

# MDA No.: 1447

## Title: Economy Committee – Food Insecurity

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 At the Economy Committee meeting on 19 October 2022 the Committee resolved that:

*Authority be delegated to the Chair, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, to agree any output from the discussion.*

- 1.2 Following consultation with party Group Lead Members, the Chair is asked to agree the Committee's report on *Food Insecurity*, as attached at **Appendix 1**.

### 2. Decision


- 2.1 **That the Chair, in consultation with party Group Lead Members, agrees the Committee's report on *Food Insecurity*, as attached at Appendix 1.**

#### Assembly Member

I confirm that I do not have any disclosable pecuniary interests in the proposed decision and take the decision in compliance with the Code of Conduct for elected Members of the Authority.

The above request has my approval.

**Signature:**



**Printed Name:** Hina Bokhari, Chair of the Economy Committee

**Date:** 20 April 2023

### **3. Decision by an Assembly Member under Delegated Authority**

#### **Background and proposed next steps:**

- 3.1 The terms of reference for this investigation were agreed by the Chair, in consultation with relevant party Lead Group Members and Deputy Chair, on the 25 September 2022 under the standing authority granted to Chairs of Committees and Sub-Committees. Officers confirm that the report and its recommendations fall within these terms of reference.
- 3.2 The exercise of delegated authority approving the report will be formally noted at the Economy Committee's next appropriate meeting.

#### **Confirmation that appropriate delegated authority exists for this decision:**

Signature (Committee Services): Jack Booth

Printed Name: Jack Booth

Date: 11 April 2023

Telephone Number: 07720 100880

#### **Financial Implications: NOT REQUIRED**

Note: Finance comments and signature are required only where there are financial implications arising or the potential for financial implications.

Signature (Finance): Not Required

#### **Legal Implications:**

The Chair of the Economy Committee has the power to make the decision set out in this report.

Signature (Legal): Rory McKenna (PRINTED SIGNATURE)

Printed Name: Rory McKenna, Monitoring Officer

Date: 4 April 2023

Email: [monitoringofficer@london.gov.uk](mailto:monitoringofficer@london.gov.uk)

#### **Supporting Detail / List of Consultees:**

- Marina Ahmed AM, Deputy Chair;
- Neil Garratt AM; and
- Zack Polanski AM.

#### 4. Public Access to Information

- 4.1 Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the FoIA, or the EIR and will be made available on the GLA Website, usually within one working day of approval.
- 4.2 If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary.
- 4.3 **Note:** this form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

##### **Part 1 - Deferral:**

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? NO

If yes, until what date:

##### **Part 2 – Sensitive Information:**

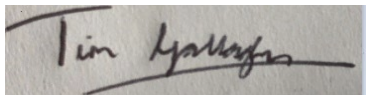
Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA or EIR should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form? NO

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#### **Lead Officer / Author**

Signature:



Printed Name: Tim Gallagher

Job Title: Senior Policy Adviser

Date: 11 April 2023

Telephone Number: 07704 348487

#### **Countersigned by Executive Director:**

Signature:



Printed Name: Helen Ewen, Executive Director of Secretariat

Date: 18 April 2023

Telephone Number: 07729 108986

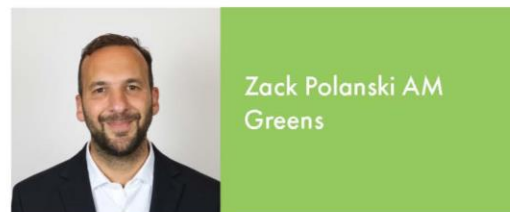
An aerial photograph of several people walking across a large, green-tinted map of London. The map shows the city's street grid and the River Thames. The people are scattered across the frame, some walking alone and others in small groups. The overall tone is green, and the image serves as a background for the report cover.

# **Food Insecurity in London**

## Economy Committee

**LONDON**ASSEMBLY

## Economy Committee



The Economy Committee scrutinises the work of the Mayor relating to economic development, wealth creation, social development, culture, sport and tourism in the capital.

### Contact us

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## Foreword



**Hina Bokhari AM**  
**Chair of the Economy Committee**

No one in London should have to rely on a food bank to feed themselves or their family. But sadly this is the reality for far too many Londoners today.

In a year in which food prices rose at the fastest rate since the 1970s,<sup>1</sup> the London Assembly Economy Committee carried out an investigation into food insecurity in London, with the aim of understanding the scale, causes and potential solutions to the problem. We spoke to experts in the field as well as people who had experienced food insecurity, including at a site visit to Wandsworth Foodbank. We repeatedly heard that food poverty is getting worse, and food banks are struggling to cope. This is backed up by research showing that food insecurity levels and food bank use increased over the course of 2022.

During our visit to Wandsworth Foodbank, it was apparent how embedded food banks have become in local communities. Several people we spoke to told us that it was ‘more than just a food bank’. There is no doubt that food banks – including the brilliant staff and volunteers we met in Wandsworth – are playing a vital role in supporting people in real need. But we should not have to rely on food banks to act as a safety net in this way.

Everyone we spoke to was clear that food insecurity is a symptom of wider financial insecurity and poverty. Guests at the Committee’s meeting highlighted a range of problems, related to a lack of job security, low pay, problems with Universal Credit and insufficient advice services. The majority of guests that the Committee spoke to, including the Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice, advocated a ‘cash first’ approach to addressing food insecurity, rather than the expansion of charitable food aid.

This report makes a number of recommendations designed to alleviate food insecurity in London. Some of these relate to areas which are the responsibility of the Government, such as the social security system. But there is also action that the Mayor of London can take, such as promoting the London Living Wage, supporting advice services, and strengthening programmes such as the Kitchen Social scheme and the Food Roots Incubator programme. He is also able to

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<sup>1</sup> ONS, [Rising cost of pasta, bread and other everyday foods leaves most vulnerable the worst off](#), 22 December 2022

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provide strategic oversight through the London Food Board, and by updating his London Food Strategy Implementation Plan. The Committee welcomes the Mayor's recent announcement that he will fund free school meals for all primary school children in London for the 2023-24 academic year, although there needs to be a long-term solution to this issue as well a short-term fix.

The Committee would like to thank everyone who took part in our investigation, and in particular the people we spoke to who had experienced food insecurity, who showed grace and courage in sharing their stories with us.



## Executive Summary

The Economy Committee carried out an investigation into food insecurity in London as part of its 2022–23 work programme. The Committee set out to examine the scale and causes of food insecurity in London, and to what extent this has been exacerbated by cost-of-living pressures. The Committee scrutinised the impact of the Mayor’s initiatives and programmes that relate to food insecurity in London, and also asked what further action can be taken to address food insecurity in London by the Mayor, central government and local government.

As part of the investigation, the Committee held a meeting in City Hall with invited guests on 19 October 2022. We followed this up with a site visit to Wandsworth Foodbank on 8 November 2022, where we spoke to staff, volunteers and people who had used the food bank.

The Committee reached several key findings as part of our investigation, which are summarised below:

- Food prices and food insecurity levels increased throughout 2022. Food and non-alcoholic beverage prices rose by 16.9 per cent in the 12 months to December 2022,<sup>2</sup> compared to just 1.6 per cent in December 2021.<sup>3</sup> The Food Foundation’s tracking of food insecurity levels found that 18.1 per cent of households in London were food insecure in September 2022, compared to 11.1 per cent in April 2022.<sup>4</sup>
- The Committee heard that low income is the main cause of food insecurity. Guests at the Committee’s meeting identified several specific factors, including low pay, insecure work and issues with the benefits system. The Trussell Trust’s 2021 report ‘State of Hunger’, based on research carried out in 2018 and 2020, found that 97 per cent of people referred to a food bank in London were destitute (meaning that a person is unable to afford the essentials to eat, stay warm and dry and keep clean).<sup>5</sup> Health, disability and adverse life events also have an impact on food insecurity levels.
- The £20 uplift per week to Universal Credit, which was introduced by the Government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in a reduction in food insecurity levels. The Department for Work and Pensions’ (DWP’s) Family Resources Survey in 2019–20 found that 43 per cent of households on Universal Credit were food insecure.<sup>6</sup> This figure fell to 27 per cent in the equivalent survey for 2020–21, while the £20 uplift was still in place.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> ONS, [Consumer price inflation, UK: December 2022](#), 18 January 2023

<sup>3</sup> ONS, [Consumer price inflation, UK: December 2022](#), 18 January 2023

<sup>4</sup> The Food Foundation, [Food Insecurity Tracking](#)

<sup>5</sup> The Trussell Trust, [State of Hunger](#), May 2021. London-specific data shared with the Economy Committee by the Trussell Trust.

