

Hunger in the East:

Food banks in the East of England

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Green Party

Introduction by Rupert Read, lead Green MEP candidate

I'm delighted to be privileged to write the introduction to this report. Well; perhaps I should rephrase that: the subject is not a fitting one for the expression of delight. For this report is about research by the Eastern Region Green Party, in co-operation with the Trussell Trust, that has shown a concerning and indeed dramatic rise in the use of foodbanks in the east of England.

Our report reveals:

- *There are now 39 food banks in the East operated by the Trussell Trust, plus a further 16 non-Trussell food banks.*
- *The growth of Food Banks is linked to 'welfare reform' and to rising food prices.*
- *In the East, there are 33,622 people who are affected by the Bedroom Tax, and 1,759 by the Housing Benefit cap. Of the 690,410 families who receive child benefit and are therefore affected by its capping, 104,000 have three or more children to support.*
- *Benefits sanctions have been issued in the East against 61,797 claimants between October 2012 and September 2013 under the new regime, compared to just under 19,080 for the region in the whole of 2008.*
- *The average cost of welfare reform to a household has been estimated at £1615 a year (£31 a week).*
- *Food prices have doubled in the past 10 years, according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). A survey by Which? magazine in September found that 41% of people were experiencing increased stress levels due to rising food prices. 29% of people were struggling to buy enough food for themselves or their household. A survey in 2012 by 'Netmums' found one in five mothers regularly skip meals to provide food for their children.*
- *Shockingly, the number of people in the East treated for malnutrition has risen from 209 in 2008 to 331 in 2012.*

I recently fasted for a day (<http://eastern.greenparty.org.uk/news.html/2014/04/07/why-is-britain-hungry/>), in solidarity with hundreds of others around the country and in solidarity more crucially with those dependent on food banks. I called then on the Government to make sure that the social security system actually does its job of providing a robust last line of defence against hunger in this country, that work pays enough for people to properly provide for themselves their families and that food is sold in a way which allows people to afford a healthy diet.

The notion which the Government seems to have, that welfare recipients can mitigate the reductions they've seen in benefits payments by finding work or moving to a smaller home is true for only a very small proportion of people. It is shameful that the consequence has been that many more people in this country are facing hunger.

One part of the longer-term answer that we as Greens think particularly important is to enable people to regain control over at least some of their own food needs. I mean: wouldn't it be great if some of the people needing help from food banks could be enabled to need less help if they could provide some of their OWN food? Green policies will make this possible: through making allotments more available, supporting 'Community Supported Agriculture', making it easier for people to work or live or build on the land, and more.

When I visited a food bank in Norwich last year alongside Green Party Leader Natalie Bennett, I was pleased but at the same time shocked to see the scale of what had been donated – which is related to the scale of what is needed. I believe that this report can point the way toward a genuine depiction of the scale of the problem here in the East – and a genuine solution. I commend the report to you.

What is a food bank?

A food bank distributes food to those who are in crisis cannot afford it themselves. Most food banks are run by volunteers, serving their local community.

The biggest network of food banks in the UK is run by the Trussell Trust, a Christian organisation, which opened their first bank in Salisbury in 2000. They now have just under 400 food banks across the UK feeding 913 138 people in the last year.

There are also other organisations which provide food and other support to those in need. Oxfam and the Church Poverty Action Group estimated that these groups fed a further 150 000 people in the UK in 2012/13. If these other food banks saw an increase in demand similar to Trussell Trust food banks, then the total number of people fed would be around 1.2 million. Whilst researching this report, we identified around at least 16 food banks in the East of England run by other organisations.

How do food banks work?

The Trussell Trust runs the majority of food banks in the East. They work with local churches to set up new food banks in areas of need. Once a food bank is established it starts to:

- Collect donations of food – from businesses, schools, individuals, and churches. Some supermarkets have a donation scheme where shoppers can buy and donate items.
- Sort and package food – this is carried out by volunteers, who make sure the food is in-date and packaged into boxes.
- Identify people in need- this is done by doctors, social workers, health workers, council workers, Citizens' Advice Bureaux, or even the police. I.e. People are referred to food banks: they don't just walk in off the street. Clients are given food vouchers which can be exchanged at the food bank. No one can just 'turn up' and get free food.
- Give out food– people can exchange vouchers for food at the food bank, or it can be delivered in some rural areas. Each voucher is equivalent to three days emergency food.

Other organisations which provide emergency food aid have slightly different processes and provide different levels of support, but referral and voucher systems are usually used.

WHAT IS IN A TYPICAL BOX?

