Standards Agency's (FSA) 'Food and You' survey found that...

- 13 per cent of UK adults are only marginally food secure (have problems or anxiety about accessing adequate food);
- 8 per cent have low or very low food security (reduced quality of food or reduced food intake).²

Recently published data from Unicef found that...

- 19% of UK children under the age of 15 live with a respondent who is moderately or severely food insecure;
- 10.4% (the highest proportion anywhere in Europe) live with someone who is severely food insecure.³

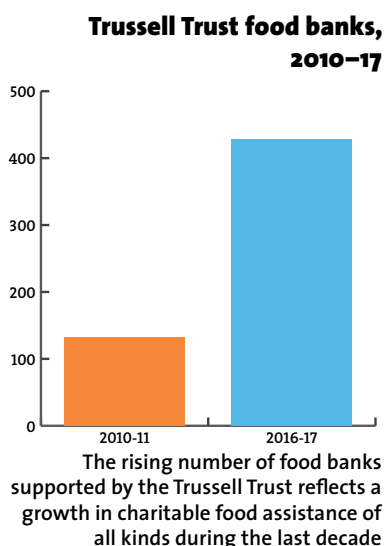
Until there are systematic measures of household food insecurity, it is hard to fully understand the scale and nature of the problem in the UK. Household food insecurity affects people's lives in numerous ways – it impacts on their health, their wellbeing and their ability to participate fully in society.

Falling incomes and rising food prices have already meant that food is now over 20 per cent less affordable for those living in the lowest income decile compared to 2003.⁴ However, indications are that the situation will worsen in the coming years. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and IFS have found that⁵ “for the worst-off 15% of households, real incomes after deducting housing costs (AHC) are projected to be lower on average in 2021–22 than in 2014–15”.

Analysis by the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) of the impact of changes to tax credits and Universal Credit also paints a worrying picture. This finds that families will lose on average £960 a year (£2,380 for lone parent families and £2,540 for families with three children by 2020).⁶ It is also likely that inflation and food prices will both increase in the coming years.⁷

Food security is the access for all, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life and includes the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods and the assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.¹

The rise of food charity and other feeding initiatives



Charitable food assistance – the provision of food to people in need by charities of various forms – has grown extensively in the UK in the last decade. Provision of food parcels by the UK’s largest food bank charity, The Trussell Trust, rose from 128,697 parcels in 2011–12 to 1,182,954 in 2016–17.⁸ The number of Trussell Trust food banks also rose in these years – from 132 food banks in 2010–11, to 345 in 2012–13, to 428 in 2016–17.⁹ In 2017 the UK Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) reported that there were also 680 independent food banks operating across the country.¹⁰

Research shows that families with children are also increasingly turning to charitable organisations for help with food. Between 2012–13 and 2013–14, Trussell Trust food bank provision to children rose by 252% in absolute terms.¹¹ Since then, provision has risen by a further 69% and in 2016–2017 Trussell Trust food banks provided 436,938 food parcels to children.¹² In addition to the growth of food banks, the UK has also witnessed a rise in feeding initiatives, particularly those aimed at children. Breakfast club provision is reported to have risen 45% between 2008 and 2014.¹³ The UK’s biggest independent breakfast club charity, Magic Breakfast, now works with 467 schools (representing 31,000 children). There are also a growing number of initiatives which aim to respond to families struggling to adequately feed their children through the school holidays when school meal provision is unavailable. Since 2011, just one provider, Make Lunch, a national summer holiday club charity, has worked in over 100 locations and given out 50,000 meals.¹⁴

We’re seeing soaring demand at food banks across the UK. Our network is working hard to stop people going hungry but the simple truth is that even with the enormous generosity of our donors and volunteers, we’re concerned food banks could struggle to meet demand this winter if critical changes to benefit delivery aren’t made now. People cannot be left for weeks without any income, and when that income does come, it must keep pace with living costs – food banks cannot be relied upon to pick up the pieces.

Mark Ward, Interim Chief Executive at The Trussell Trust, November 2017

No one should be unable to feed themselves or their children in Britain today. To have 8.4 million people unable to eat properly shows the urgency of tackling poverty in the UK.

