

Food Poverty

Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group

Report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Guildford Borough Council

March 2019

Foreword

*This has been an eye-opening journey for the task group. There has been a mass of evidence, with many facts and figures, which you'll find as troubling as we did; however, our conclusion is clear – **food poverty and insecurity exists in the Borough in both urban and rural settings.***

Food poverty and insecurity is not restricted to residents in our less advantaged areas. Our findings show that residents who live in our affluent areas experience food poverty and insecurity. This may be because they are 'asset rich' (i.e., they own their own home) and 'cash poor' so they too struggle financially to pay for their basic needs.

Our report concludes that the main cause of food poverty and insecurity is the changes to the benefits system for people of working age, against the backdrop of our government's austerity measures. The rising cost of housing, especially in the rental market, and debt are also contributors as they stretch budgets to their limit. But what's particularly interesting from the data, is that more and more working families are dealing with food poverty and insecurity (the in-work poor) and are having to make the stark decision whether to buy food or pay a bill (such as heating); we were told that parents are going without meals so that their children can eat.

*I'd like to highlight **just three causes** for particular concern from our report:*

- We have no **measurement** of the scope and extent of food poverty or insecurity across our borough. This begs the question 'How can we – and local organisations - help those people most in need? Food banks do provide some data, such as the number of food parcels, but what about the people who do not use them?*
- There is evidence that food poverty and insecurity have **adverse effects** on our physical and mental health - the phrase 'leftover food, for leftover people' hits home. This again raises the question of what can we do – alongside health & wellbeing services and local organisations – to help improve this?*
- **Food aid** – such as food banks - has its place in our community to meet immediate and short term need. But shouldn't we know more about the true causes of food poverty and insecurity and what long term resolutions can be put in place to eradicate it?*

Our report recommends the Council develop and implement a Food Poverty Strategy and Action Plan, working with academics and other experts by experience. In addition, the report makes clear that there is a need for a move away from short-term, food-centred action that is often presented as the solution to food insecurity. For a real, long-term solution, we found there is a requirement to look upstream and address the structural drivers of food poverty and insecurity.

Finally, it has been a real pleasure working on this project and I'd like to thank everyone involved in it; special thanks are extended to Professor Jon May for his insightful assistance at the outset of our review, Drs Dianna Smith and Claire Thompson for their help and advice, the Trussell Trust, the task group members, and the Council's Scrutiny Manager, James Dearling. This report would not have happened without your hard work and invaluable input.

Councillor Angela Goodwin

Chair of the Food Poverty Task Group

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Table 1: key definitions

Food poverty:	‘the inability to afford, or have access to, food to make up a healthy diet.’ [Department of Health, Choosing a Better Diet: a food and health action plan, 2005, p.7.]
Food insecurity:	‘Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.’ [Food Standards Agency, Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey, 2007]
Food Aid:	refers to range of support activities aiming to help people meet food needs, often on a short term basis, which contribute to relieving the symptoms of food poverty and insecurity. [Household Food Security in the UK: a review of food aid, DEFRA, 2014, p.iv.]

1. Introduction

Background and reasons for the review

- 1.1 In April 2017, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee approved a proposal to investigate food poverty in the Borough and agreed the terms of reference for the investigation (within the scoping document, attached at Appendix 1).
- 1.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee determined that the complexity and likely nature of the review warranted a task and finish task group approach.
- 1.3 The investigation was prompted by concerns over the occurrence of food poverty in the Borough, seemingly epitomised by the continuance of local food banks, along with knowledge of existing pockets of deprivation in the Borough.
- 1.4 A key expectation of the review was to raise awareness of emergency food provision in the Borough and the issues surrounding its use. In addition, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee tasked the task group with investigating the effectiveness of food aid provision in the Borough and addressing questions around the use of surplus food.¹
- 1.5 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee identified three key issues for the task group:
- What is driving people to use food aid in Guildford and how accessible and appropriate is it?
 - Who needs food aid and why?
 - Who provides food aid and how?
- 1.6 Five overarching objectives for the task group's investigation were agreed:
- What are the impacts of food poverty?
 - How widespread is food poverty in Guildford?
 - How effective is the model of food aid provision in Guildford (in meeting immediate and long-term needs)?
 - Consider approaches to reduce residents' dependency on food aid.
 - How successful are the strategic approaches to tackling food poverty?
- 1.7 The task group membership comprises:
- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Councillor Angela Goodwin (Chair) | Councillor Dennis Paul [until April 2018] |
| Councillor Angela Gunning | Councillor Pauline Searle |
| Councillor Sheila Kirkland | Councillor James Walsh |

2. Process

- 2.1 Throughout the period of the task group's review the issues of food poverty and food insecurity have featured in public discourse. There has been a steady flow of reports and research informing food poverty issues that the task group has sought to keep up to date with. In addition, the investigation has incorporated a desktop review of published literature on food insecurity.
- 2.2 During the course of its considerations the task group obtained oral and written evidence from Council officers (including the Family Support Team), academics, local food banks, the Trussell Trust, FareShare, local charities (including Surrey Welfare Rights Unit, Woking's Lighthouse Centre, and Guildford Action), supermarkets, the Diocese of Guildford, Ash Citizens Advice and other local authorities. Organisers at local and neighbouring food banks proved an invaluable source of information and insight for the task group's work.

¹ For details see Guildford Borough Council, Overview and Scrutiny Committee minutes, 25 April 2017, OS44 and OS45. <http://www2.guildford.gov.uk/councilmeetings/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=262&MIId=460&Ver=4>

- 2.3 The task group met formally on sixteen occasions to gather and evaluate its evidence. This was in addition to visiting the Borough's food banks, the Lighthouse Centre at Woking, FareShare Southern Central, and FareShare Sussex. The notes of the task group's meetings are attached as Appendix 2 to this report.
- 2.4 The task group members felt it was important to meet residents experiencing food poverty and hear directly the voices of those in poverty themselves. Notes from these meetings with users are not attached to this report.
- 2.5 Towards the end of its review the task group commissioned an expert external researcher to help map the emergency food aid provision in the Borough (one of the key issues for the task group's work).
- 2.6 The task group gathered evidence from the Lead Councillor for Housing and Development Management and invited the Lead Councillor for Community Health, Wellbeing, and Project Aspire to contribute to the review.
- 2.7 The task group's draft report and recommendations were shared with officers and participants for comments.

3. Context

- 3.1 Before considering the more detailed findings and conclusions of the task group's review, a brief discussion of the national and local contexts (and the interplay between the two) is beneficial. This section discusses the measurement and scale of food poverty and insecurity, food banks and other food aid provision, and the costs of food poverty and insecurity.

Measurement of food poverty and insecurity

- 3.2 Ascertaining the scale of food poverty and insecurity was an overarching objective for the task group. Both before and during the group's review, research has been published highlighting inequalities and poverty in the UK. The headline findings and figures are disturbing. For example, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, more than 14 million people in the UK live in poverty: 8.4 million working-age adults; 4.5 million children; and 1.4 million pension age adults. Twenty-two per cent of the overall UK population is living in a family considered to be in poverty and more than one in ten of the population live in persistent poverty.² Over 1.5 million people were destitute at some point in 2017, that is to say, unable to afford two 'essential' needs, such as food or shelter. Research suggests that the most common essential need lacked by people in destitution is food (62 per cent).³
- 3.3 While Guildford Borough is generally seen as an affluent area in a well-to-do county, prosperity is far from universal. Narratives of generalised affluence are misplaced and unhelpful for attempts to help tackle poverty and inequality. Significant inequalities and levels of poverty within the Borough and the county are identifiable. For example, in Surrey twenty-five neighbourhoods are within the third most deprived areas in England, with four of these deprived neighbourhoods in Guildford Borough (Westborough, Stoke, Worplesdon, and Ash Wharf).⁴ The percentage of

² Social Metrics Commission, *A new measure of poverty for the UK: The final report of the Social Metrics Commission*, September 2018. There has been no official UK-wide measure of poverty since 2015. The task group cites the core measure of poverty devised by the Commission which is wider than an assessment of income or a measure about what the public believe is a minimum standard at which people should live.

https://lif.blob.core.windows.net/lif/docs/default-source/default-library/legj6470-measuring-poverty-full_report-181004-web.pdf?sfvrsn=0

³ Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Glen Bramley, Filip Sosenko, Janice Blenkinsopp, Jenny Wood, Sarah Johnsen, Mandy Littlewood, and Beth Watts, *Destitution in the UK 2018*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, June 2018, pp.1, 8. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2018>

⁴ For comprehensive data and examples see: Surrey County Council, *The Welfare Picture in Surrey: An update report from the Surrey Welfare Coordination Group*, October 2018; Community Foundation for Surrey, *Surrey*

children in poverty in the Borough after housing costs (AHC) is 14.59 per cent. In three local neighbourhoods in the Borough over a quarter of the children live in poverty AHC.⁵

- 3.4 Significantly, and unlike some other western countries, in the UK there is not yet a routine measurement of the scope and extent of food poverty or insecurity. Only in February 2019 (as the task group finalised its report) did government concede the need to monitor food insecurity to inform its policy making. Previously, government has refused to measure food insecurity and responded to requests to do so by alluding to the complexities of why people turn to food aid and the difficulties of collecting food insecurity data. For critics of the government this reluctance to quantify how many people are too poor to eat has appeared politically motivated, perhaps allowing government inaction. From April 2019 the government will add ten questions to its Family Resources Survey to enable a measurement of food insecurity, with results published in April 2021.⁶
- 3.5 Yet, there have been different surveys that have given indications of the scale of the problem in different populations at different times. For example, in 2014 the UN estimated approximately ten per cent of adults in the UK (5.3 million) experienced food insecurity and 8.4 million adults lived in food insecure households.⁷ More recently in the first substantial survey into the scale of food insecurity, the 2016 Food & You survey by the Food Standards Agency (for England, Wales, and Northern Ireland) found a similar proportion of adults (8 per cent) to be food insecure, that is to say, living in low or very low food secure households, and 13 per cent to live in marginally secure households.⁸

Scale of the problem

- 3.6 The Food & You survey reveals contrasting differences in rates of food insecurity within society: a third of those aged 16 to 24 and a quarter of those aged 25 to 34 worried that household food would run out before there was money to buy more compared with 6–7 per cent of those aged over 65. Fifteen per cent of adults in the lowest income quartile lived with ‘very low food security’, and 23 per cent of adults in the lowest quartile lived in food insecure households compared with 3 per cent in the highest quartile. Almost half (47 per cent) of unemployed adults worried that their household food would run out before there was money to buy more. Pointedly, employment offered inadequate protection from food insecurity, with 6 per cent of all those in work living in food insecure households, and 20 per cent of adults in work worrying about running out of food before they had money to buy more. In contrast, pensioners were at lower risk of food insecurity, with less than 2 per cent experiencing food insecurity.⁹

Uncovered: Why local giving is needed to strengthen our communities, 2013 and 2017 reports; and www.surreyi.gov.uk.

⁵ The Before Housing Costs figure for the Borough is 8.96 per cent. Poverty levels are generally higher when household incomes are measured after housing costs, as poorer households tend to spend a larger proportion of their income on housing than high-income households. Feargal McGuinness, ‘Poverty in the UK: Statistics’, House of Commons Library, briefing paper 7096, August 2018.

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN07096/SN07096.pdf>. Local data, including ward level figures, are available at <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/poverty-in-your-area-2018/>

⁶ Patrick Butler, ‘UK hunger survey to measure food insecurity’, *The Guardian*, 27 February 2019.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/feb/27/government-to-launch-uk-food-insecurity-index> Feargal McGuinness, Jennifer Brown, and Matthew Ward, ‘Household food insecurity measurement in the UK’, House of Commons Library, debate pack 2016/0238, December 2016, pp.6-8.

⁷ The definitions of food poverty, food insecurity, and food security used for this review are shown in Table 1. UN data from the 2014 Gallup World Poll concluded that in the UK an estimated 8.4 million people lived in households where adults reported insecure access to food in the past year, within this task group around 2.4 million people experienced severe food insecurity. [UN FAO *Voices of the Hungry: Technical Report, 2016*](https://www.un.org/development/desa/pubs/2016/04/un-fao-voices-of-the-hungry-technical-report-2016/), p.39.

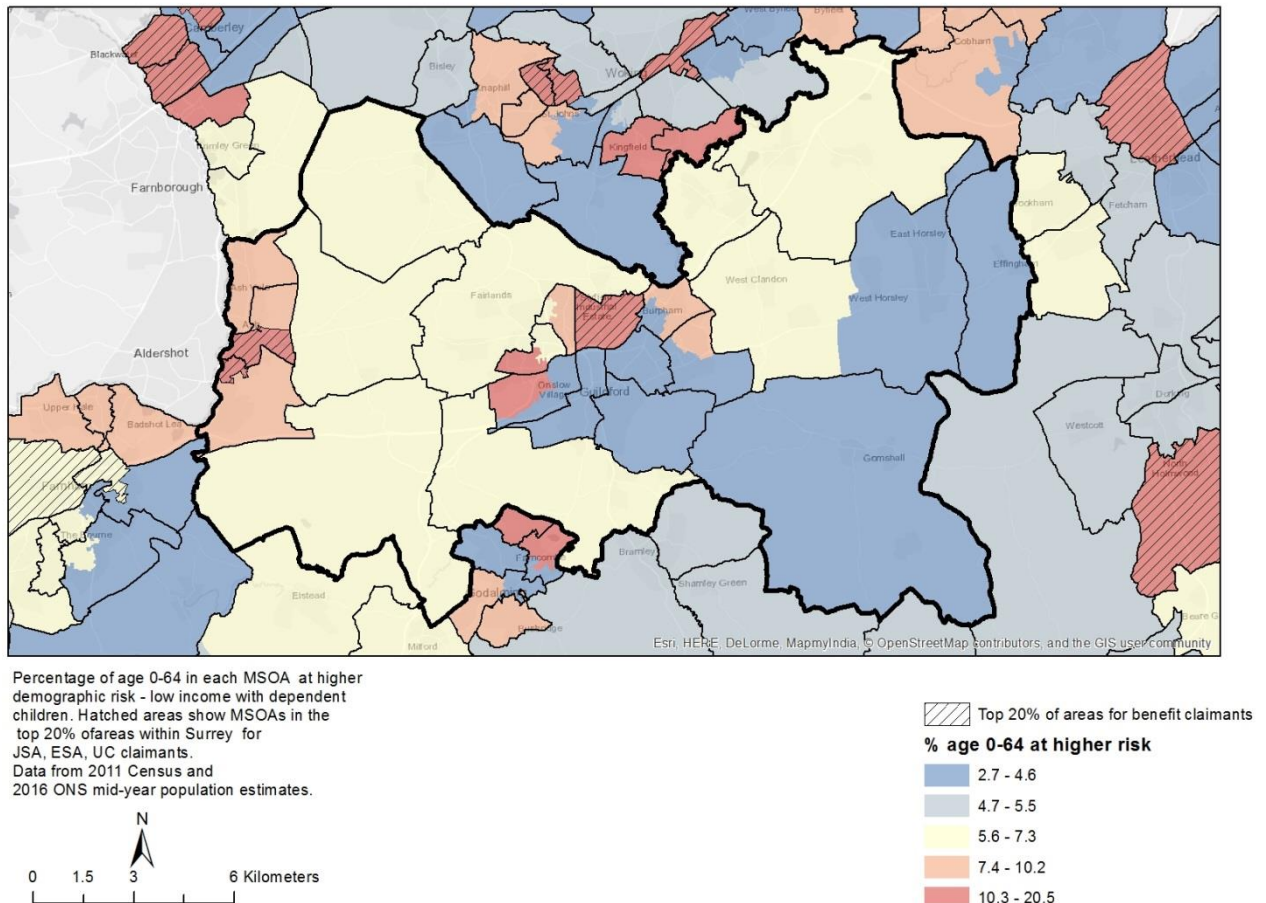
⁸ Food Standards Agency, ‘The Food & You Survey: Wave 4’, 2017, pp.26-29.