<sup>6</sup> The Food Foundation, [Government data shows £20 uplift is likely to have protected people on Universal Credit from food insecurity](#), 1 April 2022

<sup>7</sup> The Food Foundation, [Government data shows £20 uplift is likely to have protected people on Universal Credit from food insecurity](#), 1 April 2022

- Households with children experience higher levels of food insecurity than households without children, although parents are more likely to experience food insecurity than their children.<sup>8</sup> An estimated 210,000 children in London living in poverty do not currently qualify for free school meals.<sup>9</sup> An estimated 215,000 school children in England are eligible for free school meals, but are not currently registered for them, equating to 11 per cent of eligible children.<sup>10</sup> In February 2023, the Mayor of London announced that he would provide £130m in funding to ensure all primary school children in London receive free school meals during the 2023-24 academic year.<sup>11</sup>
- The Mayor's London Food Strategy Implementation Plan, published in December 2018, committed to providing 300,000 meals for 50,000 children and young people by 2020 as part of the Kitchen Social scheme, which is delivered by the Mayor's Fund for London.<sup>12</sup> This target had not been met by the start of 2020, although the annual number of meals provided by the scheme has since increased.<sup>13</sup> Kitchen Social's provision has not been evenly spread across London boroughs, with the majority of its activity located in a small number of inner London boroughs.<sup>14</sup> The Mayor is not currently funding the Kitchen Social scheme.
- The GLA's food team was dissolved as part of a restructure to the Communities and Social Policy Unit in 2021. GLA officers told the Committee that the restructure had resulted in an increase to the budget for addressing food insecurity. However, stakeholders have expressed concern that the restructure has led to a significant reduction in the GLA's work on food issues. The London Food Board is supposed to meet four times a year, but it has not met with this regularity since the restructure.<sup>15</sup>
- The current London Food Strategy Implementation Plan was published in 2018, which predates both the pandemic and the immediate cost-of-living crisis. In November 2021, the Mayor stated that an updated implementation plan would be published 'in the coming months', but this has not yet been published.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> London Datastore, [Survey of Londoners 2021-22](#), September 2022

<sup>9</sup> CPAG, [By region: number of children in poverty not eligible for free school meals](#), 1 September 2022

<sup>10</sup> Local Government Association, [Free school meals: One million more school children could be fed if the sign-up process eased, councils urge](#)

<sup>11</sup> Mayor of London, [Mayor announces every London primary schoolchild to receive free school meals](#), 20 February 2023

<sup>12</sup> Mayor of London, [The London Food Strategy Implementation Plan 2018-2023](#), December 2018

<sup>13</sup> Mayor's Question Time, [2022/0609: Kitchen Social Scheme \(1\)](#), 1 March 2022

<sup>14</sup> Mayor's Question Time, [2022/0610: Kitchen Social Scheme \(2\)](#), 1 March 2022

<sup>15</sup> Mayor of London, [London Food Board](#)

<sup>16</sup> Mayor's Question Time, [2021/4645: Food Strategy](#), 22 November 2021

## Recommendations

### Recommendation 1

The Committee supports a ‘cash first’ approach to addressing food insecurity. The Government should restore the uplift of Universal Credit in line with inflation, which will help to address food insecurity levels among the poorest households in London. The Mayor should continue to lobby the Government to reinstate the uplift.<sup>17</sup>

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### Recommendation 2

The Mayor should provide further information and transparency to the Committee about how he will implement his programme of free school meal provision, including how he will provide financial support and advice to schools to expand their provision. He should provide a further update on this work at the start of the 2023-24 academic year, and regular updates throughout the year. He should also provide the Committee with the following information:

- what analysis he has done of the revenue and capital cost implications of the policy for both schools and local authorities
  - when he first informed schools and local authorities of the policy
  - why the decision was taken to prioritise primary schools over secondary schools
  - a detailed breakdown of costs for the £130 million, as well as any additional costs for GLA staff to administer the scheme.
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### Recommendation 3

The Mayor should work with the Government and local authorities in London to develop plans to expand the provision of free school meals once his own funding comes to an end. He should also work with boroughs to share experiences and best practice of free school meal provision, including in relation to the Mayor’s funding programme for the 2023-24 academic year.

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### Recommendation 4

The Government should introduce automatic enrolment for free school meals and the Healthy Start scheme using social security records, to ensure that all eligible children receive free school meals. The Mayor should lobby the Government to make this change. He should also take action to raise awareness of free school meals and Healthy Start in order to increase enrolment levels, and report back to the Committee on action taken.

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<sup>17</sup> Conservative Group dissent for the following reasons: it’s agreed that this policy is extremely expensive, at least £4.2 billion - which, for comparison, is more than the entire budget for the Metropolitan Police Service. There has not been sufficient reflection on where this money might come from, what might have to be lost to fund this, and whether alternative options for this spending would deliver better outcomes. Without this, we cannot support such an enormously expensive recommendation.

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**Recommendation 5**

The Mayor should explore options for providing additional funding for the Kitchen Social scheme, to ensure that it is providing support to those children in households receiving Universal Credit who are currently ineligible for the HAF. This funding should be allocated on the basis of need across London boroughs.

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**Recommendation 6**

The Government's Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme should be extended to all children in households receiving Universal Credit, and should be made available during school holidays throughout the year, rather than just for six weeks. The Mayor should lobby the Government to make this change.<sup>18</sup>

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**Recommendation 7**

The Mayor should work with London boroughs to share learning and best practice on the delivery of the HAF. This could include learning from the Kitchen Social scheme.

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**Recommendation 8**

The Mayor should ensure that sufficient resource is put in place to support the work of the London Food Board, which has not met the required number of times since the restructure took place. He should update the Committee on what changes have been made to ensure that the London Food Board is adequately supported.

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**Recommendation 9**

The Mayor should publish an updated Food Strategy Implementation Plan as a matter of urgency, in order to help address the recent rise of food insecurity levels in London.

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**Recommendation 10**

The Mayor should explore options for measuring the impact of the first round of the Food Roots Incubator programme, and report back to the Committee on actions taken. He should also ensure that there is a way of measuring the impact of the second iteration of the Food Roots Incubator programme. He should report back to the Committee on what these measurements are, and subsequently on the impact of the programme.

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<sup>18</sup> Conservative Group dissent for the following reasons: we support the government's Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme and would support ways for the government to expand and enhance what is offered. There has been insufficient evidence provided to justify this specific recommendation. We do not know the costs of this, either on a regional or national level. All recommendations requesting a change in policy must first assess the cost implications.

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### **Recommendation 11**

The Mayor should support and encourage community food-growing initiatives through the updated London Food Strategy Implementation Plan and his planning powers. He should work with London boroughs to deliver these initiatives.

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### **Recommendation 12**

The Mayor should continue to support and fund the advice sector for people who are experiencing food insecurity in London. He should report back to the Committee on this work and the impact it has had.

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### **Recommendation 13**

The Mayor should promote his Good Work Standard to more employers and increase the number of employers who are signed up to it. In response to this report, the Mayor should set out any targets he has for signing up employers to the Good Work Standard in 2023-24, and how he plans to encourage this.

