

Food Poverty Review Briefing Note

1. Terms of Reference for the Review

The Council at its meeting held on 30 October 2019 made the following resolution that sets the terms of reference for the review:

“We note that there are 8 million people in this country who have trouble putting food on the table according to the UN. Over 500,000 people used Foodbanks in the UK last year.

The Trussell Trust alone distributed over 1.3m three-day emergency food supplies of people in crisis in the financial year 2017/18. Three million children are at risk of hunger during the school holidays and around 10% of the NHS Budget goes on treating diabetes and up to 1 million people live in food deserts in the UK.

We further note that the Government’s commitment to the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals which apply internationally and domestically commits governments to ending hunger by 2030.

We resolve to ask Scrutiny to investigate the extent of the issue in the Dover District and what can be done to tackle it.”

The last part of the resolution is highlighted as it sets the key objective of the scrutiny review, which is to identify the background to, and current levels of, food poverty in the Dover District and what can be done to reduce food poverty in the Dover District. As part of this there will be a need to evidence the extent of food poverty in the district such as through the collection of any available local statistics.

Timescale for Review

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 20 January 2020 approved the scoping report and identified its key witnesses for the review. However, further implementation of the review was halted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The revised timescale for the review is therefore proposed as follows:

- October 2020 – Review and agree final list of witnesses and areas of scope
- November – January 2020 – Gather evidence in support of review (this will be primarily through interviews with identified witnesses)
- February 2021 – Approve final review document
- March 2021 – Council to consider review document (May 2021 would be the fall back date if there was any slippage in the work programme)

2. Key Witnesses for Review

The following key witnesses were identified as part of the review scoping document:

- BeChange (Aylesham)
- Dover Food Bank
- Deal Area Food Bank
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Deal, Dover and Sandwich Age Concern
- Local Health Services
- Dover Outreach Centre
- Department for Work and Pensions
- Home Start (Dover)
- KCC Education Services
- KCC Social Services
- Phoenix Centre (Sandwich)
- Trussell Trust

All interviews will be conducted remotely using Teams unless government guidance relating to COVID-19 changes. We can provide a laptop in a room in the council offices for those witnesses who don't have access to a laptop with a camera.

It is suggested that, subject to availability, the witnesses identified by interviewed in the following groups:

Group 1

- BeChange (Aylesham)
- Dover Food Bank
- Deal Area Food Bank
- Trussell Trust
- Deal, Dover and Sandwich Age Concern
- Local Health Services (South Kent Coast CCG, Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust – healthy eating/nutrition/infant feeding programmes)
- Dover Outreach Centre
- Phoenix Centre (Sandwich)

Group 2

- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Department for Work and Pensions
- Home Start (Dover)
- KCC Education Services
- KCC Social Services

The Committee is asked to consider if it wishes to make any changes to the list of potential witnesses for the review.

The Committee is also asked to consider whether it considers it wishes to set key questions in advance of the interviews. If this is the case it is suggested this take the form of a dedicated remote key question setting meeting.

3. Briefing for the Review

A short high-level briefing to assist members in preparing for the review is set out below. This is not intended to be exhaustive but rather provide an introduction to the key issues and provide useful information in preparation for interviews with key witnesses and allow Members to identify any areas where further research is felt necessary.

The primary evidence base for the review will be the evidence gathered as part of interviews with key witnesses and local data gathering.

3.1 Definition of Food Poverty

The Department of Health¹ defines food poverty as:

“the inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet”.

The key drivers of food poverty can be summarised as:

- Low income
- High outgoings
- Food availability

Food poverty can lead to adverse impacts on the health status of individuals through the quantity and quality of food they have access to. Individuals with insufficient calories can be underweight; those with sufficient calories but insufficient vitamins and minerals can be nutrient deficient (which can lead to conditions such as rickets); and those with access to a high calorie, low nutrient food intake can be overweight. In addition, food insecurity can have an adverse mental health impact leading to stress, anxiety and depression. It is known that high energy / low nutrient diets can contribute towards hypertension, iron deficiency, and impaired liver function.