https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/food-and-you-w4-combined-report_0.pdf

⁹ The Food Foundation, ‘Food Standards Agency Survey Confirms Enormity of those Struggling to Afford Food in the UK’, March 2017. <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/food-standards-agency-survey-confirms-enormity-of-those-struggling-to-afford-food-in-the-uk/> Food Standards Agency, ‘The Food & You Survey: Wave 4’, Combined report - results table, 2017, Table 1.17. <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/food-and-you/food-and-you-wave-four>

Modelling food insecurity

3.7 The task group's review confirmed that the extent to which Guildford Borough residents are affected by food insecurity is neither measured nor estimated. However, the task group was introduced to models mapping the estimated risk of household food insecurity in local areas. This modelling uses factors identified as contributing to food insecurity to provide an index of food insecurity risk. A simple example of such a map is below (kindly produced for the task group's review by Dr Dianna Smith, University of Southampton). It depicts the relative risk of household food insecurity for those <65 years within Guildford.¹⁰



3.8 The map illustrates the household profile-derived risk of food insecurity (indicated by colour) and the high number of benefit claimants (indicated by hatching). Put simply, the colour shading indicates the percentage of people aged <65 years who live in a household on a low income with dependent children (identified as a higher demographic risk of food poverty). The areas with hatching are where the percentage of people of working age claiming benefits is in the top 20 per cent for Surrey. Thus, the areas where there are more people in the working age population at highest risk are shown with red shading and hatching. The task group judged the potential benefits of identifying higher-risk groups (through estimates validated by surveys) to enable a targeting of resources in neighbourhoods (using Lower Super Output Areas) as worthwhile. The advantages of such approaches, including the addition and combination of other factors and the comparability of the model to the 2015 Indices of Deprivation for England, have been considered elsewhere.¹¹

¹⁰ Abbreviations used in the map key: MSOA (Middle Layer Super Output Area), JSA (Jobseeker's Allowance), ESA (Employment and Support Allowance), and UC (Universal Credit).

¹¹ For example, Dianna Smith, Claire Thompson, Kirk Harland, Storm Parker, and Nicola Shelton, 'Identifying populations and areas at greatest risk of household food insecurity in England', *Applied Geography*, 91 2018, pp.21-31.

Local estimates of need

- 3.9 As a direct result of the task group's review, academic experts invited the Council to join a project to expand and refine local estimates of food poverty. Alas, it must be noted that participation in this project was judged not a priority for the Council and, despite the minimal resources involved, the opportunity was declined. Naturally, the task group was disappointed to encounter such a view concerning the need for better establishing how extensive food insecurity may be for residents.
- 3.10 It is unfortunate that, rightly or wrongly, such a response can be located in an apparent Council discourse that seeks to downplay the issue of food poverty; a narrative that seemingly conflates absence of evidence with evidence of absence, or views the issue as one best addressed by local communities or through changes to individual behaviour. It is doubly unfortunate that the Lead Councillor with responsibility for health and community welfare did not respond to requests from the task group to contribute to the review and share her views on food poverty and food insecurity.

Food bank usage

- 3.11 While the rise in the numbers of food banks and their users is often used to highlight issues of poverty and social injustice, food bank usage is not a simple, reliable proxy for food insecurity. Evidence from countries that routinely measure food insecurity confirms food bank usage to be a poor indicator of food insecurity, with those people using food banks not representative of the wider food insecure population. Furthermore, one study determined that possibly only a fifth of people that were food insecure used food banks.¹² Possible explanations for why people experiencing food insecurity do not use emergency food aid, and how these barriers might be addressed, are considered in sections 4 and 5 below.
- 3.12 In the UK only a fraction of the people calculated to live in food insecure households have received food parcels from food banks.¹³ Despite the amount of emergency food aid provided, for example, the Trussell Trust distributed 1.3 million three-day emergency food packages in 2017-18,¹⁴ food bank usage statistics understate measured need and cannot be relied upon as a measure of household food insecurity.¹⁵ Simply mapping the locations of food banks is not a method to reliably distinguish areas of food insecurity. Indeed, it has been suggested that the level of community resources and social networks required to start a food bank further detracts from their possible use as a measure of need.¹⁶
- 3.13 Notwithstanding the limited capacity of food bank evidence, in the absence of local measurement of food insecurity in the Borough and given the Council's stance on the value of ascertaining estimates, food bank usage can provide a very good indication of the existence of food insecurity (though how many more people are affected by food insecurity than use food banks is unknown).

¹² Rachel Loopstra and Valerie Tarasuk, 'Food Bank Usage is a Poor Indicator of Food Insecurity: Insights from Canada', *Social Policy and Society* 14(3), pp.443-55.

¹³ Briefing paper, 'Measuring household food insecurity in the UK and why we MUST do it: 4 facts you should know', Food Foundation, Sustain, and University of Oxford, November 2016. <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/MeasuringHouseholdFoodInsecurity.pdf>

¹⁴ The [Trussell Trust](#) is a non-governmental organisation and charity that co-ordinates food banks in the UK, with over 420 food banks operating out of more than 1,200 distribution centres. An ongoing mapping exercise of food bank locations by Sabine Goodman on behalf of the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) has found over 2,000 food banks operating, including over 800 not affiliated to the Trussell Trust. Trussell Trust, [End of Years Stats](#), retrieved November 2018. <http://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/mapping> [accessed 10 January 2019]

¹⁵ Flora Douglas, Ourega-Zoé Ejebu, Ada Garcia, Fiona MacKenzie, Stephen Whybrow, Lynda MacKenzie, Anne Ludbrook, and Elisabeth Dowler, *The nature and extent of food poverty/insecurity in Scotland*, NHS Health Scotland, 2015, pp.67-68.

¹⁶ Research looking at Trussell Trust food banks found them to be more likely to open in those local authorities worst hit by central welfare cuts, unemployment, and benefit sanctions. Rachel Loopstra, Aaron Reeves, David Taylor-Robinson, Ben Barr, Martin McKee, and David Stuckler, 'Austerity, sanctions, and the rise of food banks in the UK', *BMJ* 2015; 350. Dianna Smith, Claire Thompson, Kirk Harland, Storm Parker, and Nicola Shelton, 'Identifying populations and areas at greatest risk of household food insecurity in England,' *Applied Geography*, 91 2018, pp.21-31.

While vouchers for food banks¹⁷ are issued by multiple agencies and can be redeemed at multiple sites, compiling and interpreting statistics of food bank is not as problematic as commentators have asserted.¹⁸ Moreover, the task group has adopted a limited, even circumspect, approach to local food bank data that sidesteps (unfounded) charges of inflating the issue. Before reviewing the usage of food banks by Guildford Borough residents, a brief summary of local food banks is appropriate.

Local food banks

- 3.14 There are currently two food banks based within Guildford Borough, providing food parcels in four areas: the Salvation Army at Woodbridge Road and the North Guildford Food Bank with locations at St. Clare's Church, Park Barn, the New Hope Centre, Bellfields, and Bushy Hill Community Centre, Merrow. None of these food banks are Trussell Trust affiliated. The opening hours of these food banks, along with other food aid providers in the Borough, are included in Appendix 3.¹⁹
- 3.15 Data collected by North Guildford Food Bank shows the vast majority of people accessing its emergency food aid are from Guildford town and the immediate surrounding area (postcodes GU1 and GU2). This remains the predominant pattern of its usage. However, following the closure in 2017 of a food bank distribution centre at Ash Vale (within Guildford Borough but operated by Farnham food bank), the North Guildford Food Bank started to be accessed by residents from Ash for the first time.²⁰
- 3.16 Importantly, food parcel data provided to the task group by the Trussell Trust confirms that Guildford Borough residents access foodbanks outside the Borough's boundaries. Relying on figures from the two independent food banks within the Borough neglects Trussell Trust food banks at Woking, Cobham, Farnham, Dorking, and Farnborough and would overlook almost a third of the food parcels distributed to Borough residents.
- 3.17 Almost 2,000 food parcels were distributed to Borough households in 2017-18, with the task group advised by food banks of expected increases for 2018-19. (For 2017-18, the North Guildford Food Bank reports issuing 495 parcels, the Salvation Army 941 parcels and, as Appendix 4 details, Trussell Trust food banks issued 557.) Further information and analyses of food bank records would be required to identify the number of unique users (according to the Trust the average user visits twice²¹) or the total number of people helped (parcels can be for individuals or families) but, as suggested above, it is not the intention to present food bank usage as a proxy for food insecurity. Food bank statistics do not capture the exact levels of food insecurity in the population, but the number of food parcels distributed locally may serve as a wake-up call to anyone not yet at the stage of acknowledging the issue.
- 3.18 Records from the Trussell Trust and the two independent food banks within the Borough reveal the patterns of food bank usage across the Borough. Significantly, the Trust's data is broken

¹⁷ All Trussell Trust-affiliated food banks, and many others food banks (including those in Guildford) operate a voucher system that requires people seeking food aid to have been referred with a voucher completed by a frontline professional. Typically, the voucher contains personal details of the food bank user, including the number of adults and children in the household and the nature of the crisis that caused them to turn to emergency food aid. A voucher can be exchanged for a three-day, non-perishable food parcel. Food bank users are usually permitted to claim up to three vouchers over a six-month period, with food bank managers able to issue further vouchers at their discretion. An example of a local food voucher is attached at Appendix 6.

¹⁸ Robert Smith, 'The Trussell Trust's misleading figures on food bank usage help no one', *Spectator*, 22 April 2015. <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2015/04/the-trussell-trusts-misleading-figures-on-food-bank-usage-help-no-one/>

¹⁹ Ash Citizens Advice distributes food parcels provided by the Trussell Trust affiliated Farnham Food Bank (with the completed food referral vouchers returned to the Farnham food bank). Appendix 3 outlines the food aid provision in the Borough; namely, local sources of dry and cooked food available to those in greatest need and the access routes. The task group's intention is for a detailed version of this directory of resources to be publicised.

²⁰ North Guildford Food Bank, year end data for 2017 shared with the task group.

²¹ North Guildford Food Bank records reveal that during 2017 over half of its users (57 per cent) visited the food bank once, 23 per cent twice, and 12 per cent three times. North Guildford Food Bank, year end data for 2017 shared with the task group.

down by wards and shows the geographical spread of residents resorting to food banks; evidently, food poverty is experienced much wider than those localities traditionally identified as the areas of deprivation in the Borough. Such data suggests localised measurement and estimates of food poverty are necessary to better understand and tackle the issues. (Figures from the Trussell Trust food banks for 2017-18 and 2016-17 are included in Appendix 4.)

The contested meaning of food banks

- 3.19 The extent and nature of food poverty and food insecurity, particularly the meaning of the growth and use of food banks,²² remains a contested area in public discourse. Perceptions and tensions about the replacement of the welfare state with a welfare society influence such a discourse. The government's initial response to the rise of food banks applauded them as part of Big Society's active citizenship. Indeed, an All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger and Food Poverty in the UK, while concluding that the welfare state was failing to provide the social security safety net it should, presented the food bank movement as the basis to build a strategy 'to deal both with the symptoms and the long-term causes of hunger in our society.' The Inquiry explicitly rejected calls for the Government to take responsibility to deal with food insecurity and essentially argued for an increased role for voluntarism and a supporting and enabling responsibility for central and local government.²³ In contrast, other research recognises the limits of such approaches and concludes that the 'disjointed "big society" approach' is unequal to the task of ending household food insecurity.²⁴
- 3.20 The culpability for food poverty assigned to government welfare policies and austerity has acted to help politicise the growth in emergency food aid provision. The range of factors driving people to use food aid in Guildford is explored in section 4 below. It is worthwhile to note at this juncture that the task group saw no evidence of people taking advantage of free food, that is to say, free food creating demand, or the growth in food bank use being attributable to 'marketing' by the food bank movement itself.²⁵ The majority of food banks operate a voucher referral system that requires users to have been judged in genuine need by a frontline professional. In addition, beliefs that food aid charities create users have been reviewed by academics and refuted.²⁶ Food banks are a last resort for people in food poverty and, as such, best understood as the tip of the food poverty iceberg.²⁷
- 3.21 In late 2018, an investigation in the UK by the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights documented a disconnect between the government's narrative of poverty and first-hand accounts. He concluded:

Not only does the government not measure food poverty, but a Minister dismissed the significance of foodbank use as being only occasional and noted that foodbanks exist in many other western countries. The clear implication was that

²² Trussell Trust foodbank use has almost quadrupled between 2012-13 and 2017-18: from 346,992 to 1,332,952 food parcels. The Trussell Trust, 'End of Year Stats', 2018, <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/#fy-2017-2018>

²³ Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom, *Feeding Britain: A strategy for zero hunger in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland*, 2014, pp.17, 55. <https://www.feedingbritain.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=d71439a6-8788-4c31-9a05-bd0ec707f252>

²⁴ Cameron Tait, *Hungry for Change: The final report of the Fabian Commission on Food and Poverty*, Fabian Society, 2015, p.1. <http://www.fabians.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Hungry-for-Change-web-27.10.pdf>

²⁵ As suggested by some commentators: Nigel Morris, 'Demand for food banks has nothing to do with benefits squeeze, says Work minister Lord Freud', *Independent*, 2 July 2013. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/demand-for-food-banks-has-nothing-to-do-with-benefits-squeeze-says-work-minister-lord-freud-8684005.html> Toby Helm, 'Charities condemn Iain Duncan Smith for food bank snub', *Guardian*, 21 December 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/dec/21/iain-duncan-smith-food-banks-charities>

²⁶ Rachel Loopstra, Aaron Reeves, David Taylor-Robinson, Ben Barr, Martin McKee, and David Stuckler, 'Austerity, sanctions, and the rise of food banks in the UK', *BMJ* 2015; 350.

²⁷ Hannah Lambie-Mumford, Daniel Crossley, Eric Jensen, Monae Verbeke, and Elizabeth Dowler, 'Household Food Security in the UK: a review of food aid', DEFRA, 2014, p.vii. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/food-aid-research-report>

their rapid growth in the UK should not be seen as cause for concern, let alone for government action.²⁸

- 3.22 Belatedly, in February 2019 the government accepted that troubles with the roll out of Universal Credit had contributed to increased food bank use.²⁹
- 3.23 As has been noted elsewhere, there is no policy framework and little guidance from central government on food banks or on how local government should operate with emergency food aid providers.³⁰ Perhaps given the profile of the issue and the public and political calls for action this raises the question of whether this is a policy gap or a policy in itself.