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## The scale and causes of food insecurity in London

### Definition of food insecurity

The Mayor of London defines food security as ‘having financial and physical access at all times to an adequate and nutritious diet’.<sup>19</sup> Being food insecure means that ‘at times a person’s food intake is reduced and their eating patterns are disrupted because of a lack of money and other resources for obtaining food’.<sup>20</sup> Trust for London – a charity that aims to tackle poverty and inequality in London – defines food insecurity as ‘the inability to secure food of sufficient quality and quantity to enable good health and participation in society, and cutting down on food because of a lack of money’.<sup>21</sup> The Committee’s investigation has used these definitions of food security and insecurity. Food security can sometimes refer to wider issues, such as global food availability and the resilience of food supplies.<sup>22</sup> These issues were beyond the scope of this investigation, other than where they relate to Londoners’ ability to access and afford food.

### Food insecurity in London

Food insecurity is not a new phenomenon for households on low incomes. But it is clear that rising inflation and the resulting cost-of-living pressures are making this situation much worse.

The Mayor’s 2021–22 Survey of Londoners found that 16 per cent of adults in London had low or very low food security, equivalent to 1.2 million adults.<sup>23</sup> Nearly half of all Londoners (44 per cent) with a household income of less than £14,900 per annum were food insecure. The overall figure of 16 per cent represents a fall from 21 per cent in 2018–19, when the survey was last carried out using the same methodology.<sup>24</sup> The report states that this could be attributed to extraordinary measures put in place by the Government during the pandemic, the efforts of civil society organisations and food banks, and a growth in home working which meant that some Londoners have spent less on transport and commuting. The report also notes that the survey was carried out from November 2021 to February 2022, and therefore ‘took place just before the full effects of the cost-of-living crisis began to set in’.<sup>25</sup>

Data produced by other bodies on the situation nationally shows that food prices and food insecurity levels increased throughout 2022. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), food and non-alcoholic beverage prices rose by 18.2 per cent in the 12 months to

<sup>19</sup> Mayor of London, [Nearly two million Londoners struggle to afford or access enough food](#), 26 June 2019

<sup>20</sup> London Datastore, [Food security in London: Headline findings from The Survey of Londoners](#)

<sup>21</sup> Trust for London, [Food poverty](#)

<sup>22</sup> DEFRA, [United Kingdom Food Security Report 2021](#), 22 December 2021

<sup>23</sup> London Datastore, [Survey of Londoners 2021–22](#), September 2022

<sup>24</sup> London Datastore, [Food security in London: Headline findings from The Survey of Londoners](#)

<sup>25</sup> London Datastore, [Survey of Londoners 2021–22](#), September 2022

February 2023.<sup>26</sup> The ONS states that ‘the annual rate for this category in February 2023 is the highest observed for over 45 years’.<sup>27</sup> Research from the British Retail Consortium found that fresh food inflation rose to 15 per cent in December 2022, the highest inflation rate in the fresh food category on record.<sup>28</sup> The Food Foundation’s tracking of food insecurity levels found that 18.1 per cent of households in London were food insecure in September 2022, compared to 11.1 per cent in April 2022.<sup>29</sup>

Food banks have also seen an increase in demand in 2022. The Independent Food Aid Network’s (IFAN’s) survey of independent food banks in October 2022 found that ‘over 90 per cent of organisations reported helping people who had not previously accessed support’.<sup>30</sup> Between April and September 2022, food banks in the Trussell Trust network distributed 1.3 million food parcels across the UK.<sup>31</sup> Of these, 163,524 were distributed in London: a 17 per cent rise on the same period in 2021.<sup>32</sup> Guests at the Committee’s meeting noted that food bank use is just the ‘tip of the iceberg’ when it comes to food insecurity; Anna Taylor from the Food Foundation said that as of October 2022, ‘5 per cent of Londoners have visited a foodbank, but there are 18 per cent of Londoners who are food insecure’.<sup>33</sup>

In 2010, the Government introduced new rules allowing Jobcentre Plus branches to give vouchers to people for food banks run by the Trussell Trust.<sup>34</sup> At the time, the Director of the Trussell Trust stated that the new rules would mean that ‘people on the breadline will now get the help they need more easily’.<sup>35</sup> A minister later clarified that the DWP ‘signposts’ people to food banks rather than formally referring them.<sup>36</sup> Since then, there has been a year-on-year rise in the number of people accessing food banks in London and the number of food parcels distributed.<sup>37</sup> In 2021-22, 283,563 food parcels were distributed in London, compared to 108,373 in 2014-15.<sup>38</sup> This data does not capture the activity of food banks outside the Trussell Trust network. A survey carried out by YouGov on behalf of the GLA in October 2022 found that 14 per cent of Londoners had regularly (6 per cent) or occasionally (8 per cent) gone without food or essentials, or had to rely on external support such as food banks over the previous six months.<sup>39</sup> Citizens Advice said that in the weeks starting 5 and 12 December 2022, it ‘helped more people with food bank referrals and emergency charitable support than in any other week on record’.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> ONS, [Consumer Price inflation, UK: February 2023](#), 22 March 2023

<sup>27</sup> ONS, [Consumer Price inflation, UK: February 2023](#), 22 March 2023

<sup>28</sup> British Retail Consortium, [Inflation to continue into 2023](#), 4 January 2023

<sup>29</sup> The Food Foundation, [Food Insecurity Tracking](#)

<sup>30</sup> IFAN, [IFAN Data: November 2022](#)

<sup>31</sup> The Trussell Trust, [Mid-year stats 2022](#)

<sup>32</sup> The Trussell Trust, [Trussell Trust data briefing on mid-year statistics relating to use of food banks: April 2021 – September 2021](#), November 2021. A total of 163,524 food parcels were distributed in London between April and September 2022, compared to 135,461 in 2021. This represents a 17 per cent increase.

<sup>33</sup> London Assembly Economy Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Food Insecurity in London](#), 19 October 2022

<sup>34</sup> BBC News, [Job centres to give food vouchers to unemployed](#), 18 December 2010

<sup>35</sup> BBC News, [Job centres to give food vouchers to unemployed](#), 18 December 2010

<sup>36</sup> Hansard, [Food banks](#), 17 October 2013

<sup>37</sup> The Trussell Trust, [Mid-year stats 2022](#)

<sup>38</sup> The Trussell Trust, [End of Year Stats 2021-22](#)

<sup>39</sup> London Datastore, [GLA Cost of Living Polling](#)

<sup>40</sup> Citizens Advice, [CA cost of living data dashboard](#)



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*“This is a problem that has been getting worse and worse over more than a decade but is reaching crisis point now as, in our case, food banks are struggling to cope with the levels of demand.”*

**Sabine Goodwin, Coordinator  
Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN)**

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The Trussell Trust’s 2021 report ‘State of Hunger’, based on research carried out in 2018 and 2020, found that 97 per cent of people referred to a food bank in London were destitute (meaning that a person is unable to afford the essentials to eat, stay warm and dry and keep clean).<sup>41</sup> The same research found that 45 per cent of people referred to Trussell Trust food banks in London were single adults living alone, while 28 per cent of people said they were a single parent living with children under the age of 16.<sup>42</sup> Over one in three (36 per cent) reported that they were experiencing a form of homelessness at the point at which they were supported by the food bank. Just under one in six (15 per cent) of people referred to a food bank in London reported that they or their partner were in employment; 85 per cent had no one in work; and 2 per cent were retired.<sup>43</sup>

Guests at the Committee’s meeting and site visit were clear that poverty and low income are the main causes of food insecurity. They identified several specific factors, including low pay, insecure work and issues with the benefits system. These will be explored in more detail below. One guest emphasised the importance of ‘adverse life events’ in the development of poverty and food insecurity, something that was also apparent from discussions at the Committee’s visit to Wandsworth Foodbank. Guests also told the Committee that people with ill health or a disability are more likely to experience food insecurity than the general population. In London, the Trussell Trust found that 60 per cent of people who had been referred to a food bank reported that at least one health condition affected their household.<sup>44</sup> People who had experienced food insecurity told the Committee about the impact this had on their mental health, while the Trussell Trust found that poor mental health affected over a third (38 per cent) of households referred to food banks in London.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The Trussell Trust, [State of Hunger](#), May 2021. London-specific data shared with the Economy Committee by the Trussell Trust.

<sup>42</sup> The Trussell Trust, [State of Hunger](#), May 2021. London-specific data shared with the Economy Committee by the Trussell Trust.