Milk (UHT or powdered)	Sugar (500g)
Fruit juice (carton)	Soup
Pasta sauces	Sponge pudding (tinned)
Tomatoes (tinned)	Cereals
Rice pudding (tinned)	Tea bags/instant coffee
Instant mash potato	Rice/pasta
Tinned meat/fish	Tinned fruit
Jam	Biscuits or snack bar

Why are people using food banks?

People are seeing their incomes fall. Wages are down and benefits are lagging behind rises in food prices, and there are often delays in people receiving the benefits they are entitled to.

Across the UK, people are suffering as wages fail to keep up with the cost of living (i.e. increases in money wages have failed to keep up with increases in the cost of living (so real wages have fallen)). Indeed real wages in the East are lower now than they were a decade ago.¹ The use of zero-hours/low-hours contracts is an example of how underemployment has become common in the UK. A recent survey, by the trade union 'Unite', revealed that up to 5.5 million workers are on contracts which guarantee less than 3 hours work. For people relying on social security the situation is bleak, as a number of benefit increases are capped below the level of inflation.

Cuts to benefits such as the Housing Benefit, Child Benefit, and Council Tax Benefit have pushed many people to require emergency food assistance. In the East, there are 33622 people who are affected by the Bedroom Tax, and 1759 by the housing benefit cap. Of the 690 410 families who receive child benefit and are therefore affected by its capping, 104 000 have three or more children to support.

On top of welfare cuts there is now also a harsher approach to people with disabilities and a stricter benefit sanctions regime. This has had a noticeable impact on the number of people seeking help. 61797 benefit sanctions have been issued in the East from October 2012 to September 2013 under the new regime, compared to just under 19080 for the region in the whole of 2008. In some cases, disabled people with serious medical conditions have been told they are fit to work, and their benefits stopped. These assessments are carried out by private companies such as ATOS. The sanctions regime at the Job Centre has come under repeated criticism for wrongly penalising benefit claimants, and being driven by targets for sanctions.

It is likely that following the introduction of Universal Credit, these problems will get worse and that there will be an even higher demand on food banks. This is being piloted at present and is scheduled to be rolled out nationally by 2017.

Unemployment = 7.2%

Underemployment = 9.4%

Annual Inflation = 1.9%

Wage rises = 1.1%

Benefit rise = 1%

Food prices are rising. Prices have doubled in the past 10 years, according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

A survey by Which? magazine in September found that 41% of people were experiencing increased stress levels due to rising food prices. 29% of people were struggling to buy enough food for themselves or their household. A survey in 2012 by 'Netmums' found one in five mothers regularly skip meals to provide food for their children.

The Jobcentre Plus has been sending people to food banks since September 2011 if, for example, a crisis loan or benefit advance is refused, benefits are reduced due to a change in circumstances, or there are benefit delays. The Jobcentre Plus has ceased to recording the reasons for their referrals since April 2013. However, in March 2014 it was revealed that the Jobcentre was routinely sending people to food banks due to "hardship caused by benefit changes, benefit payment delays, a benefit advance has been refused, or the advance is not enough to meet their needs."

Benefit delays

The latest available data from the Trussell Trust shows that 31% of people using food banks in 2012/13 were there because of delays to receiving their benefits. Delays often happen when someone's circumstances change, for example if they move house, start working more or less hours, or even just changing bank details.

Welfare reform

17% of all referrals to Trussell Trust food banks in 2013/14 were due to benefit changes. Under the present UK Government, there have been cuts to Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, and freezes on Child Benefit and Tax Credits. A report released in August by the Local Government Association estimated the average cost of welfare reform to a household would be £1615 a year (£31 a week). The Chief Executive of the Trussell Trust has said that food banks are filling in the gaps in the welfare state created by these reforms. Research from the University of Sheffield has also linked the rise of food banks to welfare reform.

In April 2013, the Social Fund was abolished. This had provided Crisis Loans and other support for those in severe financial need. It has now been replaced by under-funded local schemes set up by councils, of whom several have decided to spend this money on food banks.

Benefit sanctions

In October 2012, the UK Government introduced a new benefits sanction regime. The changes actually serve to punish people who receive Job-Seekers Allowance, for example if they miss appointments, or if they are judged not to be trying hard enough to find work. The Trussell Trust estimates that 15% of people using their services in 2012-13 had had their benefits sanctioned. In the East, benefit sanctions doubled between 2009 and 2013. Figures show that 61797 people in the East had benefits sanctioned in the eleven months from October 2012 to September 2013, compared to 29960 for the whole of 2009.

Low income and high costs

Figures on the reasons for food-bank reliance are also revealing. In 2013/14, 20% of food-bank users indicated low income as the cause, whilst another 8% attributed need for food banks to financial debt. It's unsurprising that food bank use has increased, at a time when household incomes have remained static, or fallen, whilst costs have risen.