Other food aid provision

- 3.24 In addition to food parcels from food banks, food aid is provided through the redistribution of surplus food. [FareShare](#) is the UK's leading food distribution charity. Its network distributes surplus food from the food industry to charities and community groups. For 2017-18, FareShare reports redistributing enough food through its network of 21 regional centres and its FareShare Go app³¹ to make approximately 36.7 million meals.³² FareShare charge its Community Food Members³³ a fee to cover the operational costs of its regional centres. A consultants' report commissioned by FareShare claims that modelling the socio-economic impact of the organisation's work shows FareShare saves the public sector approximately £51 million every year.³⁴
- 3.25 Currently, FareShare does not have a regional centre covering the Borough, although Guildford is within the organisation's expansion strategy. The Guildford area has not been a focus of activity for FareShare partly due to the distance from a regional centre; however, a feasibility study by FareShare has identified 43 community groups and charities in the Guildford / Woking area that could potentially benefit from the service. The task group was advised that such an expansion could be a paid for delivery operation from FareShare Sussex into the Guildford area (likely to also include Woking, Fleet, and Farnborough³⁵). The members of the task group judged it sensible to consider the inclusion of Leatherhead in such a development. The task group was advised that local supermarkets and stores used the FareShare Go app to distribute surplus food to six³⁶ community groups in the Guildford area.

²⁸ Professor Philip Alston, *Statement on Visit to the United Kingdom*, London, 16 November 2018. p.17. https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Poverty/EOM_GB_16Nov2018.pdf

²⁹ BBC News, 'Amber Rudd links universal credit to rise in food bank use', 11 February 2019. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-47203389>

³⁰ Brent London Borough Council, 'The Use of Food Banks In Brent Task group Report', Report to Cabinet, 15 January 2018. In 2013, the Government indicated that local authorities could fund food banks. Patrick Butler, 'Welfare minister urges local councils to invest in food banks: Lord Freud accused of backing away from principle of welfare after saying local authorities should "ramp up support in kind"', *The Guardian*, 13 December 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/dec/13/welfare-minister-local-councils-food-banks>

³¹ FareShare Go connects local charities and community groups with the surplus food left over at the end of the day at local supermarkets.

³² This equals almost 17,000 tonnes of food (11,000 tonnes through its centres and the remainder from local supermarkets) redistributed and prevented from going to waste.

³³ FareShare's Community Food Members (CFMs) are those charities and community groups linked to a regional FareShare centre. For 2017-18, FareShare's income from CFM fees was £510,000.

³⁴ *The Wasted Opportunity: The economic and social value of redistributed surplus food; the current and potential cost avoided by the UK public sector resulting from FareShare's work*, 2018 <https://www.nefconsulting.com/redistributing-surplus-food-to-charities-saves-the-uk-economy-51-million-every-year/> For the methodological approach and assumptions informing the claim of monetary value see the consultants' technical report. https://nefconsulting.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/FareShare-Report_NEFC-PRINT.pdf The benefits to the food industry (for example, the saved costs of waste food disposal, the expression of corporate philanthropy, or the development of community capital) and any possible negative aspects of FareShare are not apparently detailed.

³⁵ The task group was advised that FareShare Sussex will likely change its name to FareShare Sussex & Surrey to reflect this wider geographic remit.

³⁶ Figure correct at September 2018.

- 3.26 The long-term implications of using surplus food to feed those in food insecurity are examined in sections 5.20-5.28. In addition, whether or not redistributing surplus food is likely to provide a solution to food insecurity is discussed.
- 3.27 Within the UK the range of responses and approaches to food poverty and insecurity is diverse. In addition to the models discussed above, provision includes initiatives such as members-only social supermarkets, community fridges, meal projects, cook and eat groups, pay what you can meal providers, food vouchers, holiday hunger programmes, and soups runs, along with perhaps more longstanding and formal action such as community care (meals on wheels).
- 3.28 The task group's outline of the elements of the local model of food aid provision is included in Appendix 3, and includes meal providers and a school holiday programme.

School holiday provision

- 3.29 The term 'holiday hunger' refers to the increased levels of food insecurity experienced by some children and their families during school holidays. School holiday hunger is a particular problem for families that usually receive free school meals. Holiday hunger is a historic policy gap, but the issue has come more to the fore recently with holiday clubs an increasingly popular way to help feed children during school holidays.³⁷
- 3.30 The task group was made aware of a school holiday playscheme in the Borough that targets less advantaged children. This is run by CHIPS, a local charity operating in the Westborough and Stoke wards of the Borough, which introduced free lunches³⁸ to its programme in 2016 to address the cheap food choices of low-income households during school holidays. Significantly, the approach of CHIPS is evident from the number (a majority) of children eligible for free school meals that use the playscheme.³⁹ CHIPS runs for four weeks during the summer holidays and one week at Easter. The task group felt the scheme was an example of a targeted approach that was working well and avoided stigmatising attendance. (In addition, the task group was advised that churches and holiday time clubs did provide some meals in the holidays.)

The impact of food poverty

- 3.31 Food poverty has economic, social, and health impacts and costs.
- 3.32 Obviously, an inability to afford or have access to food to make up a healthy diet can lead to diet-related ill health. Conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, malnutrition, and a range of cancers are common diet-related diseases. An extensive case-control study across 52 countries estimated that food poverty contributed to half of all coronary heart disease deaths. Statistical research has linked food poverty with low birth weight and increased childhood mortality, increased falls and fractures in older people, and increased dental cavities in children.⁴⁰
- 3.33 A rise in Victorian era diseases, such as rickets, has been linked with food poverty by public health professionals at the Faculty of Public Health (FPH).⁴¹ Malnutrition caused by food poverty can adversely affect the immune system, the muscular system, and the psychosocial function.⁴²

³⁷ Michael A. Long, Paul B. Stretesky, Pamela Louise Graham, Katie Jane Palmer, Eileen Steinbock, and Margaret Anne Defeyter, 'The impact of holiday clubs on household food insecurity—A pilot study', *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 2017, 26 (2), e261-e269. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/hsc.12507> Pamela Louise Graham, Eilish Crilley, Paul B. Stretesky, Michael A. Long, Katie Jane Palmer, Eileen Steinbock, and Margaret Anne Defeyter, 'School Holiday Food Provision in the UK: A Qualitative Investigation of Needs, Benefits, and Potential for Development', *Frontiers in Public Health* 2016 (4), pp.1-8. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4992941/pdf/fpubh-04-00172.pdf>

³⁸ The company supplying the lunches charge CHIPS a discounted rate.

³⁹ The January 2017 School Census shows 7.5 per cent of school children within the Borough eligible for Free School Meals, but records much higher levels at some schools.

⁴⁰ British Medical Association, *Health at a price: Reducing the impact of poverty*, June 2017, p.7.

⁴¹ Tracy McVeigh, 'Rickets returns as poor families find healthy diets unaffordable', *The Observer*, 30 August 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/aug/30/child-poverty-link-malnutrition-rickets>

⁴² British Medical Association, *Health at a price: Reducing the impact of poverty*, June 2017, p.7.

- 3.34 Significantly, the FPH has suggested that obesity is the biggest problem of food poverty with people forced into choosing cheap, processed, high-fat foods to live.⁴³ The task group was advised of this association (and the seeming paradox to some in government) between food insecurity and obesity. The task group was informed that high energy / low nutrient diets can contribute towards hypertension, iron deficiency, and impaired liver function. Research has confirmed that people are spending more on food, but eating less nutritious food.⁴⁴
- 3.35 The health and social consequences and costs of food poverty may be intergenerational. The importance of a healthy diet for breastfeeding, the importance of nutrients for brain development in babies and children, and the wider effects of poverty on child development are well established.⁴⁵ For children, food poverty means bad dietary patterns, hunger, lower nutrient intake, low fruit and vegetable consumption, and problems accessing food in school holidays. The task group was advised that growing up in a system of food poverty had intergenerational issues for families, particularly girls.
- 3.36 Food poverty in childhood can have a long-term impact on physical and mental health.⁴⁶ The poor health impacts associated with child poverty limits children's potential and their development and increases poor health and life chances in adulthood.⁴⁷ For example, when children and young people go to school hungry there is an effect on their education.
- 3.37 Diet-related ill health in the UK is a substantial burden. For example, it is estimated that 70,000 premature deaths (equivalent to more than 10 per cent of the total annual number of deaths) would be prevented if diets matched nutritional guidelines in terms of more fruit and vegetables and reduced consumption of salt, saturated fat, and added sugar.⁴⁸
- 3.38 In public health terms, the significance of possible repeat food bank use draws attention to issues of the nutritional value, quality, and quantity of emergency food aid.⁴⁹ An increase in food bank usage has no long-term public health upside.⁵⁰ Charitable food aid is unpredictable and has limited reach (as suggested above, approximately 80 per cent of people in food insecurity never access a food bank).⁵¹
- 3.39 Setting aside social and moral arguments, the economic case for tackling food poverty is compelling. The current overall economic costs of diet-related ill health are substantial. Food

⁴³ Tracy McVeigh, 'Rickets returns as poor families find healthy diets unaffordable', *The Observer*, 30 August 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/aug/30/child-poverty-link-malnutrition-rickets>

⁴⁴ For example, Kellogg's and the Centre for Economics and Business Research, *Hard to Swallow: The Facts about Food Poverty*, 2017. https://www.kelloggs.co.uk/content/dam/europe/kelloggs_gb/pdf/R3_Facts%20about%20Food%20Poverty%20ReportFINAL.pdf

⁴⁵ For example, J. T. Cook, D. A. Frank, C. Berkowitz, et al. 'Food insecurity is associated with adverse health outcomes among human infants and toddlers', *The Journal of Nutrition* 2004;134 (6) pp. 1432-38.

⁴⁶ For example, Sharon I. Kirkpatrick, Lynn McIntyre, Melissa L. Potestio, 'Child Hunger and Long-term Adverse Consequences for Health', *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 2010, 164(8), pp.754-62. Lynn L. McIntyre, Jeanne V. A. Williams, Dina H. Lavorato, and Scott Patten, 'Depression and suicide ideation in late adolescence and early adulthood are an outcome of child hunger', *Journal of Affective Disorders* 2012, 150(1), pp.123-29.

⁴⁷ Wickham S, Anwar E, Barr B, et al. 'Poverty and child health in the UK: using evidence for action', *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 2016;101, pp.759-66. <https://adc.bmj.com/content/101/8/759>

⁴⁸ Cabinet Office, *Food Matters: Towards a Strategy for the 21st Century*, 2008. p.11. https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100407165056/http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/work_areas/food_policy.aspx

⁴⁹ Darren Hughes and Edwina Prayogo, 'A Nutritional Analysis of the Trussell Trust Emergency Food Parcel', Trussell Trust, June 2018. Robbie Davison, 'The Trussell Trust Report: a missed opportunity', Can Cook, June 2018. <http://www.cancook.co.uk/trussell-trust-report-missed-opportunity/>

⁵⁰ Elisabeth Garratt, 'Please sir, I want some more: an exploration of repeat foodbank use', *BMC Public Health* (2017) 17: 828.

⁵¹ Martin Caraher and Sinéad Furey, 'Is it appropriate to use surplus food to feed people in hunger? Short-term Band-Aid to more deep rooted problems of poverty,' Food Research Collaboration, Centre for Food Policy, January 2017. <https://foodresearch.org.uk/publications/is-it-appropriate-to-use-surplus-food-to-feed-people-in-hunger/>

consumption-related health costs have been calculated to be approximately £45 billion annually.⁵² In 2015, one study estimated the total annual public expenditure associated with malnutrition to be £20 billion.⁵³

The stigmatisation of food aid

- 3.40 There is a strong and well-established association between poor mental health and poverty; unsurprisingly, research into the relationship between food insecurity and poor health has highlighted the important link with mental health conditions. Adults experiencing food insecurity are known to be more likely to develop mental health conditions.⁵⁴
- 3.41 The task group felt that the effects of the stigma associated with food poverty and insecurity cannot be understated. In an affluent society, more so perhaps in an affluent area such as Guildford Borough, an inability to feed oneself or one's children and family is viewed as personal failure, even shameful. The task group was advised that feelings of powerlessness, guilt, and exclusion can be associated with food insufficiency or acquiring food in socially unacceptable ways. That proof of extreme food poverty (along with its implicit connotations of personal failure) is sometimes judged necessary, or effective, in order to access emergency food provision is addressed below (see section 5.12).
- 3.42 The disputed significance and meaning of food banks, and food aid in general, has added to the stigma and embarrassment of people in food insecurity, particularly those in food poverty and needing to access emergency food aid. At times those in food insecurity have been almost scorned by some in central government and other commentators who have linked food bank use to a lifestyle choice engaged in by those unable to budget properly or cook for themselves.⁵⁵ Indeed, research has shown much of the national media has supported a perception that people at food banks are there largely due to their own fault: often alluding to inappropriate spending on alcohol, cigarettes, take-aways, big screen televisions, mobile phones, and so on.⁵⁶ Such views are ill-informed, ignorant of the influence of people's environment and circumstances on their decisions, and ultimately unhelpful. Notions of deserving and undeserving poor can be seen within the discourse of food poverty deployed, perhaps in an attempt to shift blame for poverty from financial factors to behavioural ones.
- 3.43 In formulating its recommendations, the task group rejected the concept of the undeserving poor. The task group felt that the concept led to a stereotyping that adds to the stigma associated with food insecurity. On a basic level, to suggest whether some of those in food poverty and insecurity might be responsible for their own plight (for example, through laziness or debt) and therefore undeserving of help, or alternately judged poor and deserving through no fault of their own (for example, through illness, accident, or age), is to call for a moral evaluation. Of course, people may act in ways that are not financially sound or simply make mistakes, but mistakes do not affect everyone equally: the same event or episode will mean poverty for some people and a small discomfort for others.

⁵² Sustainable Food Trust, *The Hidden Cost of UK Food*, November 2017, p.55.

<http://sustainablefoodtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/HCOF-Report-online-version-1.pdf>

⁵³ £15.2 billion in healthcare, £4.4 billion in social care. Marinos Elia, *The cost of malnutrition in England and potential cost savings from nutritional interventions (full report): A report on the cost of disease-related malnutrition in England and a budget impact analysis of implementing the NICE clinical guidelines/quality standard on nutritional support in adults*, National Institute for Health Research, 2015, p.1.

⁵⁴ Andrew D. Jones, 'Food Insecurity and Mental Health Status: A Global Analysis of 149 Countries', *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 53(2), August 2017, pp. 264-73.

⁵⁵ For examples Patrick Butler, Patrick Wintour, and Amelia Gentleman, 'Tory peer forced to eat her words after claiming poor people can't cook', *The Guardian*, 8 December 2014.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/dec/08/poor-cannot-cook-peer-eats-words> Paul Vale, 'Michael Gove: 'Families Turn To Food Banks Because Of Poor Financial Management'', *Huffington Post*, 10 September 2013. https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/09/10/michael-gove-families-tur_n_3901443.html?ec_carp=2693124991120650325

⁵⁶ Rebecca Wells and Martin Caraher, 'UK print media coverage of the food bank phenomenon: from food welfare to food charity?' *British Food Journal*, 116 (9), 2014, pp.1426-45. For example Jason Deans, 'Jamie Oliver bemoans chips, cheese and giant TVs of modern-day poverty', *The Guardian*, 27 August 2013.