Alison Garnham, chief executive of the Child Poverty Action Group, May 2016



Neruka White runs a soup kitchen in Harehills, Leeds

I would ask politicians

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a developed country

When children

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Educationally

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perform below

their potential

at school

“I think the government need to make sure there is enough money and resources available to take care especially of the children. Since we are in this situation, they have to take responsibility for what they have caused and make sure the next generation do not continue in the level of poverty there is now. Children need to be protected and cared for...”

“Families with children and people on benefits are struggling. Many are having to wait six weeks to get benefits. Many of them are not getting enough work to support their families, so we find that many children are part of the statistics of children living below the poverty line, which is very distressing. When children are not being fed properly it impacts them emotionally. Educationally they start to perform below their potential at school; if you're hungry you can't learn. We need to find a way to be able to support children, to make sure they are fed enough, getting a nutritionally-balanced meal three times a day, so they can feel secure and safe and cared for, so they can grow up to be productive, feeling that they have worth in this world. We can't continue to let children struggle and be part of a negative statistic. That is just unacceptable.

“I would ask politicians to look at the long-term cost to people because if children are not being fed properly and not provided for then in the long term it means the country is not going to stay as a developed country, it is going to end up going down. The next generation need to be educated, they need to be strong emotionally, physically and mentally to be able to take the country forward. This generation is not going to live forever, no matter how much money you've got, so if we do not invest some of the money in all of our children and make sure they are prepared to go forward then that means there is no future for the country.”

Issues raised by the growth of food charity

The human right to food

This is how the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights defines the right to food:

“The right to adequate food is realised when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement.”²⁰

Under the Covenant, governments are obliged to take steps towards the full realisation of the right to adequate food, with particular obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the human right to food.²¹

The UK has taken positive steps towards securing the right to food by signing and ratifying an array of international treaties which recognise this fundamental right, including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

As recently as December 2014, the UK government signed up to the UN Sustainable Development Goal 2: to “end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round by 2030.” This goal applies equally to domestic policy as it does to our wider international commitments.

Given the high profile of food banks in the UK today, and the unprecedented extent of their provision, what is clear is that the charitable sector is *in practice* responding to experiences of household food insecurity in local communities. This is both in response to, and in the place of, restructured state-based interventions. The links between the growth of emergency food provision and recent public policies of austerity and welfare reform since 2010 are increasingly well documented by researchers.²⁵

In the wake of changing social policy provision, emergency food charities are assuming the responsibility to respond to food crises, where they can and in their own way. This is a concerning situation. Evidence tells us that while they may (when designed and managed appropriately) alleviate experiences of household food insecurity, they are necessarily unable to solve the underlying drivers.¹⁶

Whilst emergency food initiatives like food banks are important spaces of caring and social solidarity in local communities, these systems are problematic. Given that they are voluntary initiatives, their provision is not an entitlement accessible to all.

Recipients also do not have rights within these systems in terms of how much or what food they are provided, or for how long. Their sustainability, in terms of securing and providing enough food, can also be a challenge. Charitable food provision is also very much distinct from the main socially accepted mode of acquiring food in the UK (namely, food shopping), and research has begun to highlight the experiences of embarrassment and shame amongst some emergency food recipients.¹⁷

The rise of emergency food provision and the practical response charities are offering to experiences of household food insecurity indicates that the state is, if anything, retreating from its duty to respect, protect and fulfil the human right to food (see right).

To rectify this, what are urgently needed are more systematic, upstream responses – and comprehensive policy making will be key to this. Government has a unique role to play and a clear responsibility to act, given their obligations.

Measuring household food insecurity

Rising demand for food aid is one indicator that people are going hungry. But knowing how many people go to your local food bank is not the same as knowing how many people can't afford to eat. UN data collected in 2014 suggests that the number of people facing food insecurity is 17 times higher than the number using Trussell Trust food banks.

Household food insecurity could be measured easily and inexpensively by adding questions to an existing government survey of households, perhaps as part of the work done by Defra (see page 11). Both the Food Foundation¹⁸ and End Hunger UK¹⁹ have called for this. Two survey tools – the UN Food Insecurity Experience Survey (FIES) and the USDA Food Insecurity assessment – have been used in many countries around the world, and are the gold standard for measuring food insecurity.