<sup>43</sup> The Trussell Trust, [State of Hunger](#), May 2021. London-specific data shared with the Economy Committee by the Trussell Trust.

<sup>44</sup> The Trussell Trust, [State of Hunger](#), May 2021. London-specific data shared with the Economy Committee by the Trussell Trust.

<sup>45</sup> The Trussell Trust, [State of Hunger](#), May 2021. London-specific data shared with the Economy Committee by the Trussell Trust.

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*“Ill health, disability, and adverse life events, are playing a really important part in people’s experience of low income and food insecurity.”*

**Heather Buckingham, Interim Head of Policy and Research  
Trussell Trust**

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*“When you struggle to feed yourself, you feel powerless, small, and inadequate. With the other stresses, this just exacerbates the problem, it is like a vicious cycle, and it starts to beat you down; your self-esteem, confidence, and identity as a person. My mental health was quickly affected, and I became depressed. My eating habits became irregular, and I had to start skipping meals.”*

**Sharron, who has lived experience of food insecurity**

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## Universal Credit and the social security system

Several guests at the Committee's meeting and visit to Wandsworth Foodbank raised concerns about the social security system, and the impact this is having on food insecurity. According to the Trussell Trust's research, 43 per cent of households referred to food banks in London in 2018 or 2020 were either receiving or waiting for Universal Credit, while 76 per cent were in receipt of some form of benefit income.<sup>46</sup> Heather Buckingham from the Trussell Trust told the Committee that, according to a Trussell Trust survey carried out in August 2022:

*'around 30 per cent of people in receipt of Universal Credit in London had more than one day in the last month when they did not eat at all or had only one meal because they could not afford to buy food'.<sup>47</sup>*

Anna Taylor from the Food Foundation argued that 'strengthen[ing] the benefits system' was 'paramount', while Sabine Goodwin from IFAN stated that 'benefit payments are not sufficient'.<sup>48</sup> One person that the Committee spoke to at Wandsworth Foodbank was in favour of introducing a Universal Basic Income.

In November 2022, the Government announced that benefits would rise in line with inflation by 10.1 per cent from April 2023.<sup>49</sup> This was based on September's inflation rate; inflation rates continued to rise above this level, reaching 11.1 per cent in October 2022, although this rate has since fallen.<sup>50</sup> The benefit cap levels will rise from £23,000 to £25,323 for families in London, while levels for single households without children will rise from £15,410 to £16,967 in London.<sup>51</sup> The Government also introduced temporary Cost of Living Payments for households on means-tested benefits in 2022, and has announced an additional round of payments for the 2023-24 financial year.<sup>52</sup> The Government estimates that this will benefit 1,187,000 households in London, 15 per cent of the capital's population.<sup>53</sup> In the Spring Budget 2023, the Government stated:

*'Overall, the Government is providing a total of £94 billion, equivalent to £3,300 per household on average, across this financial year and next, to support households with higher costs.'<sup>54</sup>*

<sup>46</sup> The Trussell Trust, [State of Hunger](#), May 2021. London-specific data shared with the Economy Committee by the Trussell Trust.

<sup>47</sup> London Assembly Economy Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Food Insecurity in London](#), 19 October 2022

<sup>48</sup> London Assembly Economy Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Food Insecurity in London](#), 19 October 2022

<sup>49</sup> HM Treasury, [Cost of living support Factsheet](#), 21 November 2022

<sup>50</sup> ONS, [Consumer price inflation, UK: October 2022](#), 16 November 2022

<sup>51</sup> HM Treasury, [Cost of living support Factsheet](#), 21 November 2022

<sup>52</sup> HM Treasury, [Cost of living support Factsheet](#), 21 November 2022

<sup>53</sup> DWP, [Over 8 million families in the UK to receive new Cost of Living Payment this Spring](#), 7 February 2023

<sup>54</sup> HM Treasury, [Spring Budget 2023](#), 21 March 2023

The Committee welcomes the Government's decision to raise benefits in line with inflation, as well as the additional Cost of Living Payments. However, the Committee believes that additional support through the benefits system is needed in order to significantly reduce levels of food insecurity in London.

In particular, guests at the Committee's meeting argued that the £20 uplift per week to Universal Credit should be restored. This uplift was introduced in March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, when the Government announced that Universal Credit and working tax credit payments would be increased by £20 per week. This was initially planned to last for one year, but the policy was extended for a further six months in the March 2021 budget, before being removed in October 2021.<sup>55</sup> Analysis from Policy and Practice on behalf of the Centre for Social Justice in May 2022 found that restoring the £20 per week uplift to Universal Credit would cost £4.2 billion.<sup>56</sup>

Guests at the Committee's meeting highlighted data showing that the £20 uplift per week to Universal Credit resulted in a reduction in food insecurity levels. The DWP's Family Resources Survey in 2019-20 found that 43 per cent of households on Universal Credit were food insecure.<sup>57</sup> The Food Foundation highlighted that this figure fell to 27 per cent in the equivalent survey for 2020-21, while the £20 uplift was in place.<sup>58</sup> Whilst this figure is still unacceptably high, it highlights the impact that the £20 uplift had on food insecurity levels for those in receipt of Universal Credit. Surveys carried out by the Food Foundation suggest that food insecurity levels have risen again since the uplift was removed.<sup>59</sup> According to IFAN's survey of independent food banks, '94 per cent of food banks reported an increased need for their services following the cut to Universal Credit in October 2021'.<sup>60</sup> Analysis of DWP figures by Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) found that 350,000 more children were in relative poverty in the UK in 2021-22 than in the previous year.<sup>61</sup>

## Recommendation 1

The Committee supports a 'cash first' approach to addressing food insecurity. The Government should restore the uplift of Universal Credit in line with inflation, which will help to address food insecurity levels among the poorest households in London. The Mayor should continue to lobby the Government to reinstate the uplift.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> House of Lords Library, [Universal credit: an end to the uplift](#), 3 September 2021

<sup>56</sup> Policy in Practice, [New analysis: Uprating Universal Credit to tackle the cost of living crisis](#), 24 May 2022

<sup>57</sup> The Food Foundation, [Government data shows £20 uplift is likely to have protected people on Universal Credit from food insecurity](#), 1 April 2022

<sup>58</sup> The Food Foundation, [Government data shows £20 uplift is likely to have protected people on Universal Credit from food insecurity](#), 1 April 2022

<sup>59</sup> The Food Foundation, [Food Insecurity Tracking](#)

<sup>60</sup> IFAN, [IFAN Data: November 2022](#)

<sup>61</sup> CPAG, [Official child poverty statistics: 350,000 more children in poverty and numbers will rise](#), 23 March 2023

<sup>62</sup> Conservative Group dissent for the following reasons: it's agreed that this policy is extremely expensive, at least £4.2 billion - which, for comparison, is more than the entire budget for the Metropolitan Police Service. There has not been sufficient reflection on where this money might come from, what might have to be lost to fund this, and whether alternative options for this spending would deliver better outcomes. Without this, we cannot support such an enormously expensive recommendation.