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2013/aug/27/jamie-oliver-chips-cheese-modern-day-poverty>

3.44 The social acceptability of how food is accessed is important, including the upholding of personal dignity. For many, accessing a food handout is a distressing humiliation; there is considerable stigma associated with surplus food – encapsulated in the phrase, ‘leftover food for leftover people’.⁵⁷ Indeed, the task group members encountered a reluctance among meal providers to admit to receiving and redistributing surplus food. The task group noted the value in the four Dignity Principles developed by Nourish Scotland & The Poverty Truth Commission to guide the design and implementation of responses to food insecurity:

1. Involve in decision making people with direct experience.
2. Recognise the social value of food.
3. Provide opportunities to contribute.
4. Leave people with the power to choose.⁵⁸

4. Causes

4.1 The task group’s substantive findings and conclusions are considered below within a discussion of the drivers of food poverty and insecurity and the responses to it.

4.2 The arena and discourse of food poverty and food aid is heavily politicised. The task group felt this was perhaps understandable as the reality of individuals and families too poor to eat suggests a societal failure – more so in a wealthy country such as ours with a welfare state designed to provide a social security safety net.

Drivers of food poverty

4.3 The task group was charged with identifying the reasons for food poverty and why people use food aid. Distinguishing the drivers would help identify solutions. To help accomplish this the task group used evidence from its interviews, referral data from food banks, a qualitative analysis of cases handled by Ash Citizens Advice, and a desktop review of research on the topic.

4.4 Despite assertions from government and others about the complexity of food aid and difficulties in identifying causes of food banks, the reasons why people access food aid are not hard to fathom.⁵⁹

Food bank data

4.5 While the Trussell Trust does not represent all the charitable food aid in the UK, in the absence of government data the Trust’s franchised network does provide a much-cited source of data on food bank referrals and food aid use. Included as part of the information required, food bank vouchers set out to capture the primary cause as determined by the referral agency. Shown below are the primary referral causes to Trussell Trust foodbanks in 2017-2018:

1. Low Income (28.49%)
2. Benefit Delays (23.74%)
3. Benefit Changes (17.73%)
4. Debt (8.53%)

⁵⁷ Professor Elizabeth Dowler quoted in press release accompanying Food Research Collaboration Policy Brief by Martin Caraher and Sinéad Furey, ‘Is it appropriate to use surplus food to feed people in hunger? Short-term Band-Aid to more deep rooted problems of poverty’, Food Research Collaboration, Centre for Food Policy, January 2017. <https://foodresearch.org.uk/publications/is-it-appropriate-to-use-surplus-food-to-feed-people-in-hunger/>

⁵⁸ Nourish Scotland & The Poverty Truth Commission, *Dignity in Practice: Learning, tools and guidance for community food providers*, March 2018, p.2. <http://www.nourishscotland.org/projects/dignity/>

⁵⁹ Witness the apparently stock response of government spokespeople to studies linking welfare benefit delays and sanctions with food poverty and households having to resort to food aid: ‘Reasons for food bank use are complex so it is misleading to link them to any one issue.’ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/nov/14/spike-food-bank-usage-blamed-delays-benefit-claims-frank-field>
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/universal-credit-government-food-banks-benefits-work-pensions-dwp-charities-mps-dan-jarvis-a8048496.html> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/benefit-sanctions-food-bank-use-link-study-linked-trussell-trust-oxford-university-benefits-rachel-a7382476.html>

- 5. Other (7.57%)
- 6. Homeless (5.01%)
- 7. Sickness / Ill Health (2.86%)
- 8. No recourse to public funds (2.69%)
- 9. Domestic Abuse (1.41%)
 - Reasons under 1%: Delayed Wages (0.81%), Child Holiday meals (0.76%), Refused STBA (Short Term Benefit Allowance) (0.40%)

- 4.6 Information provided by North Guildford Food Bank in 2017 about the key drivers of their emergency food aid is consistent with the above breakdown: approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ (31 per cent) of users had benefit problems, $\frac{1}{3}$ (31 per cent) were homeless / delayed wages / debt issues / sickness / domestic abuse and unemployed, and $\frac{1}{3}$ (34 per cent) low income.⁶⁰
- 4.7 Efforts to decide on a primary or perhaps determining element or factor for the use of emergency food aid from a list are not without problems. The requirement to assign a primary factor for a food parcel referral can over-simplify the issues. Evidence of such simplification was presented to the task group by Ash Citizens Advice (CA), in the form of a review of its food bank referral cases.
- 4.8 Ash CA conducted an in-depth analysis of its food aid client cases for a three-month period,⁶¹ the results of which suggested some limitations to a single tick box approach to identifying drivers of food aid. For example, all except one of these case studies involved clients on benefits (and, by definition, on low incomes) and with health issues (as demonstrated by receipt of ESA, DLA, or PIP or by reference to specific health issues). Mental health issues were recorded in almost half of the food parcel referral case studies.⁶² Yet the task group found that information gathered by providers of food aid, together with other sources of evidence, could be usefully exploited to establish the factors contributing to people asking for food aid. Indeed, the task group suggest consideration be given to altering paper food voucher forms by adding the option to specify Universal Credit (UC) as the cause of the referral.⁶³ The reasons for this suggestion are expanded in sections 4.30-4.33.

The short-term 'crisis'

- 4.9 The task group was advised by many witnesses that people typically have recourse to food aid when hit with a sudden reduction in household income that in an insecure financial context constitutes a 'crisis.' As case studies shared with the task group illustrate, what constitutes a crisis can vary – from a problem with a benefit payment, sickness, the breakdown of a kitchen appliance, the loss of a purse or wallet, or a theft.
- 4.10 The task group acknowledges that an event or crisis with financial consequences can often not be absorbed by those on a low income, and can stimulate the use of emergency food aid. However, this 'crisis' explanation is far from the whole picture. For some vulnerable households and families there are continuing circumstances and conditions (structural drivers), such as debt and low income, that mean food insecurity is a constant or near unremitting feature of their lives.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ North Guildford Food Bank, year end data for 2017 shared with the task group.

⁶¹ Ash CA shared an anonymised analysis of a client case review for the period December 2017 - February 2018.

⁶² Employment Support Allowance (ESA); Disability Living Allowance (DLA); Personal Independence Allowance (PIP).

⁶³ Increasingly, food banks in the Trussell Trust network are using electronic referrals. Electronic referrals are completed by referral agencies in the same way as paper food bank vouchers and can gather more detailed information about referral reasons. The Trussell Trust, *The Next Stage of Universal Credit: Moving onto the new benefit system and foodbank use*, November 2018, p.9. <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/10/The-next-stage-of-Universal-Credit-Report-Final.pdf>

⁶⁴ Hannah Lambie-Mumford and Elizabeth Dowler, (2014), 'Rising use of "food aid" in the United Kingdom', *British Food Journal*, 116 (9), 2014, p. 1420. Hannah Lambie-Mumford, Daniel Crossley, Eric Jensen, Monae Verbeke, and Elizabeth Dowler, 'Household Food Security in the UK: a review of food aid', DEFRA, 2014, p.viii. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/food-aid-research-report>

- 4.11 Discourses preoccupied with assigning responsibility for poverty on those experiencing it are discussed below in sections 4.44-4.46. However, such narratives risk overlooking the structural forces at play. In putting forward its understanding of the reasons for food insecurity, the task group supports a wider narrative of structural drivers causing household and individual food poverty and insecurity. As suggested above, people will always act in ways that are not financially sound, make mistakes, or encounter misfortune, but circumstances do not affect everyone equally: the same event or episode will have profound consequences for the most vulnerable and be a mild inconvenience for others. To ignore underlying or structural reasons by emphasising possible individual factors or behaviours misses the wider context.

Cost of living – food prices

- 4.12 The prevailing economic circumstances since the 2008 financial crisis have helped create and drive food aid activity: notably, a higher cost of living and stagnating or (in real terms) declining wages. In particular, high food prices have resulted in food being proportionately less affordable in low-income households, as those on lower incomes spend a higher proportion of their money on food. The largest item of household expenditure for low-income households after housing, fuel, and power costs, is food. As research shows, 'If you're in the poorest 10 per cent in the UK, almost 25 per cent of your income will go on food and beverages. If you're in the rich 10 per cent, it's just 4.2 per cent.'⁶⁵ The retail price of all food groups has risen between 2007 and 2017 (ranging from 19 per cent to 47 per cent), with food and non-alcoholic drinks increasing overall by 31 per cent.⁶⁶
- 4.13 In addition to spending a higher proportion of their money on food, people on low-incomes may have to pay more depending on where they live and shop. Typically, a food desert is an area poorly served by food stores, in which it is difficult to access healthy food at a good price; for those on low-incomes or with limited ability to travel, the costs of access to low-cost nutritious food can be higher than suggested by a standard analysis of prices.⁶⁷
- 4.14 The task group was advised that for some residents on low incomes in Guildford living in a food desert was an additional difficulty. The task group was informed that local convenience stores inevitably stocked a limited range of food. The Director of Community Services indicated that the establishment of a mobile fruit and veg van was being investigated by the Council (as part of Project Aspire) to help address issues of food availability and affordability. The task group welcome this initiative as a start, but calls for more concerted action (see section 5.37 below).

Cost of living – housing

- 4.15 As part of its investigation, the task group was presented with evidence that the affordability of the private rented sector was a key factor contributing to poverty locally. Investigations of private sector housing costs by Ash CA show rents to be above an affordable level (whether calculated using the government's National Living Wage or the national median rate).⁶⁸
- 4.16 The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) relevant to the Borough's area does not reflect actual values in the private rented sector.⁶⁹ For those families and individuals renting in the private sector, the LHA rate is used to calculate housing benefit or the housing element of universal credit;

⁶⁵ Kellogg's and the Centre for Economics and Business Research, *Hard to Swallow: The Facts about Food Poverty*, 2017, p.16.

https://www.kelloggs.co.uk/content/dam/europe/kelloggs_gb/pdf/R3_Facts%20about%20Food%20Poverty%20ReportFINAL.pdf

⁶⁶ DEFRA, Food Statistics in your pocket 2017: Prices and expenditure, Updated 9 October 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/food-statistics-pocketbook-2017/food-statistics-in-your-pocket-2017-prices-and-expenditure>

⁶⁷ Scott Corfe, *What are the barriers to eating healthily in the UK?*, Social Market Foundation, October 2018. <http://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/What-are-the-barriers-to-eating-healthily-in-the-UK.pdf>

⁶⁸ Undertaken by Ash CA in 2016 and 2017. Ash Citizens Advice, *Is the Private Rented Sector Affordable? – Follow up*, 2017.

⁶⁹ Examples provided by Ash CA suggest the LHA rate to be more than £150pcm less than the actual rental cost of a typical one or two-bedroom property, while there is a gap of over £200 pcm between the LHA rate and actual rent for a three-bedroom property.

essentially, housing benefit for private renters.⁷⁰ The task group was advised that targeting rents would be an effective way to help those residents living in poverty (including food poverty). The LHA is currently frozen until 2020. Until 2013 LHA rates were linked to the local housing market to cover the cheapest thirty per cent of homes. Notwithstanding the introduction of extra funding for areas worst affected, the reduced LHA has been found to be contributing to poverty and homelessness.⁷¹

- 4.17 The suggestion was put forward to the task group that action be taken to 'top up' the LHA rate to make rents affordable. Consequently, the task group explored Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs).⁷²

Discretionary Housing Payments

- 4.18 While some districts and boroughs in Surrey have typically overspent or optimised their DHP fund contribution from central government, until recently Guildford's percentage spend of their DHP allocation has been comparatively, and consistently, low. For instance, the Council spent less than 90 per cent of its allocated £165,930 in 2016/17 and in 2013/14 only 62 per cent of its £206,697 allocation (awarding 191 awards in response to 254 applications, at an average of £781.27). It is essential to note that local authorities must return unspent DHP contributions from central government at the end of each financial year. In addition, the DHP spending of local authorities helps inform the allocation of central government funds in subsequent years. In contrast to Guildford's underspends, Runnymede Borough Council and Spelthorne Borough Council exceeded their respective DHP fund contributions from central government by over 50 per cent in both 2015/16 and 2016/17, and in 2017/18 were again Surrey's two largest overspenders.⁷³
- 4.19 While Guildford's DHP spending increased in 2017-18 to exceed its central government contribution and will do so again in 2018-19, the task group notes that councils can legally spend up to 2½ times this allocation. That is to say, Guildford Borough Council's DHP fund in 2018-19 received a central government contribution of £222,658 and has a legal limit of £556,645, and in 2019-20 will receive £201,084 with the overall fund limit set at £502,709.⁷⁴
- 4.20 The task group questioned whether past underspends by the Council of its central government DHP contribution might be because the Council was wary of running out of government funds too quickly and did not wish to dip into its own finances. However, the group was advised that the Council had regarded DHPs as short-term financial assistance that it would be undesirable to

⁷⁰ Government plans to roll out the LHA rate cap to social housing tenants were dropped in October 2017.

⁷¹ Since 2013 LHA rates have been set using the previous year's rates updated by a flat rate index: the consumer prices index in 2013; one per cent for 2014 and 2015; and from April 2016 until 2020 a freeze. Chartered Institute of Housing, *Missing the Target? Is targeted affordability funding doing its job?*, August 2018.

<http://www.cih.org/resources/PDF/Policy%20free%20download%20pdfs/Missing%20the%20target%20final.pdf>

⁷² Local authorities are able to award DHPs to someone entitled to Housing Benefit or the housing costs element of Universal Credit needing "further financial assistance" with their "housing costs". Wendy Wilson, 'Discretionary Housing Payments,' House of Commons Library, briefing paper 6899, July 2018.

<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06899/SN06899.pdf>

⁷³ Department for Work and Pensions, 'Use of Discretionary Housing Payments, analysis of end of year returns from local authorities: Data for April 2017 to March 2018', July 2018, p.4.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/724614/use-of-discretionary-housing-payments-2017-to-2018.pdf Department for Work and Pensions, Housing Benefit Subsidy Circular S1/2019 '2019-20 Discretionary Housing Payments government contribution for English and Welsh local authorities (Revised)', 2019.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-subsidy-circulars-2019/s12019-2019-20-discretionary-housing-payments-government-contribution-for-english-and-welsh-local-authorities> Surrey County Council, *The Welfare Picture in Surrey: An update report from the Surrey Welfare Co-ordination Group*, October 2018, pp.19, 32.

⁷⁴ In 2017-18, Guildford Borough Council's DHP scheme had a spend of £258,232 and a central government contribution of £253,784 and in 2018-19 a forecast spend of £257,500 with a central government contribution of £222,658. Department for Work and Pensions, 'Data tables: Use of Discretionary Housing Payments, analysis of end of year returns from local authorities: April 2017 to March 2018', July 2018.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/use-of-discretionary-housing-payments-financial-year-2017-to-2018>

make residents dependent upon and had instead focused on the affordability issues to minimise shortfalls due to housing costs.