In addition, the impact of food poverty can be inter-generational, particularly for women where breast feeding requires a healthy diet to provide the nutrients necessary for infant development. Poor diet in children has been shown to impact life expectancy and future health outcomes and conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, malnutrition, and a range of cancers are common diet-related diseases.²

The Trussell Trust publishes information related to its own food bank network twice a year. The figures for the period 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020 indicate the following primary reasons as to why households were referred to a food bank:

- 39% Low Income
- 17% Benefit Delays
- 15% Benefit Changes

¹ Department of Health, Choosing a Better Diet: a food and health action plan, 2005

² British Medical Association, Health at a price: Reducing the impact of poverty, June 2017

3.2 Definition of Food Insecurity

The Food Standards Agency in 2007³ defined food insecurity as

‘Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.’

This can be further defined⁴ as:

Food security	Individual certain in their ability to obtain food.
Mild food insecurity	Mild food insecurity will relate to uncertainty of an individual’s ability to obtain food.
Moderate food insecurity	A person in moderate food insecurity will: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have insufficient money or resources for a healthy diet (i.e. compromising on food quality, quantity and variety)• Uncertainty over their ability to obtain food• Occasionally have experienced skipped meals or run out of food
Severe food insecurity	A person in severe food insecurity will: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have run out of food• Gone an entire day without eating at times during the day

The ‘Food and You – Wave Five’ survey for 2019 conducted by the Food Standards Agency found that 80% of respondents lived in households with high levels of food security, 10% lived in households with marginal food security and 10% lived in households with low or very low food security (i.e. the food insecure). The survey also found that 47% of respondents had made at least one change to their buying or eating arrangements for financial reasons.

The majority of respondents (83%) to the survey said that they had never worried about running out of food before there was money to buy more although there were some significant variations across groups as follows:

“Age: A quarter (25%) of respondents aged between 16 and 24 mentioned they had worried about running out of food before there was money to buy more, whereas only 5% of over 75s said the same.

³ Food Standards Agency, Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey, 2007

⁴ Public Health Northamptonshire, Presentation to Northamptonshire Health and Wellbeing Board, November 2019

Households with children: The proportion of respondents living with a child under the age of 6 who had worried about running out of food (29%) was double the proportion of respondents also living with a child under the age of 6 who had not (15%), and there was a similar pattern for those in households with children aged under 16.

Household income: In the lowest income households 36% had worried about running out of food before there was money to buy more, and this proportion declined with increasing income to 5% of the highest income households.”⁵

The UK Government added 10 questions concerning food insecurity to its Family Resources Survey in April 2019. The results of this are expected to be published in April 2021.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals agreed by world leaders, including the UK Government, in 2015 includes a commitment to end hunger.

‘Food Deserts’

A report from the University of Sheffield in 2018 defined food deserts as:

“those areas of cities where cheap, nutritious food is virtually unobtainable. Car-less residents, unable to reach out-of-town supermarkets, depend on the corner shop where prices are high, products are processed and fresh fruit and vegetables are poor or non-existent.”⁶

The report further defined food deserts as such:

- Food desert – an area containing two or fewer supermarkets/convenience stores.
- Deprived food desert – a food desert which is in the most deprived 25% of areas, according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation measures produced by government in England, Wales and Scotland.
- “Normal” area – an area containing between three and seven supermarkets/convenience stores (the modal range of such stores in Great Britain).
- Food oasis – an area containing more than seven supermarkets/convenience stores

The report identified two deprived food deserts in Kent – one in the Dartford constituency and one in the Rochester and Strood constituency.

⁵ Food and You Survey – Wave 5, Food Standards Agency, 2019

⁶ ‘Can everyone access affordable, nutritious food? A picture of Britain’s deprived food deserts.’, University of Sheffield, 2018

The study found that 41% of residents in a deprived food desert area did not own a car (compared to 23% nationally). There were also lower levels of online shopping in deprived food desert areas.

‘Holiday Hunger’

The phrase ‘holiday hunger’ is traditionally used to refer to increased levels of food insecurity experienced by children and households during the school holidays when access to free school meals ceased. The advent of ‘holiday clubs’ to continue to provide access to free meals for school children is one way of combating this where available.

3.3 Definition of Food Aid

DEFRA defined ‘food aid’ in 2014⁷ as a:

“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.”