Electricity, gas, and housing costs are all rising faster than inflation. Utilities bills are often higher for poorer households who depend on pre-pay meters. The lack of affordable credit and banking entails that poorer households can end up in spiralling debts, as they attempt to fund basic necessities. Poorer households are also limited in their choices of where to buy food and other goods as they cannot afford to travel, or to buy in bulk to take advantage of discounts.

Case study: Jane's Story

I am a middle-aged single-mother to a mid-teen child, living in private rental accommodation. I earn a modest income from self-employment and have some top-up help by way of tax credits, disability living allowance and some help with rent and council tax. I live with and manage both mental & physical health conditions; my child has been my carer on many occasions.

I've been used to living on a tight budget for most of my life. To look at us you wouldn't think we would ever have used a food bank. We have many nice items in our home, (from my days of full time and well paid employment), and I have been lucky enough to have had a university education.

However, last year the financial stars collided in such a way, that I literally had pence in my purse and I realised we could not eat a laptop or t.v.

I had four weeks of food to cover and had no money after paying all of my out goings. We managed to sell some items, but I was too ashamed and embarrassed to tell anyone, especially my friends and family. I couldn't even tell my doctor.

I called the Citizen's Advice and the lady was so kind and helpful, I burst into tears. We had a chat about my situation and I was able to very discretely turn up to the local branch and pick up a voucher in a discrete envelope.

I chose a food bank slightly out of area, so I wouldn't be recognised, but had to risk using my car, which was on its reserve tank, I had no money to put petrol in and I have difficulties riding a bike.

The food bank was in an evangelical church and I was worried I'd be proselytised to, but what I got was a cuppa, two boxes of lovely food products, including needed toothpaste and sanitary products and a much needed hug and another good cry, I remember saying something like, "How did I get here...how did it come to this?"

They even put in biscuit treats and food was easily cooked to avoid too much use of electricity.

I'm not a religious person, but I found myself saying "G-d bless you". That was six months ago and it feels like a bad dream. I have always tried to show, and bring up my child to show, compassion and kindness to people and I can't express how grateful and touched I am that such compassion and kindness was shown to me and my daughter during this time.

Myths about food banks

It's nothing to do with poverty, food banks are being used because people like free food

In order to use a food bank, you have to be referred by a care professional who assesses that you need support. This could come from a GP, social worker, health visitor, or even staff at the Jobcentre.

The number of people helped by food banks is growing because there are more around

Conservative Lord Freud said about food banks, 'There is actually no evidence as to whether the use of food banks is supply led or demand led.'

The number of people using food banks is increasing much more than the number of food banks themselves. Often, people have already run up debts, or turned to family and friends for support before coming to a food bank. A study by Defra published in February concluded that families use food banks as a last resort.

We shouldn't be worried about the growing number of food banks.

The growth of food banks is a sign of growing poverty and inequality in the UK.

Olivier de Schutter, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, recently commented that: "[Food banks] ... represent the best and most up-to-date source of data on social marginalisation in our societies – and thus hold the key to understanding the nature of poverty in developed countries. Access to food is the perfect bellweather for broader socio-economic inequalities. Food insecurity hotspots generally correlate not only with poverty but also with a series of factors that marginalise people and narrow their options."

Food banks are just for scroungers who don't want to work

According to the Trussell Trust, only 3.65% of food bank vouchers are issued to people because they are unemployed. Most vouchers (around 31%) are issued because of delays in benefits, many of which are supporting people in work. More than half of children in poverty live in working households, with 1 in 5 mothers regularly skipping meals to feed their children according to research from Netmums.

Food banks give out the leftovers from supermarkets

Food banks only distribute in-date and non-perishable food. Organisations such as Fairshare, and Foodcycle do work with the food industry to collect and distribute usable food.

Food banks are part of the Welfare system

Food banks receive no funding from the UK Government, and are run by charitable organisations supported by the public. Welfare Minister Lord Freud has said in Parliament that food banks are not part of the welfare system. Some UK Councils do provide grants and support, an investigation by the BBC's Panorama found that one third of UK councils were funding food banks.

Aren't they just for people sent there from the JobCentre?

Only around 3% of people coming to food banks have been referred by the Jobcentre, according to the Trussell Trust.

Food banks encourage welfare dependency

If someone has visited a Trussell Food Bank more than 3 times (9 days of emergency food) in 6 months then the manager contacts the organisation which referred them. This is to make sure that they are receiving the help they need to escape poverty.

Food banks in the East:

Ten years ago, food banks were virtually unknown in the East. There are now 56 food banks across the region. 40 of these are run by the Trussell Trust, and the remaining 16 by other providers. The places they are opening are no longer just traditionally deprived areas, every major settlement either has or will soon have a food bank if trends continue. In 2013/14, 39 513 children were supported through a food bank.