Lee Camfield uses The Crypt food bank in Leeds

I daresay there are thousands

of people blind to the facts

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If they miss an appointment,

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and their money stopped

I find very unfair,

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“In the summer of last year I came into financial difficulty due a business venture that went wrong. I tried to hold on to my house but within six months they took it from me – the house I had had for 15 years and worked hard for and paid for myself.

“Because I had no one to turn to, no family or anything, I found myself homeless. With the help of The Crypt, I managed to stay off the street and survive; they fed me and gave me a roof, which I’m very grateful for.

“It’s had a very big impact. I realised that food is a luxury really that many can’t afford so they’re relying on food banks and handouts from places like The Crypt and the churches to help them live and get by, especially people on benefits that get sanctioned or with mental health issues. I think that is a bit wrong. If they miss an appointment on a day when they should see the Job Centre, for them to be sanctioned and their money stopped I find very unfair, looking on from the side and having never seen it before...

“They should look at not sanctioning people as much, obviously at raising the benefits to living standards to compare with the fluctuation of food so they can live, so they can survive.

“I think first-hand voices, people who have experienced it first-hand, speak volumes. I didn’t know this place existed until I needed it and I daresay there are thousands of people like that, pretty much blind to the facts of the situation with people homeless and relying on food handouts and hot meals like The Crypt provides. I daresay there is pretty much a naivety to the situation and the problem that we have today.”

What will it take to tackle the underlying drivers of hunger and food insecurity?

In the last few years there have been some highly constructive policy reports, seeking to identify both some of the underlying causes of the growth of household food insecurity in the UK and potential 'upstream' policy solutions, across a range of areas of government departmental responsibilities.

Feeding Britain

In 2014, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger and Food Poverty held a parliamentary inquiry into hunger in the UK.²² It led to the creation of a network called Feeding Britain, and made over 70 practical and policy recommendations, covering areas such as:



- reducing food waste;
- encouraging the production and retail of locally grown food;
- reducing the additional costs associated with prepayment energy meters;
- better regulation of high-cost lenders;
- improving access to mobiles and the internet;
- training in budgeting, parenting and cooking skills;
- improved access to free school meals;
- the creation of a government Office for Living Standards;
- promotion of the Living Wage;
- tackling problems with benefit delays, sanctions and crisis support.

End Hunger

There has also been extensive work by NGOs which have sought to influence more comprehensive policy. In 2017, the End Hunger UK coalition published a 'menu'²³ with nine policy recommendations:



- A dedicated minister to mobilise action on household food insecurity.
- Measure and monitor household food insecurity.
- Increase the voucher value and uptake of the Healthy Start scheme.
- Safeguard child nutrition, every day of the year.
- Reduce the unjust Poverty Premium for people on low incomes.
- Incentivise employers to pay the 'real' Living Wage and to provide decent work.
- Make sure welfare reform does not leave people hungry.
- Ensure sanctions do not cause undue harm or destitution.
- Ensure that there is effective financial assistance in times of crisis.

Food and Poverty

The Fabian Society's Food and Poverty Commission made these recommendations in 2015.²⁴



- Appoint a minister with responsibility for eliminating household food insecurity.
- Government respects, protects and fulfils the right to food. Civil society organisations monitor government compliance.
- Introduce measures of the extent of household food insecurity.
- Broaden the 25-year plan for food and farming to include strategies to reduce household food insecurity.
- Launch an inquiry into the poverty premium, and work with businesses to remove poverty premiums for key living costs.
- Index working-age social security benefit upratings to the inflation experience of low-income households.
- Expedite action by the DWP to reduce household food insecurity caused by social security benefit sanctions, delays and errors.
- Local authorities identify barriers to affordable, sustainable, nutritious food and develop plans to overcome them.
- Rule out future cuts to public health schemes and budgets, and protect existing public health spending.
- Review advertising codes to protect children from the marketing of unhealthy food and drink.
- Consider piloting a sugary drinks duty.
- Set a goal of bringing everybody up to a minimum socially acceptable level of income.
- Proceed with raising the minimum wage up to 60 per cent of median earning, while building coverage of the Living Wage.
- Re-establish the link between social security and a subsistence level, by linking Universal Credit to the minimum income standard.