- 4.21 The task group recommends greater efforts to publicise the Council's DHP scheme and encourage applications to the fund. The task group noted that DHPs are available to tenants with social or private landlords, and it is for local authorities to determine how much a household receives and the length of time DHPs are paid. The group was advised that the Council's DHPs are promoted through the service given at the local Citizens Advice, but the Council does not advertise the help available through the DHP fund (other than as part of a homelessness prevention process). Nevertheless, national guidance emphasises the importance of publicising DHPs and puts forward an extensive list of suggestions to raise awareness.⁷⁵ The task group feels that increasing the awareness of DHPs as a source of help for those struggling to pay for housing will improve the effectiveness of the scheme (which has seen an increase despite a lack of publicity).
- 4.22 Available details of the welfare reform for which a DHP was awarded confirm the variations between districts and boroughs in Surrey. Indeed, within the county the administration of DHP varies markedly; if and how much people receive appears to be influenced by their postcode rather than determined by individual circumstances.⁷⁶
- Income stagnation and insecurity**
- 4.23 The rising cost of living, combined with income stagnation, contributes to food insecurity.⁷⁷ Average incomes (after housing costs) for low- and middle-income families are lower in 2016-17 than they were in 2003-04.⁷⁸ In the ten years since the financial crisis, average real wages in the UK have contracted by an average annual rate of 0.3 per cent. Moreover, a report from the Resolution Foundation thinktank reveals it is unlikely that UK real pay levels will return to the pre-crisis level until the 2020s.⁷⁹ The Institute for Fiscal Studies projects that on average for the poorest 15 per cent of households real AHC income will fall between 2014-15 and 2021-22.⁸⁰
- 4.24 Zero-hour contracts that offer no guarantee of work and other often insecure types of jobs have increased markedly following the effects of the financial crisis.⁸¹ In-work poverty, welfare reform, and austerity (frozen benefit levels) are discussed below.

⁷⁵ Suggestions include leaflets and posters, making landlords aware of the scheme, information on local authority and choice-based-lettings websites, raising awareness with social housing tenants and residents' organisations, and targeted communications aimed at those likely to be affected. Department for Work and Pensions, 'Discretionary Housing Payments Guidance Manual: Including Local Authority Good Practice Guide', March 2018, pp.39-40.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/692240/discretionary-housing-payments-guide.pdf

⁷⁶ Department for Work and Pensions, 'Data tables: Use of Discretionary Housing Payments, analysis of end of year returns from local authorities: April 2017 to March 2018', July 2018, Monitoring Returns.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/use-of-discretionary-housing-payments-financial-year-2017-to-2018>

⁷⁷ Hannah Lambie-Mumford, Daniel Crossley, Eric Jensen, Monae Verbeke, and Elizabeth Dowler, 'Household Food Security in the UK: a review of food aid', DEFRA, 2014, p.viii. Niall Cooper, Sarah Purcell, and Ruth Jackson, *Below the breadline: the relentless rise of food poverty in Britain*, Church Action on Poverty and Oxfam, 2014. <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/317730/rr-below-breadline-food-poverty-uk-090614-en.pdf?sequence=1>

⁷⁸ Adam Corlett, Stephen Clarke, Conor D'Arcy, and John Wood, *The Living Standards Audit 2018*, Resolution Foundation, July 2018, p.22. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2018/07/Living-Standards-Audit-2018-3.pdf>

⁷⁹ Adam Corlett, Stephen Clarke, Conor D'Arcy, and John Wood, *The Living Standards Audit 2018*, Resolution Foundation, p.31

⁸⁰ Andrew Hood and Tom Waters, *Living Standards, Poverty and Inequality in the UK: 2016-17 to 2021-22*, Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2017, p.6. <https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/publications/comms/R127.pdf>

⁸¹ Stephen Clarke and Nye Cominetti, 'Setting the record straight: How record employment has changed the UK', Resolution Foundation, January 2019, p.47. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2019/01/Setting-the-record-straight-full-employment-report.pdf>

Impact of welfare reform and austerity

- 4.25 It is not possible to consider the reasons for food poverty and insecurity without highlighting the role of welfare reform and austerity. The task group heard repeated evidence from experts, including local experts by experience, about difficulties with welfare benefits driving individuals and families into both food insecurity and the use of food aid.
- 4.26 The task group found much evidence to support the contention that changes to the system of benefits for people of working age are a major driver of food poverty. Research by academics, charities, and food providers shows a clear link between welfare reform, austerity, and increasing charity food aid provision.⁸² As indicated above, the failure of benefit levels to cover essential living costs and issues with payments are common reasons for referral to a foodbank. Previous assertions from government denying the link between charitable food aid use and welfare reform are no longer credible to those familiar with the evidence.
- 4.27 A brief examination of the effects of these changes is both necessary and revealing. To aid this discussion some of the main welfare reform changes are outlined at Appendix 5.
- 4.28 An independent evaluation published by the Department for Work and Pensions of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, or so-called bedroom tax, found that 76 per cent of people affected reported having to cut back on food to meet the cut in benefit.⁸³ In Guildford in 2018, almost 300 households remained affected by this under-occupation deduction for working-age claimants in social housing.
- 4.29 Local evidence gathered by the task group confirmed national reports that changes in benefit can lead to a gap in income (for a period of weeks) which benefit claimants frequently lack any reserves to bridge. In addition to these gaps in income, welfare reforms can cause a sudden drop in income. For example, the task group was advised of difficulties Guildford residents had encountered with the transition from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to Personal Independence Payments (PIP). Due to the different criteria between the two benefits, the change from DLA to PIP could lead to a reduction in income. The task group was advised that challenging a PIP decision was a lengthy process and appeals could take several months.
- 4.30 As noted above, problems with benefit transitions drive up food bank referrals. In particular, the five-week or more wait for a first payment under Universal Credit (UC) has been singled out for criticism. Government figures show that 1 in 6 people do not receive full payment of UC on time. The Trussell Trust is among those questioning why people being transferred from legacy benefits in the roll-out of UC are subjected to a delay given that need has been established under the old benefits or tax credit system.⁸⁴ The judgment of the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights about the five-week delay between a UC claim and payment is blunt: 'The rationales offered for the delay are entirely illusory, and the motivation strikes me as a

⁸² Rachel Loopstra, Aaron Reeves, David Taylor-Robinson, Ben Barr, Martin McKee, and David Stuckler, 'Austerity, sanctions, and the rise of food banks in the UK', *BMJ*, 2015; 350. Rachel Loopstra, Jasmine Fledderjohann, Aaron Reeves, and David Stuckler, 'Impact of Welfare Benefit Sanctioning on Food Insecurity: a Dynamic Cross-Area Study of Food Bank Usage in the UK', *Journal of Social Policy*, 43 (3), 2018, pp. 437-57. Niall Cooper, Sarah Purcell, and Ruth Jackson, *Below the breadline: the relentless rise of food poverty in Britain*, Church Action on Poverty and Oxfam, 2014.

<https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/317730/rr-below-breadline-food-poverty-uk-090614-en.pdf?sequence=1>

All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom, *Feeding Britain: A strategy for zero hunger in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland*, The Children's Society, 2014, p.34.

⁸³ Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research and Ipsos MORI, 'Evaluation of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy: Final Report', Department for Work and Pensions, December 2015, p.18.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/506407/rsrs-evaluation.pdf

⁸⁴ Abhaya Jitendra, Emma Thorogood, Mia Hadfield-Spoor, *Left Behind: Is Universal Credit Truly Universal?*, The Trussell Trust, April 2018. <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/trusselltrust-documents/Trussell-Trust-Left-Behind-2018.pdf> 'The next stage of Universal Credit: Moving onto the new benefit system and foodbank use', The Trussell Trust, October 2018. <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/10/The-next-stage-of-Universal-Credit-Report-Final.pdf>

combination of cost-saving, enhanced cashflows, and wanting to make clear that being on benefits should involve hardship.⁸⁵

- 4.31 Surrey is one of the last areas subject to the full service rollout of UC (October 2018 for Guildford Borough) and the task group could not monitor its impact locally. (In January 2019, the 'managed migration' of approximately 3 million existing eligible claimants on legacy payments was halted by the government following widespread criticism of the extension of the system.) According to Trussell Trust data, in areas of full roll out of UC there is a demonstrable increase in demand in local food banks:

On average, 12 months after rollout, foodbanks see a 52% increase in demand, compared to 13% in areas with Universal Credit for 3 months or less. This increase cannot be attributed to randomness and exists even after accounting for seasonal and other variations.⁸⁶

- 4.32 Research commissioned by Gateshead Council has linked the roll out of Universal Credit with increasing food poverty and insecurity (as well as debt, rent arrears, extreme hardship, and serious consequences for health and wellbeing).⁸⁷ The task group was advised that a review of case studies locally by Ash Citizens Advice had confirmed that changes in benefit often led to a gap in income that caused hardship.
- 4.33 The task group was informed that the Council had previously provided information about Universal Credit to local food banks in the Borough. With reference to the roll out of Universal Credit, and notwithstanding the government commissioning Citizens Advice to provide Universal Support for Universal Credit claimants, the task group felt that a forum or similar gathering to raise awareness of the issues and provide updates would be beneficial. The task group suggest that such a forum consider the matter once the 2019 pilot scheme has been assessed and the future of UC is clearer.
- 4.34 The effect of the policy to limit benefits based on the number of children, the so-called 'two child policy' introduced by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, is estimated to push an additional 260,000 children across the UK into poverty by 2019-20, representing a 10 per cent increase in child poverty. A similar number of children already living below the poverty line will fall deeper into poverty. However, the local impact of the limit is unknown.⁸⁸
- 4.35 Since 2016, the majority of working age benefits have been frozen as a key austerity measure. This follows the government switching the indexing of benefit rates to the CPI rate of inflation and then capping most increases at one per cent for three years, thus ending the link between benefits and price rises. Overall, the real cut to many benefits from the four-year freeze alone has been shown as over 6 per cent. The overall impact of the four-year freeze will have been to reduce working-age household incomes by £4.4 billion. Analyses show the extent to which the freeze has eroded the value of benefits, meaning almost half a million more people will be in

⁸⁵ Professor Philip Alston, *Statement on Visit to the United Kingdom*, London, 16 November 2018. p.5. https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Poverty/EOM_GB_16Nov2018.pdf

⁸⁶ The Trussell Trust, *The Next Stage of Universal Credit: Moving onto the new benefit system and foodbank use*, November 2018, p.4. <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/10/The-next-stage-of-Universal-Credit-Report-Final.pdf>

⁸⁷ Mandy Cheetham, Suzanne Moffatt, and Michelle Addison, "It's hitting people that can least afford it the hardest" the impact of the roll out of Universal Credit in two North East England localities: a qualitative study,' Gateshead Council and FUSE, November 2018, p.23. https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/media/10665/The-impact-of-the-roll-out-of-Universal-Credit-in-two-North-East-England-localities-a-qualitative-study-November-2018/pdf/Universal_Credit_Report_2018pdf.pdf?m=636778831081630000

⁸⁸ Deven Ghelani and Giovanni Tonutti, Briefing paper 'The impact of the two child limit to tax credits', Policy in Practice, April 2017, pp.9-10. http://policyinpractice.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Limiting-Child-Tax-Credits-to-Two-Children_PIP_Briefing-Paper_April2017.pdf

poverty in 2021 than if benefits had kept pace with inflation; indeed, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has claimed the freeze is the 'biggest policy driver' of increasing poverty.⁸⁹

- 4.36 Introduced as a work incentive, the Benefit Cap reduces the amount households can claim in a year; in areas outside London the cap is currently set at £13,400 for single adults (£258 a week) and £20,000 for couples and families (£385 a week). In Britain, since the introduction of the benefit cap in 2013 to August 2018 almost 200,000 households have had their Housing Benefit or Universal Credit capped: over 60 per cent of those capped were single-parent families and over 90 per cent of households capped have dependent children. In Guildford Borough in the same period, 311 households have had their benefits capped, 75 per cent of which were single-parent families and 93 per cent households with dependent children. At August 2018 there were 104 households in the Borough affected by the benefit cap, losing between a few pence to over £200 per week.⁹⁰
- 4.37 In 2017, the task group was advised by the Council's then Head of Housing Advice that there was an association between the reduction in the benefit cap in 2016 and an increase in use of emergency food aid.⁹¹
- 4.38 The task group notes that it is not within their remit to assess a social policy seemingly driven by continued austerity and welfare reform. Nonetheless, the task group members feel it is difficult to avoid concluding that changes to the system of benefits for people of working age, introduced against the backdrop of austerity, are a major driver of food poverty and insecurity.

The failing social security safety net

- 4.39 Social security was conceived as a safety net to protect citizens from want. However, critics of welfare reforms in the era of austerity observe that elements of the system designed to provide a social security safety net are actively contributing to poverty rather than tackling it. Breaking the link between benefits and price rises has meant benefit levels have failed to keep pace with essential living costs. Adjusted for inflation, the levels of some benefits have been shown to be at their lowest for decades. For example, in April 2019 unemployment benefit (jobseekers allowance) will be lower than it was in April 1991.⁹² A comparison of welfare regimes across Europe confirms that if social security spending is low (such as in the UK) then social protection becomes insufficient to protect people from economic hardship and an increase in food insecurity can be expected to follow.⁹³
- 4.40 Information and research considered by the task group alludes to a contrast in the incidence of food insecurity among those of working age and older people over pension age. Food banks in Guildford reported few elderly users and Ash CA did not have many clients over pension age. The task group was informed that generally if entitlements were claimed, particularly Pension Credit, then a food parcel would not be needed by the elderly as they had been protected from elements of the welfare reform changes. Furthermore, the task group was advised that there had not been a single food aid client over 65 years of age within the three-month period of Ash CA's case studies review. However, the task group felt this difference might be explained by the

⁸⁹ Adam Corlett, 'Despite "the end of austerity", April promises another deep benefit cut', Resolution Foundation, October 2018. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/media/blog/despite-the-end-of-austerity-april-promises-another-deep-benefit-cut/> Katie Schmuecker, 'Briefing for November 2017 Budget: Incomes not keeping up with prices', Joseph Rowntree Foundation, October 2017. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/briefing-november-2017-budget>

⁹⁰ There are no instances of Universal Credit being capped in Guildford. Department for Work and Pensions, Benefit cap: GB households capped to August 2018, Tables, November 2018, Tables 1 and 12. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/benefit-cap-number-of-households-capped-to-august-2018>

⁹¹ Prior to November 2016 the caps outside London was set at £500 a week for couples and families and £350 for single adults.

⁹² Adam Corlett, 'Despite "the end of austerity", April promises another deep benefit cut', Resolution Foundation, October 2018. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/media/blog/despite-the-end-of-austerity-april-promises-another-deep-benefit-cut/>

⁹³ Rachel Loopstra, Aaron Reeves, Martin McKee, and David Stuckler, 'Food insecurity and social protection in Europe: Quasi-natural experiment of Europe's great recessions 2004-2012', *Preventative Medicine* 89 (2016), pp.44-50.

elderly being more reticent to ask for help than younger people, rather than a lack of need. In addition, testimony from food banks that deliver food parcels to Guildford Borough residents confirms that mobility problems can make accessing emergency food aid difficult for the elderly.