## Child food insecurity and free school meals

### Free school meals

According to the Mayor's 2021–22 Survey of Londoners, around one in seven parents in London (14 per cent) had children living in low or very low food security.<sup>63</sup> Parents were more likely to report themselves, rather than their children, as food insecure: 41 per cent of single parents reported that they were food insecure, whereas 26 per cent reported that their children were food insecure. Of parents living in a couple, 13 per cent were food insecure, whereas 8 per cent of this group reported that their children were food insecure.<sup>64</sup>

Households with children experience higher levels of food insecurity than households without children. Anna Taylor told the Committee that 'the rates [of food insecurity] tend to be 60 per cent higher among households with children compared to households without children'.<sup>65</sup> The Food Foundation's tracking of food insecurity levels in September 2022 found that, nationally, 25.8 per cent of households with children experienced food insecurity, compared to 16 per cent of households without children.<sup>66</sup>

The provision of free school meals is vital to alleviating food insecurity among children from low-income households. In 2021–22, 24.6 per cent of pupils in London were eligible for free school meals, compared to 22.5 per cent nationally.<sup>67</sup> The Government's guidance states:

*"Your child may be able to get free school meals if you get any of the following:*

- *Income Support*
- *income-based Jobseeker's Allowance*
- *income-related Employment and Support Allowance*
- *support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999*
- *the guaranteed element of Pension Credit*
- *Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)*
- *Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for four weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit*
- *Universal Credit – if you apply on or after 1 April 2018 your household income must be less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including any benefits you get)".<sup>68</sup>*

<sup>63</sup> London Datastore, [Survey of Londoners 2021–22](#), September 2022

<sup>64</sup> London Datastore, [Survey of Londoners 2021–22](#), September 2022

<sup>65</sup> London Assembly Economy Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Food Insecurity in London](#), 19 October 2022

<sup>66</sup> The Food Foundation, [Food Insecurity Tracking](#)

<sup>67</sup> DfE, [Academic year 2021/22: Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#), 9 June 2022

<sup>68</sup> Gov.uk, [Apply for free school meals](#)

Free school meals are currently not made available by the Government for all children whose families are in receipt of Universal Credit. Analysis of DWP data by CPAG suggests that 800,000 primary and secondary-aged pupils across England living in poverty do not currently qualify for free school meals.<sup>69</sup> CPAG estimates that 210,000 of these non-qualifying children live in London, which represents 41 per cent of all children living in poverty in London: the highest proportion not receiving free school meals in the country.<sup>70</sup> It is estimated that 100,000 of these non-qualifying children are in primary school.<sup>71</sup>

The National Food Strategy, an independent review commissioned by the Government and led by Henry Dimbleby, recommended that the Government should extend free school meals to all children living in families who receive Universal Credit.<sup>72</sup> This recommendation was not accepted by the Government.<sup>73</sup> Analysis carried out by PwC found that expanding free school meals to all pupils receiving Universal Credit would deliver a net economic benefit of £2.5 billion over 20 years.<sup>74</sup> The same research also identified benefits relating to education, health and nutrition.

In February 2023, the Mayor announced that he would provide £130m in funding to ensure all primary school children in London receive free school meals during the 2023-24 academic year.<sup>75</sup> The Mayor has said that this is a ‘one-off proposal’, and will not apply to secondary school pupils. The Committee welcomes the Mayor’s announcement as a way of addressing child food insecurity. However, it is important that there is a long-term solution to the problem as well as a short-term fix.

Some London boroughs already offer free school meals for all primary school children, while some councils have recently announced an extension of free school meals to secondary school pupils.<sup>76</sup> Many boroughs also run programmes that provide meals to children during school holidays. In addition, the Government’s Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme funds local authorities to provide both food and activities to children from reception to year 11, who are in receipt of free school meals during the school holidays (this will be discussed in more detail below).<sup>77</sup> The Committee believes that the Mayor should encourage more London boroughs to expand provision of free school meals in the long term, although we acknowledge that local authorities have seen their funding reduced in recent years.<sup>78</sup> The Mayor also has a role to play in enabling boroughs to share best practice in this area with other local authorities. At the Committee’s meeting, Anna Taylor urged ‘the GLA to do as much as they can to share that experience across other boroughs, explore with other boroughs whether or not they can

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<sup>69</sup> CPAG, [800,000 children in poverty not currently getting free school meals](#), 9 June 2022

<sup>70</sup> CPAG, [By region: number of children in poverty not eligible for free school meals](#), 1 September 2022

<sup>71</sup> *Evening Standard*, [Exclusive: Free school meals for all primary school pupils in London, says Mayor, in victory for our special investigation](#), 20 February 2023

<sup>72</sup> National Food Strategy, [National Food Strategy: An independent review for Government](#), July 2021

<sup>73</sup> DEFRA, [Government Food Strategy](#), 13 June 2022

<sup>74</sup> Impact on Urban Health, [Investing in Children’s Future: A Cost Benefit Analysis of Free School Meal Provision Expansion](#), October 2022

<sup>75</sup> Mayor of London, [Mayor announces every London primary schoolchild to receive free school meals](#), 20 February 2023

<sup>76</sup> Southwark Council, [Southwark Council funds emergency free school meals in secondary schools for low-income families](#), 24 February 2023

<sup>77</sup> DfE, [Holiday activities and food programme 2022](#)

<sup>78</sup> London Councils, [A decade of austerity](#)

move in a similar direction’.<sup>79</sup> As part of this work, the Mayor can also share learning from his own programme of free school meal provision during the 2023-24 academic year.

At present, eligible children are not automatically enrolled for free school meals, meaning their parents have to apply to the local authority in order to receive them. Analysis of Government figures by the Local Government Association (LGA) and CPAG show that 215,000 school children in England are eligible for free school meals but are not currently registered for them, equating to 11 per cent of eligible children.<sup>80</sup> Analysis by the *i* newspaper in 2022 found that 14 per cent of children in London who were eligible for free school meals did not claim them.<sup>81</sup> The National Food Strategy recommended moving to a system of automatic enrolment, and this call was supported by the LGA.<sup>82</sup>

## Healthy Start

A similar situation exists for the Government’s Healthy Start card (previously Healthy Start vouchers), whereby eligible families are not automatically enrolled on the scheme.<sup>83</sup> The Healthy Start scheme offers payments worth £4.25 per week to pregnant women and children (aged between one and four) who are in low-income families; and to all pregnant women under the age of 18. Funds can be used to purchase fruit, vegetables, milk and infant formula. Eligible families with a baby under the age of one receive £8.50 per week.<sup>84</sup>

Analysis carried out by the LGA found that in March 2022, 143,000 eligible families did not receive Healthy Start vouchers.<sup>85</sup> The LGA’s data showed that the take-up within London boroughs was 9 per cent lower than in the rest of the country. There was considerable variation in take-up across local authorities: the London Borough of Redbridge was the lowest in the country, at just 50 per cent.<sup>86</sup> The LGA recommended that auto-enrolment should be introduced for the Healthy Start scheme.

## Recommendation 2

The Mayor should provide further information and transparency to the Committee about how he will implement his programme of free school meal provision, including how he will provide financial support and advice to schools to expand their provision. He should provide a further update on this work at the start of the 2023-24 academic year, and regular updates throughout the year. He should also provide the Committee with the following information:

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<sup>79</sup> London Assembly Economy Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Food Insecurity in London](#), 19 October 2022

<sup>80</sup> LGA, [Free school meals: One million more school children could be fed if the sign-up process eased, councils urge](#)

<sup>81</sup> *i*, [Free school meals: Over 100,000 children and parents could be shunning scheme due to stigma, analysis shows](#), 15 February 2022

<sup>82</sup> LGA, [Free school meals: One million more school children could be fed if the sign-up process eased, councils urge](#)

<sup>83</sup> LGA, [Hundreds of thousands of eligible families miss out on Healthy Start Vouchers – LGA analysis](#)

<sup>84</sup> LGA, [Hundreds of thousands of eligible families miss out on Healthy Start Vouchers – LGA analysis](#)

<sup>85</sup> LGA, [Hundreds of thousands of eligible families miss out on Healthy Start Vouchers – LGA analysis](#)

<sup>86</sup> LGA, [Hundreds of thousands of eligible families miss out on Healthy Start Vouchers – LGA analysis](#)



- what analysis he has done of the revenue and capital cost implications of the policy for both schools and local authorities
- when he first informed schools and local authorities of the policy
- why the decision was taken to prioritise primary schools over secondary schools
- a detailed breakdown of costs for the £130 million, as well as any additional costs for GLA staff to administer the scheme.

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### Recommendation 3

The Mayor should work with the Government and local authorities in London to develop plans to expand the provision of free school meals once his own funding comes to an end. He should also work with boroughs to share experiences and best practice of free school meal provision, including in relation to the Mayor's funding programme for the 2023-24 academic year.

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### Recommendation 4

The Government should introduce automatic enrolment for free school meals and the Healthy Start scheme using social security records, to ensure that all eligible children receive free school meals. The Mayor should lobby the Government to make this change. He should also take action to raise awareness of free school meals and Healthy Start in order to increase enrolment levels, and report back to the Committee on action taken.