Policies to tackle food insecurity: a policy vacuum at the heart of government?

Despite the high profile of the issue within public and political debate in recent years, there has been a reluctance on the part of government to engage with this debate.

Indeed, there has long been a policy void around household food insecurity, and policy opportunities and connections across government continue to be missed. Historically in the UK, approaches to ensuring everyone has access to healthy food have been left to the operation of markets in retail and employment, consumer choice and a social welfare system meant to enable those lacking employment or unable to work to purchase food.²⁵ There has been little specific policy attention paid to food insecurity at a household level.

Whilst the issue of household access to food is formally located within Defra's remit (see below), it overlaps with areas of responsibility in other Whitehall departments – and in the devolved administrations – opening up the possibility of joint commitment and working.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

Defra is responsible for safeguarding our natural environment, supporting our food and farming industry, and sustaining the rural economy. It is the lead government department for food security.

“Food security is broadly recognised as the situation where all people, at all times, have physical, economic and social access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs. ... In the UK this means that people should have enough money to buy what they want to eat, that people can reach shops or markets where appropriate food is available at affordable prices ...”

Elizabeth Dowler, University of Warwick

In 2015 the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee, a cross-party group of MPs, called for action from Defra:

“We recommend that Defra commission further research into why more people are using food banks to provide an evidence base to inform and enhance policy responses.”

One of the recommendations was to include questions in the UK's living costs and food survey. However, there is still currently no effective measurement of household food insecurity in the UK.

The Fabian Society report *Hungry for Change* (2015) included recommendations in relation to the 25-year plan for food and farming which is overseen by Defra (see opposite page for details).

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

The DWP has responsibility for social security levels and tax credits, which have a very direct impact on food insecurity.

Figures from the Trussell Trust (2016–17) demonstrate that the majority of food bank referrals are due to either low income (26%) or benefit delays and changes (43%).

Meanwhile, in areas where the new Universal Credit system has been rolled out, food banks have seen a 17% average increase in referrals for emergency food – more than double the national average of 7%.²⁶ The lengthy waiting period for a first Universal Credit payment can lead to food bank referrals, debt, mental health issues, rent arrears and eviction. The November 2017 Budget made some welcome adjustments to Universal Credit, but there is still a five-week waiting period and a system of advances which leave people on low incomes in debt.

At the same time, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation point out that the ongoing four-year benefit freeze will leave vulnerable groups, including single parents with children, worse off than before.

The Department for Education (DfE)

Teachers have highlighted the impact of food insecurity on the children they teach. Hunger and malnutrition have a negative impact on children's physical and mental wellbeing, and impair learning by reducing their ability to concentrate. In a 2014 YouGov poll commissioned by the NUT²⁷, almost half of teachers reported that malnutrition or hunger was affecting the ability of pupils to concentrate.

Many schools have been responding actively to the problem, by looking to extend free school meals or offering 'wraparound' services – breakfast clubs and after-school care – that ensure access to decent food 365 days a year.

"Our strong belief in the need for children to feel safe and experience warmth and nourishment in order to grow and be able to learn is a driver behind our philosophies."

*Beech Hill Primary School*²⁸

"Extended care [services] in schools can do a lot for families. Done well, they can offer affordable, enriching activities for children outside of school hours. They take place in a trusted setting in which universal provision is seen as the norm, offering childcare that can give parents greater scope to undertake paid work to help reduce the economic insecurity which underpins food insecurity. And they are places where children just happen to be fed, helping to reduce hunger without making children feel singled out or stigmatised."

Alison Garnham, Child Poverty Action Group

However, schools are set to lose thousands with the reduction in Pupil Premium – money that schools use to fund breakfast clubs, free school uniform and class trips for families that cannot afford to pay.

"The projection is that our school will be £80,000 a year worse off by 2020. But we have huge challenges with many families living in real poverty."

Helen Slack, Birmingham headteacher

The Department of Health and Social Care

Food poverty is a major health issue. The Department of Health has itself done a lot of work highlighting the impact of poor diet on health, and numerous other bodies have highlighted issues which fall within the department's area of responsibility.