In-work poor

- 4.41 Government responses to criticism of welfare reform and austerity typically refer to incentivising paid work and ‘making work pay’ as if work is the solution to poverty. And yet the Trussell Trust states that approximately 1 in 6 of the people referred to their food banks are in work.⁹⁴ Researchers have found that a majority of people living in poverty in the UK are in households where someone works. In 2016/17, almost 3 million of those living in poverty were in families where all adults worked full-time.⁹⁵ Rising costs of living, low pay, and higher job insecurity (exemplified by the rise of zero hours contracts), means that work per se does not solve poverty.

The Living Wage

- 4.42 In 2016, the government introduced a ‘National Living Wage’ – a higher minimum wage rate for all staff over 25 years of age. However, the national living wage is not based on actual living costs, but aims to reach 60 per cent of median earnings by 2020 (currently it is 55 per cent, or £7.83 per hour).⁹⁶ To underline the principle that pay should reflect living costs, the task group recommends that the Council becomes an accredited real Living Wage Employer with the Living Wage Foundation and promotes the scheme locally to other employers.
- 4.43 To become an *accredited* Living Wage Employer, and join the hundreds of already accredited public sector employers, would require the Council to commit to a plan to pay contractors the real living wage. The task group was advised that the Council currently pays the UK Living Wage to all staff in established posts or with fixed term contracts. Other arrangements are in place for casual workers, interns, apprentices, and staff who have transferred into the Council under TUPE.

Individual behaviour and responsibility (budgeting and food skills)

- 4.44 Despite the numerous, evidentially sound, structural drivers of poverty identifiable, views assigning primary responsibility for poverty on those experiencing it are far from uncommon.⁹⁷ As suggested above, a common theme in discourses around food poverty is to question the financial management, spending decisions, and food skills of low-income households.⁹⁸ Questioning from the task group confirmed a belief that users of local food banks sometimes lack budgeting skills (with the particular examples of mobile phone contracts and loans cited). However, actual research into the approaches employed by people on a restricted budget has shown often complex household management strategies and knowledge (and a desire) to eat healthily.⁹⁹ In short, the idea that financial mismanagement is a widespread cause of food insecurity is refuted by the evidence.
- 4.45 Similarly, the task group felt that there are more convincing explanations for food poverty than a lack of food skills.¹⁰⁰ This is not to argue that cookery or budgeting skills should not be offered to those in food insecurity – indeed, the task group proposes measures in this area. Rather it is to

⁹⁴ Rachel Loopstra and Doireann Lalor, *Financial insecurity, food insecurity, and disability: The profile of people receiving emergency food assistance from The Trussell Trust Foodbank Network in Britain*, Trussell Trust, July 2017, p.ix.

⁹⁵ Social Metrics Commission, *A new measure of poverty for the UK: the final report of the Social Metrics Commission*, September 2018, p.86. <https://socialmetricscommission.org.uk/MEASURING-POVERTY-FULL-REPORT.pdf>

⁹⁶ See Living Wage Foundation website. <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/what-real-living-wage>

⁹⁷ Rebecca Wells and Martin Caraher, ‘UK print media coverage of the food bank phenomenon: from food welfare to food charity?’, *British Food Journal*, 116(9), 2014, p.1436.

⁹⁸ Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom, *Feeding Britain: A strategy for zero hunger in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland*, 2014, p.29.

⁹⁹ For example, Elizabeth Dowler and Hannah Lambie-Mumford, ‘How Can Households Eat in austerity? Challenges for Social Policy in the UK’, *Social Policy & Society* 2015 14:3, pp.419-20.

¹⁰⁰ For a satirical comment on approaches that centre on the behaviour of individuals experiencing food poverty see the microplay, ‘Britain Isn’t Eating’ *The Guardian* 17 November 2014:

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/video/2014/nov/17/britain-isnt-eating-microplay-guardian-royal-court-video>

underline that it is fundamentally wrong to see the provision of such skills as a solution to food poverty and equally misplaced to condemn and apportion blame for a lack (or supposed lack) of skills that many of us do not possess or demonstrate.¹⁰¹

- 4.46 Approaches focusing on budgeting and food skills constitute a downstream intervention whereas the task group feel there is a need to look upstream and address the fundamental structural reasons for food insecurity. Ultimately, in the face of dramatically reduced public expenditure on social security and other structural drivers for food insecurity, narratives that focus on individuals' behaviour and attempt to frame responsibility for food poverty and insecurity on those suffering it are flawed.¹⁰²

Community resilience

- 4.47 The task group judge it appropriate to point out that an emphasis on developing community resilience and placing solutions at a community level – such as occurs with the Council's Project Aspire – risks downplaying structural drivers and accentuating individual behaviours and responsibilities. The task group questions whether developing community resilience is a strategic approach to tackle food poverty or a response led by available resources. The task group is aware of accusations that enabling communities to develop resilience can be viewed as a smoke-screen to justify those budget cuts to local authorities that can affect the most vulnerable in society. In addition, the task group rejects the view put to it by a senior Council officer that if food poverty needs existed then local people and organisations would adapt to meet them.

Brexit

- 4.48 Given the UK's exit from the EU, the plight of food insecure families is unlikely to improve. Brexit is predicted to increase food prices. Research has concluded that any increase in food prices because of Brexit will add to the number of food insecure households. The impact on nutrition is unclear with 40 per cent of vegetables and over a third of fruit purchased in the UK coming from the EU.¹⁰³ The Joseph Rowntree Foundation predicts poverty rates to be not greatly affected by Brexit, so long as future governments uprate benefits to account for inflation – failure to do so could mean an additional 900,000 people in poverty by 2030.¹⁰⁴

5. The local response

- 5.1 The above examination and assessment of the causes of food insecurity was necessary before an evaluation of the response to food poverty in Guildford Borough, including the accessibility, appropriateness, and effectiveness of food aid provision locally. As will be seen, the current model of food aid provision in the Borough is grounded in addressing food poverty and insecurity in the short-term. This stopgap model accords with the crisis narrative of food poverty identified above.
- 5.2 Before reviewing the actions of local government to food poverty and insecurity, the response from the third sector is considered.

Charity

- 5.3 Food banks are perhaps the most well-known example of the charitable sector's response to food poverty. As outlined above, there are two food banks within the Borough providing emergency food aid parcels from four locations. In addition, Ash Citizens Advice distributes food parcels provided by Farnham Food Bank and North Guildford Food Bank provides Guildford Citizens Advice with a supply of two-person emergency bags for clients. Significantly, residents from across the Borough are accessing food banks at Woking, Cobham, Farnham, Dorking, and

¹⁰¹ Jesse Bauman, "Poor People Can't Cook," and other myths', Food Secure Canada, August 2014.

<https://foodsecurecanada.org/resources-news/blogs-discussions/poor-people-cant-cook-and-other-myths-0>

¹⁰² Elizabeth Dowler and Hannah Lambie-Mumford, 'How Can Households Eat in austerity? Challenges for Social Policy in the UK', *Social Policy & Society* 2015, 14:3, p.424.

¹⁰³ House of Lords European Union Committee, 'Brexit: food prices and availability', May 2018, HL129, p.4.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Rowntree Foundation briefing, 'How could Brexit affect poverty in the UK?', September 2018, pp.12,13. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/how-could-brexit-affect-poverty-uk>

Farnborough. The Salvation Army is long established in Guildford town and North Guildford Food Bank opened in late 2012. The opening times of the three North Guildford Food Bank locations are detailed in Appendix 3.

- 5.4 Given the incidence of food insecurity indicated by current food parcel levels for residents in food poverty and feedback from officers working with food insecure households, the task group suggest that there might be advantages to a further staggering or extension of the opening times of food bank locations within the Borough. This measure might be expected to increase accessibility. In addition, the task group noted that some food banks (notably Cobham) delivered to people unable to physically access the food bank, sometimes due to mobility issues or the expense of collecting from food banks.
- 5.5 Similarly, individual officers from the Council's Family Support Team confirmed the difficulties within Guildford of accessing food banks, particularly for those unable to drive or afford public transport, and indicated that they often collected food bank parcels for client families in such circumstances. The need for improved access to food banks in the Borough was identified, with the task group advised that Council officers were contacted by families without food on days when no food bank was open. The task group supports the proposal from these frontline officers for food parcels to be available in more places around the community for families to access when required.
- 5.6 In addition to the identified areas of urban deprivation where the Council traditionally targets its efforts, rural areas in the Borough are affected by food poverty and insecurity. The task group was informed of the mix of economic circumstances across villages in the Borough, geographically isolated low-income families, and the difficulties of accessing food provision in affluent areas such as the Horsleys, particularly as public transport was in all likelihood not affordable to those in food poverty. The existence of food poverty in rural areas of the Borough is confirmed by food parcel data in Appendix 4.
- 5.7 Research has shown that the religious setting in which charity food aid is offered, in contrast to the neutrality of state social provision, can be expected to raise issues for some people to such an extent that it may affect attendance. The task group suggest that to increase access and avoid unintentionally excluding anyone, there should be no faith-based obligations, questions, or interventions with food aid users at any stage of a visit. The list of voluntary and community groups in Appendix 3, together with the interviews undertaken by the task group members, confirms a religious impetus behind the provision of food aid in the Borough. The Trussell Trust identifies itself as a charity based on Christian principles. Everyone that the task group spoke to involved in food aid provision locally recognised that faith should not be a barrier to access, although many of the ventures were based in churches. However, on occasion the task group encountered a desire, if not an expectation, that clients would engage with Christian doctrine or symbols.

A Forum for the Borough

- 5.8 In framing suggestions relating to the third sector, the task group members are particularly mindful of the possible sensitivities of local government being seen to direct voluntary food aid organisations. Extending or formalising the voluntary sector's response to food insecurity raises both practical and conceptual concerns. During its review, the task group came across the example of the NG7 food bank in Nottingham that closed in protest at the local authority's use of it as a reason to avoid paying out hardship funds.¹⁰⁵ While NG7 was a rare response, the task group did find consistently that local food banks organisers and volunteers held concerns about the perceived long-term role of food banks as an answer to food insecurity or being viewed as

¹⁰⁵ After opening in 2012, the NG7 food bank closed in 2014 in protest at the local authority's use of it as a reason to avoid paying out hardship funds. As the final update from the food bank stated, '[W]e have recognised that we are not being used as a temporary service of last resort, but rather being seen as a part of the long term strategy of replacement for statutory services, who have a duty and the resources to address a large part of the need.' NG7 Food Bank, Facebook, 25 November 2014 [accessed 29 January 2019].

https://www.facebook.com/Ng7FoodBank/posts/681857565260824?_tn_ =K-R

part of the social security safety net. Pointedly perhaps, the task group was advised that Council efforts in 2016 to establish a food bank forum in the Borough came to nothing.

- 5.9 From the information gathered, the task group noted that there were potential advantages from continued familiarisation between local food banks, particularly Trussell Trust and independent operators. Needs might differ between food banks (although running operations from halls often without sufficient storage seemed a near constant issue). The task group felt that food banks might benefit from networking and co-ordination in areas such as volunteers, premises, drivers, and donor networks.
- 5.10 The task group recommends the Council facilitate an inaugural food insecurity forum for the Borough with the objective of further developing the network of emergency food aid provision in the Borough. Invited forum members would include stakeholders, charities, churches, schools, sheltered housing, supported accommodation providers, and food bank referrers. Through the forum, training and briefings on subjects such as safeguarding, food safety, and customer care could be offered. The task group was made aware that the Council had run a workshop for food bank referrers around 2014, but members were disheartened to find that the lessons learnt and best practice from the event seem to have been lost to the Council following staff restructuring.¹⁰⁶

The referral gateway

- 5.11 Although keen to point out that they do not turn away anyone in need, the food banks known to be used by Borough residents ostensibly operate on a referral-only basis. To state the obvious, food charity is not a right or entitlement akin to social security, and this compounds the stigma and embarrassment felt by recipients. Access to local food banks is mediated through a system that normally requires a professional to verify the needs of those referred through the issue of a voucher (an example is included at Appendix 6). Through this mechanism the state is pushing citizens in food poverty towards charities. The benefits of this referral approach, as presented to the task group, are that individuals visiting the food bank are not asked to demonstrate their poverty and food bank volunteers and donors are reassured that their respective efforts and donations are going to those in need. In short, no-one is 'taking advantage.' However, members of the task group met residents who described how their usage of food bank vouchers had been challenged at a local food bank (with the result that they subsequently avoided visiting the food bank in question).
- 5.12 By insisting on referrals, food banks risk invoking the long-established narrative of a 'deserving poor' and, implicitly, reinforcing a negative stereotype of an 'undeserving poor'. As we have seen above, such a discourse is unhelpful; the desirability and effects of distinguishing between those in genuine need and others, along with the rationale for it, are questionable.
- 5.13 The task group believe that rather than restricting emergency food provision by gatekeepers, access should be broadened. Hence, the task group members support an increase in the number of agencies able to provide referrals (including the possible addition of suitably trained councillors), along with a more radical widening of access through accepting self-referrals. Specifically, the task group recommends that food banks consider accepting initial approaches by users without a formal referral in order to minimise the distress for anyone approaching a food bank for the first time. A change to self-referral would widen emergency food provision to include residents who may not be accessing other services or may not be able to request a referral.
- 5.14 Along with self-referrals, the task group advocates lifting the current referral limit rules operated by local food banks. A three-voucher referral limit in any six-month period is common for Borough residents, with a fourth referral sometimes triggering a phone call to the referring agency for further information. The task group heard evidence suggesting that this limited referral policy appears intended to discourage dependency on the service, rather than address a concern that because supplies are limited or variable a limit on the number of visits and the amount of food distributed is required.

¹⁰⁶ Surrey County Council Public Health, *Food Access Needs Assessment 2014*, p.10.
<https://www.surreyi.gov.uk/dataset/food-access-needs-assessment-2014>

- 5.15 Given the structural nature of the causes of food insecurity, especially the periods of low or no income associated with welfare reform and austerity, the task group questioned the effectiveness of a restrictive model of limited referrals. On more than one occasion the task group was advised by food bank organisers of a wariness or concern about creating a dependency amongst those accessing the aid. Yet, the testimony of the same food bank organisers juxtaposes the three-referral model with the discretion required to help people affected by benefit claims delayed by weeks. The task group notes that the Trussell Trust advocates that after someone has been referred to a food bank three times, the food bank manager should contact the referral agency to check the household is receiving the statutory and other support needed.
- 5.16 The task group heard suggestions from many witnesses, including local food bank users, that the cap of three food bank vouchers per individual be removed, if not completely then certainly during the roll out of Universal Credit in the Borough. The task group would encourage food banks to review their policy for helping people in need to ensure its flexibility. As a first step, the task group asks consideration be given to the introduction of a ten-visit limit, obviously subject to supplies being sustainable.
- 5.17 In light of the array of structural drivers of poverty, any limiting of emergency food aid users to just a handful of visits to ensure they do not develop a possible dependency on it seems a secondary or misdirected concern. Efforts to make a system punitive to dissuade possible abuse (by introducing barriers to filter out all but the most desperate or determined) can appear misplaced. The task group members are not naïve; they conclude that occasional attempted abuse (of which very few examples were relayed to the group) is a price worth paying to help those individuals and families in need.