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## Holiday Hunger and the Kitchen Social scheme

The Kitchen Social scheme provides meals to children during the school holidays, as well as giving them a safe place to go where they can socialise with other children.<sup>87</sup> It is delivered by the Mayor's Fund for London, an independent charity, in partnership with community organisations already working with children and young people. The Mayor has previously provided funding to the Mayor's Fund for London to help deliver the programme, although Debbie Weekes-Bernard, Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice, told the Committee that the Mayor is not currently funding it.<sup>88</sup> It continues to be funded by the Mayor's Fund for London.

The Mayor's London Food Strategy Implementation Plan, published in December 2018, committed to providing 300,000 meals for 50,000 children and young people by 2020 as part of the Kitchen Social scheme.<sup>89</sup> This target had not been met by the start of 2020, although the annual number of meals provided by the scheme has since increased. In response to a question in March 2022, the Mayor provided the following breakdown of the number of children supported and meals delivered in each year of the Kitchen Social scheme:<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Mayor's Fund for London, [Kitchen Social](#)

<sup>88</sup> London Assembly Economy Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Food Insecurity in London](#), 19 October 2022

<sup>89</sup> Mayor of London, [The London Food Strategy Implementation Plan 2018-2023](#), December 2018

<sup>90</sup> Mayor's Question Time, [2022/0609: Kitchen Social Scheme \(1\)](#), 1 March 2022

Year	No of children	No of meals
2017	1,728	10,800
2018	8,470	51,000
2019	15,966	88,700
2020	22,637	336,500
2021	19,546	471,427
<b>Total</b>	<b>68,347</b>	<b>958,427</b>

In response to a question in February 2020, the Mayor stated that, following an independent evaluation carried out by researchers from Northumbria University, the scheme would ‘provide more intensive holiday provision (offering greater support to the children most in need) rather than the light-touch model piloted in 2017 when the original target was set’.<sup>91</sup> Data shows that Kitchen Social’s provision has not been evenly spread across London boroughs, with the majority of its activity located in a small number of inner London boroughs. For example, from 2017 to 2021, 51 per cent of children supported by the scheme attended programmes in just three London boroughs (Lambeth, Southwark and Tower Hamlets).<sup>92</sup>

The Government’s Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme funds local authorities to provide both food and activities to children from reception to year 11, who are in receipt of free school meals during the school holidays. The Government first introduced the HAF programme as a pilot scheme in 2018, and rolled it out across the country in 2021.<sup>93</sup> As with free school meals, not all children in households receiving Universal Credit are eligible to take part in the HAF. In 2023, the Government plans to provide up to £33.7 million of funding for the HAF programme in London, which is 16.5 per cent of the total spend in England (16.12 per cent of under-18s in England live in London).<sup>94,95</sup> Anna Taylor told the Committee that ‘overall, our view is that the HAF scheme is a fantastic scheme’, but noted:

*“It is still early days in terms of really reaching all the children that it needs to reach ... evidence seems to suggest is that the provision is quite mixed in terms of the extent to which it is readily available across different local authorities.”<sup>96</sup>*

An evaluation carried out into the programme in 2021 found that it reached 29 per cent of all children eligible for free school meals.<sup>97</sup>

The HAF provides a similar service to the Kitchen Social scheme. Debbie Weekes-Bernard told the Committee that, since the HAF has been established, Kitchen Social is ‘trying to find its own

<sup>91</sup> Mayor’s Question Time, [2020/0710: Kitchen Social Target](#), 28 February 2020

<sup>92</sup> Mayor’s Question Time, [2022/0610: Kitchen Social Scheme \(2\)](#), 1 March 2022

<sup>93</sup> DfE, [Holiday activities and food programme 2022](#), 22 December 2022

<sup>94</sup> DfE, [Section 31 Grant Determination for the Holiday Activities and Food Programme](#), 20 December 2022

<sup>95</sup> ONS, [Age by single year](#). Analysis of data carried out by London Assembly Secretariat Research Unit. The figure is based on the number of people at each age from 0 to 17 at Census Day, 21 March 2021.

<sup>96</sup> London Assembly Economy Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Food Insecurity in London](#), 19 October 2022

<sup>97</sup> DfE, [Evaluation of the 2021 holiday activities and food programme](#), March 2022, p. 6

role in that broader landscape’.<sup>98</sup> In a subsequent letter to the Committee, Debbie Weekes-Bernard said that ‘discussions have taken place with the Mayor’s Fund to understand its future plans for Kitchen Social’, but at that point she was not in a position to provide an update on the outcomes of those conversations. The Committee believes that Kitchen Social could play a role in supporting children who are currently ineligible for the HAF. The Mayor can also play a role in addressing holiday hunger by sharing learning and best practice on the delivery of the HAF, to ensure that the scheme is delivering successfully across all parts of London and is accessible to all eligible children.

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*“There is a real case for making sure – and this could be something done through the GLA – that those lessons are really shared across boroughs about how the [HAF] scheme is implemented so that it can really maximise its impact.”*

**Anna Taylor, Executive Director  
The Food Foundation**

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## Recommendation 5

The Mayor should explore options for providing additional funding for the Kitchen Social scheme, to ensure that it is providing support to those children in households receiving Universal Credit who are currently ineligible for the HAF. This funding should be allocated on the basis of need across London boroughs.

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## Recommendation 6

The Government’s Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme should be extended to all children in households receiving Universal Credit, and should be made available during school holidays throughout the year, rather than just for six weeks. The Mayor should lobby the Government to make this change.<sup>99</sup>

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## Recommendation 7

The Mayor should work with London boroughs to share learning and best practice on the delivery of the HAF. This could include learning from the Kitchen Social scheme.

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<sup>98</sup> London Assembly Economy Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Food Insecurity in London](#), 19 October 2022

<sup>99</sup> Conservative Group dissent for the following reasons: we support the government’s Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme and would support ways for the government to expand and enhance what is offered. There has been insufficient evidence provided to justify this specific recommendation. We do not know the costs of this, either on a regional or national level. All recommendations requesting a change in policy must first assess the cost implications.

## The Mayor's work on food issues

### The role of the Mayor

The Mayor published his London Food Strategy in 2018, in which he stated that he wanted 'every Londoner to have access to healthy, affordable, good food – regardless of where they live, their personal circumstances or income'.<sup>100</sup> This was followed by the London Food Strategy Implementation Plan 2018-2023.<sup>101</sup> Both the Strategy and the Implementation Plan address food issues that are wider than food insecurity, but contain some commitments designed to tackle food insecurity. These include supporting the Kitchen Social scheme and measuring levels of food insecurity, which was implemented through the Survey of Londoners, discussed above.<sup>102</sup> The strategy also referenced wider commitments to address low incomes, such as encouraging employers to pay the London Living Wage and developing the Good Work Standard.

In response to a question in May 2022 about actions to tackle food insecurity in London, the Mayor stated that he would 'continue working with partners through the Robust Safety Net mission to help Londoners maximise their incomes', and highlighted the Food Roots Incubator programme.<sup>103</sup> This is discussed in more detail below. The Mayor's Robust Safety Net recovery mission aims to bring together 'London boroughs, civil society, the advice sector and the GLA to strengthen and coordinate the support available for Londoners experiencing financial hardship in the wake of the pandemic'.<sup>104</sup> At the Committee's meeting, Debbie Weekes-Bernard highlighted several ways that the Mayor is aiming to address food insecurity in London, in particular by supporting advice services and by pursuing a 'cash first' approach, to ensure that Londoners have enough income to afford food.

The Mayor's draft consolidated budget for 2023-24 included £2.5 million for 'food poverty projects'.<sup>105</sup> This funding is welcome, although the Committee awaits further detail on how this funding will be used.