In 2014 the UK Faculty of Public Health identified food insecurity as an emerging public health crisis. Adults experiencing food insecurity are more likely to develop mental health conditions and have trouble managing other health conditions; they also cost the NHS more than adults who are not food insecure.

A recent study found that 50% of households referred to food banks have a disabled person resident in the household, one in three referrals were for households where someone is affected by mental illness, and 75% had other health problems.

People on lower incomes are also disproportionately affected by the major killer diseases: coronary heart disease, cancer and diabetes. The Faculty of Public Health highlighted the need for government action to tackle inequalities, including changing the 'food environment' (accessibility, affordability and culture) in which people live.

The Department of Health has created schemes such as Healthy Start to tackle food insecurity. Healthy Start provides vouchers and free vitamins to young and low-income pregnant women, and families with children aged 1–4 years. Vouchers can be spent on fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables, cow's milk or first infant formula. The scheme was designed to protect the health of women, infants and young children on lower incomes, improve diets, reduce obesity and encourage breastfeeding.

When the new scheme was established in 2006 it was spending £160 million a year; in 2015–16 it spent £72 million. Decreasing entitlement due to welfare reform and lower uptake have been given as reasons for this decline. The Healthy Start Alliance (an external advocacy group) is calling for action to address the poor uptake and restrictive eligibility criteria.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)

MHCLG is responsible for creating good places to live and work, including supporting communities with strong public services, and devolving powers and budgets to boost local growth and give more power to local people to shape what happens in their area.

The MHCLG 2015–20 Single Departmental Plan²⁹ includes initiatives promoting local access to pocket parks and pubs, addressing domestic violence, troubled families, youth unemployment, mental health and homelessness – but makes no mention of ensuring people have local access to affordable food.

MHCLG retains responsibility for the Local Welfare Assistance schemes run by local government, which were designed to help people in deep poverty to cope with short-term crisis (e.g. benefit delay, fire, flood, illness and injury) and the breakdown of essential household goods.

"For instance, buying basic furniture for a woman fleeing domestic violence so that her child can stay with her can save the cost of taking that child into care. We also look to prevent problems recurring in the longer term, so, for example, as well as purchasing household essentials for people in crisis, we offer them support with debt management, education and employment." *Andy Hull, Islington Council*³⁰

The Centre for Responsible Credit tracked local welfare schemes in 110 out of 155 English councils. It found that 26 councils had closed their schemes; 11 had cut local welfare funding by more than 80% compared with 2013 levels, leaving a very basic skeleton service; and some councils were just transferring what remained of their budget to local food banks or credit unions. 30 councils had imposed cuts of between 60% and 79% on local schemes.³¹ The cuts to these emergency funds leave low-income households at much greater risk of food insecurity.

The Cabinet Office

The Cabinet Office “has responsibility for supporting collective government, helping to ensure the effective development, coordination and implementation of policy.”

- It has led on the Race Disparity Audit, which gathers government data about differences in treatment and outcome affecting people of different ethnicities, and coordinates the government’s response.
- It is preparing proposals to improve care and support for older people and tackle the challenge of an ageing population.

A good example of the Cabinet Office’s coordinating role was when, in July 2013, the Office led cross-government youth policy by putting young people at the heart of policy-making.

The Welsh Assembly

The Welsh government’s approach is an example of how government can take responsibility for tackling food insecurity:

The Food Poverty Alliance Wales was set up in response to the outcomes of a Think Tank hosted by the Welsh government and Public Health Wales in April 2015.

The Food Poverty Alliance facilitates action to address food poverty and to take forward the work proposed by the Think Tank. It promotes the importance of affordable nutritious and sustainable food for all, and its impact upon health, wellbeing, environment and quality of life. The Alliance’s vision is “to enable all individuals, families and communities to have the ability to access affordable food which makes up a socially and culturally acceptable healthy diet every day.”

After a successful pilot in 2016, the Welsh government invested £500,000 in holiday food clubs to boost existing provision for the summer of 2017. The scheme provided quality meals, activities and education about healthy eating for 1,500 children attending 39 clubs across 12 local authority areas. Provision was available for primary-aged children and funding had to be matched.

“I dread the holidays and always have done. When they first mentioned it [Holiday Fun and Food club], it gave me hope that I would get through the six weeks.”