Food aid should provide a balanced nutritional diet and is often in the form of a multi-day provision. There are a number of charitable and community groups in the UK that either act as food banks distributing food parcels or are involved in the redistribution of surplus food to various charitable or community groups. For example, the Trussell Trust provides a network of food banks in the UK while Fareshare is involved in the redistribution of surplus food to charities to use for meals.

How is food aid accessed?

The majority of food aid in the UK is accessed through a referral system from a relevant body and is usually intended as short-term support. Care professionals such as health visitors, schools, local authority social/family services and GPs identify people in need and issue them with a food bank voucher. However, a minority of food banks will permit self-referral to their services and some will permit self-referral in either the first instance or following a formal referral. Most food banks require that the food parcel be collected from them, though some will deliver food parcels.

In terms of the length of support provided, this varies by food banks with many imposing a limit on the number of times a food parcel can be received.

A survey conducted for the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) found that only 27% of food banks did not require referrals *and* put no limit on the number of times an individual could receive support.⁸

A study conducted for IFAN estimated that there are at least 916 independent food banks operating across the UK with a further 1,250 provided by the Trussell Trust. Over half of

⁷ Household Food Security in the UK: a review of food aid, DEFRA, 2014

⁸ A survey of food banks operating independently of The Trussell Trust food bank network, Independent Food Aid Network, 2019

the independent food banks are operated by a Christian faith group. The IFAN estimates that the combined total of at least 2,166 food banks is more probably over 3,000 nationally when independent food aid providers operating outside of the food bank model are taken into consideration.

The majority of independent food banks (75%) were established within the last nine years according to IFAN.

In the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, the Trussell Trust provided 191,240 three-day emergency food parcels in the southeast region through its network of food banks. This compared to 149,587 food parcels issued in the period 2018/19 by the Trussell Trust. It estimates that it will provide 846,00 food parcels for the period October to December 2020, a year-on-year increase of 61%.

3.4 Definitions of Poverty

There is no single definition of poverty and there has been no official UK-wide measure of poverty since 2015. Poverty can also be measured in different ways, resulting in differing estimates as to the level of poverty.

However, poverty should not be taken to mean purely 'low income' as costs such as childcare, housing, costs associated with disability and different levels of savings and assets will affect households differently. The condition of being in poverty is potentially dynamic and not a static condition with individuals moving in and out of poverty over time and with some groups being more vulnerable than others to the risk of experiencing poverty.

The Child Poverty Act 2010 (subsequently repealed by the Welfare and Reform Act 2016) set out differences between:

- **Absolute Poverty:** People living below a certain income threshold or unable to afford certain basic goods and services
- **Relative Poverty:** People whose financial resources fall below an average income threshold for the economy, for instance those families with income below 60% of the median
- **Persistent Poverty:** People who experience long periods of relative poverty. The Office for National Statistics defines persistent poverty as experiencing relative low income both in the current year and at least two out of the three preceding years.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) in its 2017 study (published in 2019) estimated that 7.8% of the UK population (equivalent to roughly 4.7 million people) lived in persistent

poverty. The study found that “an estimated 2.4 million working people were in poverty in 2017, of which 31% also experienced in-work poverty in 2016”.⁹

The ONS study found that UK persistent poverty rates had been relatively static (at a small decrease in levels) between 2008 – 2017.

A study by the Social Metrics Commission in 2018¹⁰ found that 14.2 million people (8.4 million working age adults, 4.5 million children and 1.4 million pension age adults) in the UK were in poverty. The study also found that 2.7 million people were less than 10% below the poverty line and a further 2.5 million people were less than 10% above the poverty line, meaning that relatively small changes in their circumstances could move them in or out of poverty.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation define poverty as being “when a person’s resources, (income, financial assets, goods, and services such as Health and Children’s) are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs that are considered reasonable by standards in society”.¹¹

The Foundation identifies three needs which it uses to quantify whether people’s resources are sufficient to fulfil their needs as follows:

1. The range, sustainability, quantity and quality of those resources – taking into account not only material, but also in-kind and informal resources. In respect of informal or indirect resources these may be insecure and arbitrary nature and significant reliance on them may not be sustainable.
2. Their personal circumstances and characteristics – while basic needs are all the same, personal circumstances such as age, health status, disability, family circumstances, etc. will have an impact.
3. The choices people make – for example, if a person, no matter what their level of income, is spending their available resources on non-essentials, then they may neglect their own or their family’s needs. But it is important to recognise that the choices available to people living in poverty are generally much more constrained.