### The London Food Board and the restructure of the GLA food team

In 2021, a restructure took place within the GLA's Communities and Social Policy Unit, which resulted in changes in responsibilities for the London Food Strategy and the London Food Board.<sup>106</sup> Under the previous structure, there was a food team within the Communities and

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<sup>100</sup> Mayor of London, [London Food Strategy](#), December 2018

<sup>101</sup> Mayor of London, [The London Food Strategy Implementation Plan 2018-2023](#), December 2018

<sup>102</sup> Mayor of London, [The London Food Strategy Implementation Plan 2018-2023](#), December 2018

<sup>103</sup> Mayor's Question Time, [2022/1455: Food insecurity in London](#), 24 May 2022

<sup>104</sup> Mayor of London, [A Robust Safety Net](#)

<sup>105</sup> Mayor of London, [The Mayor's budget](#)

<sup>106</sup> GLA Oversight Committee, [GLA Communities and Social Policy – Proposed Changes to the GLA Establishment](#), 22 July 2021

Social Policy Unit which held responsibility for implementing the London Food Strategy. The restructure aimed to bring together ‘existing work on food security with work on low income into a new team with increased capacity to work on financial hardship’.<sup>107</sup> This involved disbanding the food team. The GLA stated that support for the London Food Board would be provided by the Committee Services Team, while the Strategy and Communications directorate would coordinate delivery of the London Food Strategy.<sup>108</sup>

According to the Assistant Director for Communities and Social Policy, the restructure resulted in an increase in the budget for food insecurity issues. Tom Rahilly told the Committee: “The food budget as a whole, as an example, prior to those changes across the breadth of work on food, was £144,000. Our budget on food insecurity this year alone is £370,000.” Debbie Weekes-Bernard noted, “A lot of what we are intending to focus our investment on now will be on tackling broader financial insecurity as a driver of food insecurity.”<sup>109</sup>

However, the restructure appears to have had a negative impact on the work of the London Food Board. The London Food Board is supposed to meet four times a year, but it has not met with this regularity since the restructure. Tom Rahilly told the Committee that the London Food Board had met in May 2022, and was due to meet again in November 2022. After the Committee’s meeting, Tom Rahilly wrote to the Committee with a schedule of meetings for the Board for 2023, with four meetings planned in total. However, there is currently no record of London Food Board meetings on the GLA website since the restructure in September 2021.<sup>110</sup> Ben Reynolds, Deputy Chief Executive of Sustain, wrote to the London Assembly in October 2022 to express concerns about the impact of the restructure. He stated, “The majority of the funding that once existed to run food programmes linked to the food agenda and Food Board/Strategy aims has been cut,” and added that there is no longer any ‘central expertise on food issues’.<sup>111</sup>

It appears that the London Food Board has become less of a priority since the restructure within the Communities and Social Policy Unit. The Committee believes that the Mayor should put sufficient resource in place to support the work of the London Food Board, to ensure strategic oversight of food issues in London, at a time when food insecurity levels are rising.

## Recommendation 8

The Mayor should ensure that sufficient resource is put in place to support the work of the London Food Board, which has not met the required number of times since the restructure took

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GLA Oversight Committee, [GLA Communities and Social Policy – Proposed Changes to the GLA Establishment](#), 15 September 2021

<sup>107</sup> GLA Oversight Committee, [GLA Communities and Social Policy – Proposed Changes to the GLA Establishment](#), 15 September 2021

<sup>108</sup> Mayor of London, [London Food Board](#)

<sup>109</sup> London Assembly Economy Committee, [Transcript of Agenda Item 6 – Food Insecurity in London](#), 19 October 2022

<sup>110</sup> GLA, [London Food Board](#), accessed 1 February 2023

<sup>111</sup> Email sent to the GLA Oversight Committee, 13 October 2022

place. He should update the Committee on what changes have been made to ensure that the London Food Board is adequately supported.

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## London Food Strategy Implementation Plan

The current London Food Strategy Implementation Plan was published in 2018, which predates both the pandemic and the immediate cost-of-living crisis. In response to a question in November 2021, the Mayor stated that he would publish an updated implementation plan ‘in the coming months’.<sup>112</sup> This has not yet been published. Debbie Weekes-Bernard told the Committee that ‘the plan is being finalised at the moment and that is sitting with the [GLA] food champion’, who is the Mayoral Head of Policy.

## Recommendation 9

The Mayor should publish an updated Food Strategy Implementation Plan as a matter of urgency, in order to help address the recent rise of food insecurity levels in London.

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## Food Roots Incubator programme

The Mayor launched the Food Roots Incubator programme in February 2021. The first round of the programme supported ten local ‘food partnerships’ between councils, civil society organisations and businesses to develop and deliver initiatives to address food insecurity.<sup>113</sup> Each partnership received a £15,000 ‘growth grant’ and a six-month ‘incubator programme’ involving a ‘curriculum focussed on developing their skills and long-term sustainability’.<sup>114</sup> The ten partnerships were based in Enfield, Greenwich, Hackney, Haringey, Havering, Lambeth, Camden, Waltham Forest, Southwark and Wandsworth.<sup>115</sup> The first round of the programme concluded in August 2022.

In response to a question in September 2022, the Mayor stated that an evaluation report would be produced once the first iteration of the Food Roots Incubator programme had concluded.<sup>116</sup> He said:

*“Interim assessments of the programme have found that the incubator support has enabled knowledge sharing amongst grantee partnerships, as well as learning from and piloting a variety of specific initiatives to address food insecurity in their communities.”<sup>117</sup>*

In December 2022, the Mayor approved expenditure of up to £740,000 for a second phase of the Food Roots Incubator programme.<sup>118</sup> This will fund around ten food partnerships. The

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<sup>112</sup> Mayor’s Question Time, [2021/4645: Food Strategy](#), 22 November 2021

<sup>113</sup> Mayor of London, [Food Roots Incubator Programme](#)

<sup>114</sup> Mayor of London, [Food Roots Incubator Programme](#)

<sup>115</sup> Sustain, [Food Roots Incubator Programme guide](#), June 2021

<sup>116</sup> Mayor’s Question Time, [2022/2874: Food Roots Incubator Programme](#), 21 September 2022

<sup>117</sup> Mayor’s Question Time, [2022/2874: Food Roots Incubator Programme](#), 21 September 2022

<sup>118</sup> GLA, [MD3048 Food Roots 2 – supporting the sustainability of the food-aid sector](#), 7 December 2022

objectives of the second iteration of the programme include ‘an increase in the number of food-aid providers within partnerships that offer support beyond food – including cash-first and wraparound approaches, and referrals to advice services’ and ‘increased awareness and visibility of Healthy Start across food partnerships, including newly trained staff and volunteers who can signpost and support applications’.<sup>119</sup>

The Deputy Mayor stated that there were no quantitative measures to measure the success of the first iteration of the programme, but suggested that this could be introduced for the second round of the programme. She told the Committee:

*“The second iteration will be focused more on the cash-first approach. We will use that to develop better quantitative measures, so that we could come back if you wanted to ask us to come back, to ask us what the impact of it has been in the second iteration.”*

## Recommendation 10

The Mayor should explore options for measuring the impact of the first round of the Food Roots Incubator programme, and report back to the Committee on actions taken. He should also ensure that there is a way of measuring the impact of the second iteration of the Food Roots Incubator programme. He should report back to the Committee on what these measurements are, and subsequently on the impact of the programme.

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## The role of community food growing

Local food growing can play a role in making healthy food readily available to local communities. Sustain, an organisation that campaigns on food and environmental issues, outlines the following benefits of local food growing:

*“Access for residents to healthy, local food; healthy and active residents; resilient and mentally healthy communities; safer, cohesive communities; greener and environmentally sustainable communities.”<sup>120</sup>*

Local authorities can take action to grow more food locally, and some London boroughs have introduced specific projects to encourage local food growing. Research carried out by Sustain found that 16 councils in London have included food growing within relevant strategies or action plans, and 13 have a designated officer to champion food growing across departments.<sup>121</sup> Over two-thirds of councils reported working with schools or voluntary-sector organisations to develop growing initiatives, and provide grants or other resources.