Parent of child attending a holiday club

Wales also has a statutory requirement that all schoolchildren who attend a local authority-maintained school can have a free breakfast at school. If their school does not already provide free breakfasts, parents can request that they do so. The scheme has been in place since autumn 2004, and aims to improve children’s health and concentration.

An evaluation of the Welsh free breakfast initiative found that (with sufficient funding and effective services) free school breakfast could improve health and social inequalities.

The Scottish government

In 2016 the Scottish government set up a Fair Food Transformation Fund (£1 million per year), to facilitate projects that seek a dignified response to food poverty. The fund aims to help Scotland become a ‘Good Food Nation’ where everyone has access to healthy, nutritious food, without needing emergency food aid.

“Our £1m Fair Food Fund supports local organisations and community groups to reduce reliance on emergency food provision through other means, for example by providing nutritious food and teaching people how to cook fresh meals. We are also exploring ways to give further and better effect to the right to food in Scots Law, and whether that could support us to tackle the very real problem of hunger with a response based on human rights and dignity for all.”

Angela Constance, Communities Secretary

In September 2016 the Scottish government announced the Good Food Nation bill in their programme for government. The bill will aim to improve Scots’ access to high quality food through a range of methods. Consultation on the bill has been ongoing throughout 2017.

“We’re calling for a cross-cutting rights-based approach because food cuts across so many parts of our lives – it doesn’t make sense to just look at food and poverty in isolation without thinking about the impacts on health, workers’ rights, access to land, farm incomes, environment, or climate change.”

Pete Ritchie, Director of Nourish Scotland

The SNP, Scottish Labour and the Scottish Greens made manifesto commitments to the bill that would read across food, farming, health and other issues. Ministers have confirmed that the bill will be aligned with a ‘Right to Food’ approach, for example through referencing the UN Convention on Social Economic and Cultural Rights.³²

The Scottish government has also started to measure household food insecurity in the Scottish Health Survey.

Government policy: what needs to change?

Five key shifts are needed in policy approaches to household food insecurity.

1. **Appoint a minister or department charged with responsibility for coordinating a policy response across Government**, which also takes into account the role of local government, the devolved administrations, civil society and business.
2. **Measure household food insecurity each year**, by adopting and using the internationally agreed definition of household food insecurity.
3. **Free people from the threat of food insecurity**. Government should build a vision to ensure people can access and enjoy food in socially acceptable ways, not just today but next week and next month. Policy should address not only food crisis and minimum diets, but vulnerability, social acceptability and inclusion. Solutions need to be broad, ambitious and include all stakeholders.
4. **Listen to people with first-hand experience of hunger** and use their experiences, as well as informed research, as the basis for policy. This would bring to the forefront of policy design the lived experiences of household food insecurity and frontline experiences of responding to them; as well as drawing on the increasing amounts of research on household food insecurity and need for emergency food provision.
5. **Lead the way in ending hunger and household food insecurity**. What is needed is a strong and effective universal and entitlement-based approach, ensuring everyone can eat well and participate fully. To achieve this, government will need to play a leadership role – bringing all stakeholders together but taking ultimate responsibility.

We therefore recommend a **government-led Food and Poverty strategy**. The strategy should establish specific policy programmes and their implementation.³³ The strategy must 'be linked to pro-poor initiatives, must be credible and realistic and must identify concrete actions for the various duty bearers'.³⁴

Given the level of public and civil society interest in the issue of household food insecurity and rising use of food banks in particular, now is an important time to call for such an intervention from government. If we build on the lived experiences, growing evidence base and important policy interventions that we have seen in recent years, we can create a Food and Poverty strategy that develops effective upstream responses, and ensures that everyone can live well.

In recent years, local and national charities, faith and community groups have truly stepped up to the plate, in responding to the growth in household food insecurity and hunger across the UK. But civil society cannot be left to shoulder the burden alone. Government too must accept its responsibility and play its part in finding solutions to the current crisis. Only then can we hope to create a society in which everyone has access to good food and no one needs to go to bed hungry.

Now is the time for government to step up to the plate.

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A UK Food and Poverty strategy: the shifts we need from government

- Measure the problem
- Ensure everyone can access food
- Appoint a minister
- Listen to people with experience
- Step up and lead all stakeholders