Short-term emergency food aid

- 5.18 Almost all the charity food aid providers the task group spoke to were adamant that the service they provided was intended to be short term emergency provision. The task group agrees that it is essential that short-term emergency responses do not become mistaken for long term solutions. The task group believe it is vital to be aware of the dangers and implications in the changing narrative of charity food aid: from something abnormal and short term – essentially thrown up by recession – to more recent portrayals as a normalised and long-term feature of society.
- 5.19 Somewhat curiously, after railing against a normalisation or institutionalisation of food banks and any reliance on charitable food to address structural causes of food insecurity, in early 2018 the Trussell Trust entered into a three-year, £20 million partnership with Asda (and FareShare) to combat food poverty and food insecurity through an expansion of its infrastructure.¹⁰⁷ The task group noted the criticisms of this expansion from within the third sector, particularly the institutionalisation of the ‘poor-food-for-poor-people’ model or the notion that for the poor some food is better than no food.¹⁰⁸

Food waste: the other side of the coin?

- 5.20 Part of the remit for the task group was to evaluate the strategic approaches proposed to tackle food poverty – a necessary step in the process of developing recommendations. At the outset of

¹⁰⁷ See Asda news release, ‘Asda, FareShare and The Trussell Trust launch £20 million partnership to help one million people out of food poverty’, 8 February 2018. <https://corporate.asda.com/newsroom/2018/02/08/asda-fareshare-and-the-trussell-trust-launch-20-million-partnership-to-help-one-million-people-out-of-food-poverty> For the Trussell Trust’s announcement see <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2018/02/09/new-partnership-fareshare-asda/> For a critique see, Independent Food Aid Network, ‘Our response to the Asda, Fareshare & Trussell Trust Announcement’, 10 February 2018. <http://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/asda-response> The Trussell Trust has stated that it does not apply for or receive Government funding to ensure ‘both independence of voice and that we do not become part of the welfare state.’

¹⁰⁸ Robbie Davison, ‘A Third Sector Plan to Institutionalise Food Poverty’, Can Cook, February 2018. <http://www.cancook.co.uk/third-sector-plan-institutionalise-food-poverty/> The Trussell Trust advised the group that its funds have gone into direct grants to food banks doing additional services and a three-year research project with Heriot-Watt University into the reasons behind food bank use.

its review, the task group was eager to explore the feasibility of using waste food, or ‘surplus food’, from the food industry to address food poverty and insecurity. There is an estimated total of 10 million tonnes of food and drink waste occurring post-farmgate annually in the UK, with the food industry wasting 1.9 million tonnes (of which over half is edible, with or without further processing).¹⁰⁹ Put simply, it initially seemed to the task group that connecting surplus food and hungry people would tackle both issues. Advocates of redistributing surplus food present it as a win-win, ‘turning an environmental problem into a social solution.’

- 5.21 However, as the task group’s review progressed and its understanding of the causes of food insecurity developed, it became clear that while surplus food might reduce food poverty there was very little evidence to suggest it would solve the issue or tackle food insecurity. There is an established body of academic research concluding that food donation can support the fight against food poverty in the short-term only.¹¹⁰
- 5.22 The task group accepts that without emergency food aid it is difficult to see where people in need can turn while longer term solutions to the issue of food poverty are sought. The task group’s desire to avoid entrenching an inadequate system is not to disparage food donation or the redistribution of surplus food, much less the efforts of the volunteers involved. Indeed, the task group welcomes the proposed expansion of FareShare Sussex into the Guildford area as outlined in section 3.25 above. Nor is the task group denying that food waste is a significant global issue, with environmental impacts both in terms of producing food, which is then wasted, and the additional emissions of food disposed of in landfill. However, the task group seeks to draw attention to the confusion of the two separate issues of food insecurity and food waste as a mutual solution. Food surplus is decidedly not the ‘other side of the coin’ as some have suggested.¹¹¹
- 5.23 The morality of sending food to anaerobic digestion or landfill while people go hungry is an emotive argument for using surplus food, but the consequences of pursuing surplus food as the solution to food insecurity are profound. Championing the redistribution of waste food asks one to set aside several concerns: for example, the dignity and choice for recipients; the inherently ad hoc, limited, and randomised nature of the supply; the ethics of citizens being dependent on charity for essential needs; and the lack of social security. Food transfers are not the most efficient or effective way to ensure food security.
- 5.24 Research on models of food charity deployed in North America has indicated several advantages to the food industry and to government from using waste food to address food insecurity. Besides burnishing corporate philanthropy and social responsibility credentials, redirecting surplus food to charities avoids the cost to the food industry of landfill disposal. For government, the use of surplus food for emergency food aid can depoliticise the issues of food poverty with a narrative that promotes in-kind food relief in place of a political response (for example, welfare entitlements).¹¹² The task group agreed it was increasingly unlikely the public would disaggregate the issues of surplus food and food insecurity in light of the political and media momentum to combine the two. Pointedly, in October 2018 the government announced a

¹⁰⁹ House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, ‘Food waste in England’, April 2017, HC429, p.9. Julian Parfitt, Stuart Woodham, Elanor Swan, Tecla Castella, and Andrew Parry, *Quantification of food surplus, waste and related materials in the grocery supply chain*, WRAP, 2016, p.2. [https://www.farminguk.com/content/knowledge/Quantification-of-food-surplus-waste-and-related-materials-in-the-grocery-supply-chain\(4040-684-286-3476\).pdf](https://www.farminguk.com/content/knowledge/Quantification-of-food-surplus-waste-and-related-materials-in-the-grocery-supply-chain(4040-684-286-3476).pdf)

¹¹⁰ Martin Caraher and Sinéad Furey, ‘Is it appropriate to use surplus food to feed people in hunger? Short-term Band-Aid to more deep rooted problems of poverty’, Food Research Collaboration, Centre for Food Policy, January 2017. <https://foodresearch.org.uk/publications/is-it-appropriate-to-use-surplus-food-to-feed-people-in-hunger/> Graham Riches, *Food Bank Nations: Poverty, Corporate Charity and the Right to Food*, Routledge, 2018.

¹¹¹ Doireann Lalor, ‘Feeding the Gaps: Food poverty and food surplus redistribution in Oxford’, CAG Oxfordshire, 2014, p.4. <https://cagoxfordshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Feeding-The-Gaps-Report-2014.pdf>

¹¹² Graham Riches, ‘Food Banks and Food Security: Welfare Reform, Human Rights and Social Policy. Lessons from Canada?’, *Social Policy and Administration* 36(6): pp.648-63. https://www.historyofsocialwork.org/1967_food_banks/2002%20Riches%20food%20banks.pdf

planned £15m fund to subsidise the diversion of surplus food from the food industry to charities.¹¹³

- 5.25 Academics warn that the practice of using surplus food to feed food insecure people will undermine calls for action to both reduce the production of surplus food and to address underlying, upstream drivers of food poverty.¹¹⁴ Reviewing the evidence available, the task group judge that to be effective action needs to get upstream and address the cause of food poverty. The task group's concerns about the irrationality of concentrating on short term responses to food poverty at the expense of putting into place a long-term solution to address the root causes is neatly illustrated by the parable of the river.¹¹⁵
- 5.26 The task group is aware that a review singling out 'food' poverty is likely to be seen as encouraging a focus on food, feeding, or food-centred strategies as a solution. To be sure, at the outset of the review it appeared to the task group that linking surplus food and hungry people would tackle both issues. As described above, as its review has progressed the task group has resolved that the issue is the structural causes of poverty, not food poverty as such. Yet, selecting food poverty does underline the extent to which the social security safety net is failing and social policy appears driven by austerity and welfare reform. And it has an undeniable emotive impact, which for some symbolises the effects of austerity.
- 5.27 The task group's review confirmed that there are positive aspects of food waste redistribution that do not distract from tackling the structural drivers of household food insecurity. These include pay-as-you-feel cafes and social supermarkets where the end beneficiary makes a nominal payment in exchange for receiving food or meals. The review learnt of a desire for a pay-as-you-feel café (the Trash Canteen) at the Boileroom in Guildford town.
- 5.28 Similarly, the task group welcomes the reported progress of a possible community fridge at the Park Barn Centre. While the primary goal of a community fridge is to reduce food waste, it aims to give people facing hardship access to fresh food. The task group noted that a community fridge scheme in Dorking uses surplus food collected from local supermarkets and a weekly delivery from FareShare.¹¹⁶

Expanding the Food Bank Plus Model

- 5.29 The *Feeding Britain* report from the All Party Parliamentary Task group on Hunger advocated a 'One Stop Shop/Food Bank Plus' approach to poverty, whereby expert advisors are placed into emergency food projects to help people.¹¹⁷ In turn, this reflected the Trussell Trust's submission to the parliamentary group, promoting a similar 'More Than Food' co-location of additional services within foodbanks. On balance, the task group supports the provision of such services,

¹¹³ Megan Tatum, 'Michael Gove commits £15m to subsidise redistribution of food', *The Grocer*, 1 October 2018. <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/home/topics/waste-not-want-not/food-waste-government-commits-15m-to-subsidise-redistribution/572198.article>

¹¹⁴ Valerie Tarasuk, 'A critical examination of community-based responses to household food insecurity in Canada', *Health Education & Behavior*, 2001, 28(4), p.489.

¹¹⁵ The parable, in which preoccupations with short-term emergency efforts mean that upstream solutions are neglected, is summarised below: One day a resident of the community sees a baby floating down the river. She rushes out to rescue it, and, with the help of her neighbours, finds dry clothing, a cot, and a blanket. The next day two babies are rescued, and the day after that several more. Soon the babies are arriving in large numbers, and they become a regular feature of life in the village; very nearly the whole village becomes involved in rescuing them. Finally, one of the villagers suggests making an expedition upstream, to see how the babies are getting into the water in the first place. The villagers, however, are afraid to take time and energy away from the immediate rescue project, afraid that babies will drown if they are not there to save them. Janet Poppendieck, *Sweet Charity?: Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*, New York, 1998.

¹¹⁶ www.dorkingcommunityfridge.co.uk Alex Boyd, 'Volunteers at Dorking Community Fridge save 10 tonnes of supermarket food from wastage', *Surrey Live*, 3 July 2018. <https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/surrey-news/volunteers-dorking-community-fridge-save-14827006>

¹¹⁷ All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom, *Feeding Britain: A strategy for zero hunger in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland*, 2014, p.18. The task group received support for such a general approach from officers within the Council's Family Support Team.

<https://www.feedingbritain.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=d71439a6-8788-4c31-9a05-bd0ec707f252>

particularly as part of a wider umbrella project delivering a range of individual projects such as occurs at Woking's Lighthouse centre.

- 5.30 The anxiety from having to access a food bank can be lessened by locating the service in a building with other uses; the task group was informed that Woking's Lighthouse was intended to feel like a community space rather than premises set aside for those in need. The task group understands that the availability of accommodation will determine the feasibility of such a community hub in the Borough and welcomes the Council's ongoing efforts to help identify a property for a Lighthouse base. The task group recommends that the Council prioritise and progress such a Lighthouse style approach.
- 5.31 At the Lighthouse centre, the task group witnessed a range of individual projects (including a food bank) in a venue that people visited for reasons other than food aid. One of the projects within the centre is Foodwise, which the task group understands the Council has made efforts to help introduce within the Borough. This charity trains people to cook low cost nutritional food on a budget. The training, equipment and food is offered free of charge (with enough food provided to feed the immediate family of the participant).
- 5.32 The task group felt that organisations operating food banks consider a name change to exclude the term 'food bank'. The task group consider the term carries a stigma and, especially if there are other services offered from the same premises, is limiting. In addition, the task group noted the efforts of the Lighthouse centre, which is run by the Emmaus Road Church, to both use a neutral name and be non-proselytising.

Holiday hunger programmes

- 5.33 As described in section 3.30 above, there are efforts within the Borough to target food insecure households in school holidays. The task group was informed that this included some families in the Borough receiving post-dated food bank vouchers from home school link workers. The task group noted that elsewhere food parcels were offered in holiday periods for children eligible for free school meals. However, the task group questions whether singling out the issue of holiday hunger and considering it in isolation addresses the structural causes of food poverty.
- 5.34 The responses of local government to food poverty and insecurity are discussed below.

A Council priority?

- 5.35 With reference to section 3.9 above, the significance of the Council declining involvement in a project to obtain more accurate estimates of local food insecurity appears clear. The task group suggest the Council confirm whether quantifying the extent of the problem locally is such a low priority. The task group felt that establishing the extent of the issue, that is to say, how many people are too poor to eat or are food insecure, should be a first step in an action plan to address the issues. The task group suggests that the relevant Lead Councillor champion Guildford's Health and Wellbeing Board investigating the issues as a priority (possibly through its Reducing Inequalities in the Borough work stream).

Food poverty strategy and action plan

- 5.36 The task group suggests the involvement of Guildford Health and Wellbeing Board be requested in developing a food poverty strategy and action plan. In calling for the development of a food poverty strategy and action plan (incorporating a food access plan) the task group is not looking for the construction of an umbrella document for existing actions. The recommendation is for a targeted strategy that allocates responsibilities and accountability, measures food insecurity to provide a baseline to evaluate interventions and monitor progress, and ensures effective redress.

Food access planning

- 5.37 As noted above in sections 4.13-4.14, the Council is aware that food deserts exist in the Borough and is taking limited action to address them. However, the task group recommend that a formal food access plan be prepared to identify barriers to accessing affordable and nutritious food and actions to overcome these obstacles. The task group was keen to see the concept of good food

markets explored. Guildford Health and Wellbeing Board would seem ideally placed to co-ordinate such action given the clear links between food and health.¹¹⁸

- 5.38 The review was advised that there are no community store or social supermarket initiatives in Surrey, and certainly none in the Borough, but the task group would support their introduction as part of efforts to improve access to affordable, nutritious food. The task group was advised of tenants' shops, food cooperatives, and pantry projects where users sign up and pay some money towards the food they are obtaining. Such free-choice models afford users more dignity than a pre-packaged food parcel and are more useful (and less wasteful).¹¹⁹

Signposting support

- 5.39 The task group considered the accessibility and amount of information relating to food insecurity and poverty on the Council's website, and contrasted it with approaches elsewhere in Surrey to signposting information. In particular, the task group reviewed the Diocese of Guildford publication, *Help for those in Need: Crisis Support across the Diocese of Guildford*, and accessed information provided on other local authority websites.¹²⁰ The task group recommend the Council provide information to show and support actions being taken and generally raise awareness of food insecurity issues.