Pam Warhurst, founder of Incredible Edible, told the Committee that the Mayor could:

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<sup>119</sup> GLA, [MD3048 Food Roots 2 – supporting the sustainability of the food-aid sector](#), 7 December 2022

<sup>120</sup> Sustain, [Response, Resilience and Recovery: London’s Food Response to Covid-19](#), November 2020

<sup>121</sup> Sustain, [Response, Resilience and Recovery: London’s Food Response to Covid-19](#), November 2020



*“show some leadership on the repurposing of public realm to feed local people, which is not a marginal activity when we know that 40 per cent to 50 per cent of fruit and vegetables could be grown on our public realm and on public land”.*

## Recommendation 11

The Mayor should support and encourage community food-growing initiatives through the updated London Food Strategy Implementation Plan and his planning powers. He should work with London boroughs to deliver these initiatives.

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## Advice services

Guests told the Committee about the importance of advice services in helping people experiencing food insecurity. This was also emphasised at the Committee’s visit to Wandsworth Foodbank, as people spoke about the challenges they faced in navigating the social security system and accessing the right support in relation to a range of services. This acts as an additional barrier for people who are already experiencing financial hardship, and demonstrates the importance of advice services that are properly funded. At present, food banks are often required to provide advice to users on issues such as claiming benefits.

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*“It is the focus on advice services and ensuring that there are more and more advisers available, recruiting and training people to be advisers, and ensuring that everyone is on the same page across local authorities around the importance of a cash grant being available as a first port of call.”*

**Sabine Goodwin, Coordinator  
Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN)**

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The Mayor has an important role to play in supporting services that signpost people towards benefits and other forms of support to which they are entitled. Debbie Weekes-Bernard told the Committee:

*“Advice is one of the key ways that we can really mitigate for the rising cost of living. We are significantly trying to contribute to the advice sector in London, which has an enormous funding gap at the moment.”*

She noted that the Mayor is funding ‘welfare advice, legal advice and energy-specific advice’. The Committee welcomes this work, but would like to see more evidence of where the Mayor’s initiatives have strengthened the advice sector and supported Londoners experiencing food insecurity.

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## Recommendation 12

The Mayor should continue to support and fund the advice sector for people who are experiencing food insecurity in London. He should report back to the Committee on this work and the impact it has had.

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## The Living Wage and the Mayor's Good Work Standard

Low wages and insecure work are key drivers of food insecurity. The Mayor's 2021-22 Survey of Londoners found that 44 per cent of Londoners with a household income of less than £14,900 per annum were food insecure, compared to just 2 per cent of Londoners with a household income of more than £58,900.<sup>122</sup> Guests at the Committee's meeting emphasised the importance of the Living Wage in helping to address food insecurity.

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*"For us the focus must continue to be on a cash-first approach to escalating food insecurity ... a real Living Wage promoted, prioritised. People need to be able to earn a decent wage and have job security."*

**Sabine Goodwin, Coordinator  
Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN)**

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*"The reason people are struggling is because of low wages and zero-hour contracts."*

## Sharron, who has lived experience of food insecurity

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The Mayor has a role to play in driving up wages in London by promoting the London Living Wage and encouraging employers to sign up to his Good Work Standard. The Mayor's 2021 manifesto committed to working 'with the Living Wage Foundation to expand further the number adopting it, and help make London a Living Wage City'.<sup>123</sup> At present, 3,265 employers in London are accredited Living Wage employers, an increase from 1,018 in 2017.<sup>124,125</sup>

The Mayor's Good Work Standard 'provides employers with a set of best employment practices alongside information and resources to help achieve them'.<sup>126</sup> This includes a commitment to

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<sup>122</sup> London Datastore, [Survey of Londoners 2021-22](#), September 2022

<sup>123</sup> [Sadiq for London manifesto](#), April 2021, p. 77

<sup>124</sup> Living Wage Foundation, [Accredited Living Wage Employers](#)

<sup>125</sup> Living Wage Foundation, [Living Wage South Bank Report](#), April 2017

<sup>126</sup> Mayor of London, [How to achieve the Good Work Standard](#)

paying the London Living Wage. In response to a question in October 2022, the Mayor stated, “There are 113 accredited Good Work Standard employers, employing over 243,000 employees.”<sup>127</sup> This is a very small proportion of the total number of employers in London (for example, there are around 1 million businesses in London).<sup>128</sup> We are reiterating our previous calls to the Mayor to promote his Good Work Standard to more employers and ensure that more employers sign up to it.

### **Recommendation 13**

The Mayor should promote his Good Work Standard to more employers and increase the number of employers who are signed up to it. In response to this report, the Mayor should set out any targets he has for signing up employers to the Good Work Standard in 2023-24, and how he plans to encourage this.

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<sup>127</sup> Mayor’s Question Time, [2022/3530: Good Work Standard](#), 18 October 2022

<sup>128</sup> House of Commons Library, [Business statistics](#), 6 December 2022

## Committee Activity

The Economy Committee held a meeting on food insecurity on 19 October 2022 with the following invited guests:

- Debbie Weekes-Bernard, Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice, GLA
- Tom Rahilly, Assistant Director for Communities and Social Policy, GLA
- Heather Buckingham, Interim Head of Policy and Research, Trussell Trust
- Sabine Goodwin, Coordinator, Independent Food Aid Network
- Anna Taylor, Executive Director, the Food Foundation
- Pam Warhurst, Founder, Incredible Edible
- Sharron, who had experienced food insecurity and used food banks.

The Committee followed this up with a visit to Wandsworth Foodbank on 8 November 2022, where they heard from staff, volunteers and people who had used the food bank.

During the course of its investigation, the committee has also received correspondence from:

- Trussell Trust: 'State of Hunger: food bank use, poverty and destitution in London', received on 10 November 2022
- Tom Rahilly, Assistant Director for Communities and Social Policy, GLA: received on 3 January 2023
- Debbie Weekes-Bernard, Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice: received on 3 January 2023.

## Other formats and languages

If you, or someone you know needs this report in large print or braille, or a copy of the summary and main findings in another language, then please call us on: 020 7983 4100 or email [assembly.translations@london.gov.uk](mailto:assembly.translations@london.gov.uk)

### Chinese

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### Vietnamese

Nếu ông (bà) muốn nội dung văn bản này được dịch sang tiếng Việt, xin vui lòng liên hệ với chúng tôi bằng điện thoại, thư hoặc thư điện tử theo địa chỉ ở trên.

### Greek

*Εάν επιθυμείτε περίληψη αυτού του κειμένου στην γλώσσα σας, παρακαλώ καλέστε τον αριθμό ή επικοινωνήστε μαζί μας στην ανωτέρω ταχυδρομική ή την ηλεκτρονική διεύθυνση.*

### Turkish

Bu belgenin kendi dilinize çevrilmiş bir özetini okumak isterseniz, lütfen yukarıdaki telefon numarasını arayın, veya posta ya da e-posta adresi aracılığıyla bizimle temasa geçin.

### Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦਾ ਸੰਖੇਪ ਆਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਫ਼ੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜਾਂ ਉਪਰ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਡਾਕ ਜਾਂ ਈਮੇਲ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

### Hindi

यदि आपको इस दस्तावेज़ का सारांश अपनी भाषा में चाहिए तो उपर दिये हुए नंबर पर फोन करें या उपर दिये गये डाक पते या ई मेल पते पर हम से संपर्क करें।

### Bengali

আপনি যদি এই দলিলের একটা সারাংশ নিজের ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে ফো করবেন অথবা উল্লেখিত ডাক ঠিকানায় বা ই-মেইল ঠিকানায় আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করবেন।

### Urdu

اگر آپ کو اس دستاویز کا خلاصہ اپنی زبان میں درکار ہو تو، براہ کرم نمبر پر فون کریں یا منکورہ بالا ڈاک کے پتے یا ای میل پتے پر ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

### Arabic

الحصول على ملخص لهذا المستند بلغتك،  
فارجاء الاتصال برقم الهاتف أو الاتصال على  
العنوان البريدي العادي أو عنوان البريدي  
الإلكتروني أعلاه.

### Gujarati

જો તમારે આ દસ્તાવેજનો સાર તમારી ભાષામાં જોઈતો હોય તો ઉપર આપેલ નંબર પર ફોન કરો અથવા ઉપર આપેલ ટપાલ અથવા ઇ-મેઇલ સરનામા પર અમારો સંપર્ક કરો.

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