According to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government’s English Indices of Deprivation 2019, the Dover District has several areas in the 10% most deprived in England (as well as several areas in the least deprived deciles) according to the Indexes of Multiple Deprivation at a Super Output Area level.

⁹ Persistent poverty in the UK and EU: 2017 Comparisons of persistent poverty between UK and other EU countries, Office for National Statistics, 6 June 2019

¹⁰ Social Metrics Commission, A new measure of poverty for the UK: The final report of the Social Metrics Commission, September 2018

¹¹ JRF Programme Paper, Anti-poverty strategies for the UK, A DEFINITION OF POVERTY, Chris Goulden and Conor D’Arcy September 2014

3.5 Impact of COVID-19

The Trussell Trust reported an 89% increase in the number of emergency food parcels in April 2020 compared with the same period in 2019. A 175% year-on-year increase in food bank use was reported by IFAN for April 2020.

There were 100,000 households who received support from the Trussell Trust for the first time between April – June 2020.

This is supported by data collected by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) which found that millions of people used a food bank or charity during this time. Its survey for July 2020 found that:

- 9% of the population had had food delivered to their home by a food charity or food bank in the month to July, with households with children over-represented. This does not include those households that visited food banks in person during this period.
- One in six people (16%) report cutting down on the size of their meals or skipping them altogether due to a lack of money. Again, households with children were over-represented.

The reasons for requiring support from a food bank or charity were both economic- and health (Covid-19) related. One in four (26%) of those that used a food bank or charity did so because they were self-isolating or shielding due to Covid-19. One in five (20%) advised that they did not have enough money to buy food.

The majority (81%) of households that needed support from a food bank in June or July 2020 did not have someone working. This was unchanged from before the pandemic. In addition, only 4% of people that needed to use a food bank in June or July were furloughed indicating that the Government's Job Retention Scheme had a positive impact on households.

The Trussell Trust's research found that one in five (22%) of those that used a food bank during the pandemic were waiting for a decision on a benefit application, or the first payment. Of those that were waiting, one in five (20%) had not received a decision on their first payment for six weeks or longer.

The Trussell Trust data indicated that low income remained a significant factor in why households needed to turn to support from food banks and the majority (95%) of households needing support from food banks were living in relative poverty after housing costs.

Finally, the study found that younger people (25-44) and BAME groups were more likely to have needed support from food banks during the pandemic.

3.6 Potential Areas for Consideration in Conducting the Review

Members may wish to consider the following points as part of the review:

- Who needs food aid and why?
- Who provides food aid and how?
- How accessible and appropriate is the food aid available in the district?
- How effective is the model of food aid provision in the Dover District (in meeting immediate and long-term needs)?
- What are the impacts of food poverty?
- What is the impact of deprivation on food poverty?
- How widespread is food poverty in the Dover District?
- What approaches could reduce dependency on food aid?
- How successful are the strategic approaches to tackling food poverty?
- What impact has there been from the Covid-19 crisis?
- What role is there for Dover District Council in tackling the issue?

3.7 Source Material

- Food Standards Agency. The Food and You Survey – Wave 5. 2019
- Britain's not so hidden hunger - A progress report from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger. 2016
- Department of Health. Choosing a Better Diet: a food and health action plan. 2005
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- Household Food Security in the UK: a review of food aid, DEFRA, 2014
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- The Trussell Trust. Lockdown, lifelines and the long haul ahead: The impact of Covid-19 on food banks in the Trussell Trust network. 2020
- The Trussell Trust. The State of Hunger - Introduction to a Study of Poverty and Food Insecurity in the UK. 2019
- The Trussell Trust. A Nutritional Analysis of the Trussell Trust Emergency Food Parcel. 2019

- Loopstra, R., Goodwin, S., Goldberg, B., Lambie-Mumford, H., May, J., Williams, A. A survey of food banks operating independently of The Trussell Trust food bank network. 2019
- University of Sheffield. Can everyone access affordable, nutritious food? A picture of Britain's deprived food deserts. 2018
- Scott Corfe. What are the barriers to eating healthily in the UK? Social Market Foundation. 2018
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- Independent Food Aid Network. <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/>