Local social security net

- 5.40 Following the end of the central Social Fund in 2013 and transfer of responsibility for providing discretionary emergency welfare from central government to local authorities, many local welfare assistance schemes have closed or reduced their spending. At the time of transferring the responsibility in 2013-14, central government funding had reduced from £330 million in 2010-11 to £178 million in 2013-14. In 2012-13, the Social Fund issued a total of £240.2 million in funds.¹²¹ A parliamentary review of the local welfare safety net noted that one result of the localisation was that those in poverty were a financial cost to councils in a manner they had never been before.¹²² The UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights noted that, 'The collapse of this [local welfare fund] resource for people who face sudden hardship has apparently been of no concern to the government, which decentralized responsibility for the funds and does not collect any information on what has become of them.'¹²³
- 5.41 Somewhat against the national trend, Surrey County Council continues to provide support through a local welfare assistance scheme fund for people facing sudden hardship. The fund is designed to assist with immediate needs such as food, certain utilities, and emergency travel costs. However, the scheme's criteria has tightened (for example, the almost complete removal of replacement white goods and furniture) and its non-ringfenced budget more than halved since April 2015: in 2014/15 the funding was £1,144,833; in 2015/16, £500,000; in 2016/17, £508,000; and in 2017/18, £518,000. Surrey's local assistance scheme awards have fallen steadily:

¹¹⁸ Cameron Tait, *Hungry for Change: The final report of the Fabian Commission on Food and Poverty*, Fabian Society, 2015, p.2. <http://www.fabians.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Hungry-for-Change-web-27.10.pdf>

¹¹⁹ For example, see Your Local Pantry established in Stockport.

<https://www.stockporthomes.org/community/pantries/> The task group was advised of interest in establishing a Your Local Pantry community food store within Guildford town.

¹²⁰ Diocese of Guildford, *Help for those in Need: Crisis Support across the Diocese of Guildford*, 2018 [accessed on 11 February 2019] <https://www.cofequildford.org.uk/docs/default-source/default-document-library/crisis-support-foodbanks-homelessness.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

¹²¹ Gavin Aitchison, *Compassion in crisis how do people in poverty stay afloat in times of emergency?*, Church Action on Poverty and End Hunger UK, October 2018, p.4. <http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/compassion> Frances Ryan, 'We had a safety net for the poor. Now they fall to earth', *The Guardian*, 21 September, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/sep/21/remove-safety-net-disabled-toddlers-dirty-clothes-social-fund>

¹²² House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, 'The local welfare safety net', January 2016, HC373, p.31.

¹²³ Professor Philip Alston, *Statement on Visit to the United Kingdom*, London, 16 November 2018. p.14. https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Poverty/EOM_GB_16Nov2018.pdf House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, 'The local welfare safety net: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2015-16', March 2016, HC924, pp.8, 12-13.

2014/15, £932,790; 2015/16, £523,189; 2016/17, £275,344; and 2017/18, £254,860.¹²⁴ In 2017/18 the approval rate for claims saw three in ten turned down, whereas in 2013/14 just one in ten was. The proportion of applications from Guildford residents to the scheme has consistently been over ten per cent, with more than 450 applications in 2016/17.¹²⁵

- 5.42 In the past, resorting to Surrey's emergency local assistance scheme for the provision of food was commonplace. An analysis undertaken in 2014 confirmed that the majority of all funds provided were for food and that 95 per cent of awards included money for food. The task group was advised that such an analysis and classification of Surrey's awards has not been undertaken since 2014.¹²⁶
- 5.43 The task group notes that Surrey County Council's local assistance fund uses card payment, rather than in-kind vouchers or similar methods that may stigmatise the support. Certainly, the task group would not support building donated food or charity food into the local social security net as has occurred elsewhere. The task group is aware that some local assistance schemes provide food parcels delivered direct by supermarkets, rather than the use of food vouchers.
- 5.44 The other two elements of the local social security net are Discretionary Housing Payments and Council Tax Support. Discretionary Housing Payments are considered above in sections 4.18-4.22. The task group recommends greater efforts to publicise the Discretionary Housing Payments fund and encourage applications.
- 5.45 The local social security net was further extended through the abolition of the nationwide council tax benefit (CTB) in 2013 and its replacement with localised council tax support schemes. This localisation of help for low-income households with their council tax has increased the cost of living for some of the poorest and increased poverty.¹²⁷ A brief summary of the change illustrates how.
- 5.46 In 2013 Councils were tasked with designing local council tax support (LCTS) schemes for those of working age (while ensuring the provision of a level of support for pensioners set by central government¹²⁸); the rationale behind the change included incentivising councils to get people back into work. At its introduction, the funding for localised schemes was set ten per cent lower than central government's council tax benefit, in part due to austerity.¹²⁹ Faced with this funding reduction, the majority of councils (including Guildford Borough Council) introduced schemes less generous than the previous CTB system, with low-income households either required to pay local tax for the first time or finding their tax liability increased.¹³⁰ Guildford Borough Council is among

¹²⁴ The costs of administering and delivering the fund are included in the Local Assistance Scheme budget.

¹²⁵ Surrey County Council, *The Welfare Picture in Surrey: An update report from the Surrey Welfare Coordination Group*, October 2018, pp.17-18, 31. Additional information provided by Surrey County Council's Local Assistance Scheme office.

¹²⁶ Surrey County Council Public Health, *Food Access Needs Assessment 2014*, pp.28-29.

<https://www.surreyi.gov.uk/dataset/food-access-needs-assessment-2014>

¹²⁷ LGA, *Council Tax Support: the story continues*, January 2015, p15.

<https://hqnetwork.co.uk/download.cfm?doc=docm93jjm4n7332.pdf&ver=14976> Research has found that some low-income households are cutting back on essentials, including food, or borrowing money to meet their council tax bills. Sam Ashton, Marc Francis, and Alice Woudhuysen, 'Still too Poor to Pay: Three years of localised Council Tax support in London', Child Poverty Action Task group and Z2K, 2016, p.4.

http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/StillTooPoor_web_update5Oct16_0.pdf

¹²⁸ Protecting the council tax support for pensioners has left a further reduced pot of money to spend on working age recipients. Guildford's council tax support caseload is approximately 48 per cent pension age and 52 per cent working age. Guildford Borough Council, Report to Executive, 'Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2019-20', 27 November 2018. <http://www2.guildford.gov.uk/councilmeetings/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=132&MIId=748>

¹²⁹ Wendy Wilson and Chris Murphy, *Council Tax Reduction Schemes*, House of Commons Library, briefing paper 6672, June 2017, pp.3, 4. The funding for council tax support has been incorporated into the (shrinking) yearly central government grant that each local authority receives.

¹³⁰ Stuart Adam, Robert Joyce, and Thomas Pope, *The impacts of localised council tax support schemes*, The Institute for Fiscal Studies, January 2019, p.10.

the 90 per cent of English councils that have reduced Council Tax Support entitlements for working-age families below the level of support provided to pensioners in 2013-14.¹³¹

- 5.47 A proportion of councils, including Guildford Borough, have a discretionary hardship fund to help support residents struggling financially as a consequence of savings in council tax support. The task group recommends publicity for the Council's Discretionary LCTS Hardship Fund be increased to ensure it is spent. Since the introduction of the Fund in 2013-14 there has been a considerable underspend every year; at no point have hardship payments awarded in the Borough exceeded 40 per cent of the £40,000 budgeted. Such underspending in hardship funds elsewhere has been attributed to a lack of promotion or highly restrictive eligibility criteria.¹³² The task group notes that approximately half of the applications to Guildford's discretionary LCTS hardship fund are refused help. The task group suggests an evaluation of the application process and criteria for the hardship fund be undertaken.
- 5.48 The task group recommends that the Council act to publicise and protect the local security safety net (Surrey County Council's local welfare assistance scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments, and the LCTS Hardship Fund).

Mayor's Local Distress Fund

- 5.49 The task group recommends both an extension of the remit for the Mayor of Guildford's Local Distress Fund and that its application procedure be reviewed. During its investigation, the task group was made aware that an objective of the Fund is the prevention and relief of poverty. The task group noted that the formal distribution policy of the Fund was last revised in 2012, as was the maximum value of grant (£250). As discussed above, the welfare landscape has changed in the intervening years. Currently, funds are not given for ongoing expenses such as rent, utility bills, debts, and food, whereas carpets, kitchen items and appliances, household furniture, and clothing are within the remit of the fund. The task group felt the application procedure requiring the ongoing involvement of a third party appeared bureaucratic and was unlikely to maximise take-up.¹³³ The level of grant expenditure in 2017-18 was £5,762, leaving a balance of £43,165 with an additional £20,000 donation from the Council to be included in 2018-19.¹³⁴

A moral imperative

- 5.50 The task group recognise that although the primary drivers of food poverty and insecurity are structural, an immediate response is required. Immediate, short-term action is essential and for many this constitutes a moral imperative. The task group's review suggests an equal moral imperative or duty to tackle the problem in the medium-long term while avoiding false solutions.
- 5.51 The task group felt compelled to try and highlight that depoliticising and institutionalising the response to food insecurity within charities is unlikely to be helpful to food insecure households in the longer term. In kind food assistance given in the short-term needs an exit strategy to avoid becoming a long-term non-solution.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 During its review the task group has experienced scepticism towards the notion that food poverty or food insecurity could be a widespread issue for residents in the Borough. Generally, in affluent

¹³¹ Stuart Adam, Robert Joyce, and Thomas Pope, *The impacts of localised council tax support schemes*, The Institute for Fiscal Studies, January 2019, p.64. Guildford Borough Council, 'The Rules of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for those of working age', 2014-18. <https://guildford.gov.uk/article/18603/What-is-Local-Council-Tax-Support-and-how-has-it-changed->

¹³² Sam Ashton, Marc Francis, and Alice Woudhuysen, 'Still too Poor to Pay: Three years of localised Council Tax support in London', Child Poverty Action Task group and Z2K, 2016, p.6. http://www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/StillTooPoor_web_update5Oct16_0.pdf

¹³³ Guildford Borough Council website, 'How to apply for the Mayor of Guildford's Local Distress Fund', [accessed 9 February 2019] <https://guildford.gov.uk/localdistressfund>

¹³⁴ The Mayor of Guildford's Local Distress Fund Annual Report, 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018, [accessed on Charity Commission website on 9 February 2019] <http://beta.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-details/?subid=0®id=258388>

areas there can be less food aid infrastructure and services, and less assumption of need. Still, at times there has seemed an apparent lack of interest within the Council itself. Witness the failure of the Lead Councillor with responsibility for health and community welfare to respond to requests to contribute to the review, or the assurance offered to the task group that while not knowing if emergency food aid provision met the current level of demand in the Borough if food poverty needs existed then local people and organisations would adapt to meet them. Or the judgment that participation in a project to expand and refine local estimates of food poverty was not a Council priority. In this respect, and knowing that food bank use is the tip of the food poverty iceberg, it is hoped that the number of food parcels distributed locally may serve as something of a wake-up call in the Borough.

- 6.2 The task group reviewed the issues of food poverty and insecurity over a period of time that enabled analysis and reflection on its findings. Naturally, the task group's recommendations evolved with its assessment of the evidence and narratives. An example of this change is the perceived role of surplus food as a solution to food poverty. From a position of considering the logistical issue of matching corporate food waste to food insecure households the task group moved to a belief that while waste food might reduce food poverty there was very little if any evidence to suggest it would solve the issue. As Mencken alluded, 'For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong.' Proposing the redistribution of surplus food as the solution to food poverty and insecurity is just such a case.
- 6.3 Evidence about the causes of food poverty and insecurity demands a structural framing of the drivers and solutions to food poverty and insecurity, rather than an approach focusing on the behaviour of those in food insecure households. The task group found powerful and cogent explanations for food insecurity in an exposition of the impact and extent of welfare reforms, austerity, the cost of living, and income stagnation – explanations far more convincing than narratives that point towards the behaviour and decisions of those affected and suggests responsibility.
- 6.4 The task group has attempted to move beyond a short-term portrayal of food poverty and insecurity and put forward a more rounded analysis of the causes and solutions. At the risk of stating the obvious, there is a need to look upstream and address the structural drivers of food poverty and insecurity. And not blame or stigmatise people for circumstances which they can perhaps do little to fundamentally change.
- 6.5 The long-term solutions to the issue of food poverty are in a different sphere to local government or the third sector. The task group feels it to be vital to raise awareness of the danger of short-term emergency responses to food insecurity becoming mistaken for and pursued as long-term solutions. Yes, of course there are measures to help in the short-term – and in the context of Guildford some have been suggested – but evidence shows that a focus on food, feeding, or food-centred strategies will not be effective in the long-term.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 The reasoning for the recommendations is presented within the discussion above.
- 7.2 To address food poverty and insecurity in the Borough we recommend that:
 - (I) The Leader of the Council write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions outlining the problems caused by Universal Credit and other welfare reforms and calling for immediate upstream action on food insecurity.
 - (II) The Executive formally recognise food poverty and insecurity as issues meriting priority action in the Borough.
 - (III) The Executive reiterate its support for the principle that pay should reflect living costs and that the Council becomes an accredited real Living Wage employer with the Living Wage Foundation then promote the Living Wage scheme to employers locally.

- (IV) The Executive develop and implement a Food Poverty Strategy and Action Plan that includes, but is not limited to:
- (a) Facilitation of a food insecurity forum for the Borough (invited stakeholders to include food aid providers, food bank referrers, the Citizens Advice, churches, schools, sheltered housing, supported accommodation providers, and other experts by experience).
 - (b) Development and training sessions on food poverty and insecurity for Councillors, led by the relevant Lead Councillor, that includes advice on dealing with residents in severe hardship, how to make food bank referrals, the roll out of Universal Credit, and the local social security safety net.
 - (c) Prioritisation of a community space, 'Lighthouse' style resource for the Borough.
 - (d) Preparation and delivery of a formal food access plan to identify barriers to accessing affordable and nutritious food and actions to address them.
 - (e) Measures to encourage the creation of a community store or social supermarket (such as a *Your Local Pantry*).
 - (f) Development of local measurements of food poverty and insecurity, including engaging with external experts whenever possible, and working with partnership organisations such as Guildford's Health and Wellbeing Board.
 - (g) Extension of the remit of the Mayor's Local Distress Fund and reviewing the application procedure.
 - (h) Increased promotion of existing initiatives that target food poverty and insecurity and provide help to residents in hardship (including, Surrey's Local Assistance Scheme, the Discretionary Housing Payments fund, Guildford's Local Council Tax Support Hardship fund, the Mayor's Local Distress Fund, and emergency food aid providers).
 - (i) Maintaining and publicising, including on the Council's website and through partners, the current provision of food aid that is accessible to Guildford Borough residents.
 - (j) Review of the application process and criteria for the Council's Local Council Tax Support Hardship fund.
- (V) The Executive ensure the Overview and Scrutiny review of food poverty is publicised.
- (VI) The Executive request local emergency food aid providers consider the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny review of food poverty and insecurity (for example, the consideration of self-referral gateways and removal of the three-visit cap; altering paper food voucher forms by adding a tick box to specify Universal Credit as the primary cause of the referral; a possible name change to exclude the term 'food bank'; a limited delivery service; further staggering of opening times; improved availability of food parcels in more places around the community; ensuring there are no faith-based obligations, questions, or interventions with food aid users at any stage of a visit; and endorsement of the Dignity Principles).

Furthermore,

- (VII) That the Executive submit to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee an update on the above recommendations no later than November 2019.

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