Since 2007 the Trussell Trust have gone from one food bank providing emergency food aid, to 40 food banks providing emergency food aid to 90 006 in 2013/14. This year we have seen a rise of up to 168%.

Food poverty is also about the quality of food people are eating. The number of people in the East treated for malnutrition has risen from 209 in 2008 to 331 in 2012.

All the food banks and referral agencies we spoke to are doing their best in what is a perfect storm of unemployment, price rises, and catastrophic welfare policies. Where emergency food organisations have coordinated efforts, such as in Bedfordshire through the Food Aid Network, groups have been able to work together to make the most of their resources.

County by County Statistics

Bedfordshire

Number of food banks: 5 (2 Trussell Trust and 3 other)

Number of people helped (Trussell Trust): 2013/14: 8852

Case study: Luton Food Bank – Sanum Ghafoor

“The reason we launched was because of welfare reform.”

In 2012, key figures in Luton came together in a steering group to tackle issues of low income. These issues had been around before, but with welfare reforms it was feared that the situation would get worse. One of the things they decided to do was to create a food bank, a project which took around six months to complete – and launched in April 2013. According to Sanum, there isn't a 'stereotypical user' of the food bank. They have seen cases where one or both parents are in work, but are unable to make ends meet. In Luton, the benefit cap affected 563 families, costing them £94 a week on average.

Sanum says the food bank is a short term solution, “Like putting a plaster on a wound.” The important work is longer-term support, advice, and guidance provided by other agencies like the Citizens' Advice Bureau.

School holidays are a busy time for the food bank, as free school meals are not provided out of term time. The Luton Food Bank saw a rise of 75% in child food parcels during the 2013 summer holidays, and a rise of 53% during half-term. They also work with the local Childrens' Centres to provide them with food parcels to distribute directly to families.

Cambridgeshire

Number of food banks: 8 (7 Trussell Trust + 1 other)

Number of people helped (Trussell Trust): 2013/14: 17036

Case study: Evvv Edwards – Cambridge Food Bank

Cambridge Food Bank is a member of the Trussell Trust Network. Through its five distribution centres in the city, it supplies three days worth of food to people who are referred to them by local agencies like the CAB. This is done through a secure voucher scheme produced nationally by the Trussell Trust. So far this year, they have seen an 85% increase in people coming to them – a total of 4500 people.

Of these 4500 people, 26% are in work, 35% are children, and 48% are having issues with their benefits. These benefit issues include delays, changes, and sanctions.

The Food Bank introduced a new scheme before Christmas to alleviate fuel poverty. People who are demonstrably in fuel poverty can go to the CAB or Christians Against Poverty and receive a one-off letter which enables them to access fuel payments of up to £30 for gas and/or £30 for electricity. This is funded by local pensioners who donate their Winter Fuel Payments.

Essex

Number of food banks: 12 (11 Trussell Trust + 1 other)

Number of people helped (Trussell Trust): 2013/14: 20259

Case study: Maldon CAB – Lucy Bettley

“The local housing allowance is not realistic in terms of local rents.”

Maldon CAB covers an area which includes three independent food banks. The CAB refer people to the food banks who are experiencing a crisis or emergency. The Maldon-area food banks provide food for a much longer period of time than most other food banks – up to 8 food parcels to last 8 weeks. In this time, the CAB works to address the underlying problems which brought people to them in the first place.

In particular, they have seen issues around changes to the Local Housing Allowance (housing benefit), and the Employment Support Allowance (ESA). Housing benefit no longer covers the average local rents, so people are having to use money they would otherwise spend on food to match the difference. They have also found a number of cases where people with mental health issues have been placed on Job-Seekers Allowance rather than ESA, and are vulnerable to being sanctioned as a result.

Hertfordshire

Number of food banks: 12 (7 Trussell Trust + 5 other)

Number of people helped (Trussell Trust): 2013/14: 17968

Case study: Stevenage Food Bank – Sarah Walker

My partner and myself set about starting a food bank in October 2012. We visited neighbouring food banks, researched arguments about dependency, studied case studies of food banks around the globe. We had come across people who were having to make decisions about whether to eat or pay bills, feed their children and not themselves and people who were suddenly made unemployed and as much as they are desperate to work have found they are not skilled for the modern day workplace and disabled people who were being declared fit yet facing minimal chance of gaining employment because of disability and again, lacking in work experience/skills. I recall hearing on BBC Radio 2 in 2010 the author of the Atos test frantically telling us that the test was not complete and not fit for purpose and seemed in despair and this certainly compelled me to try and help. We opened in December 2012 having set up a board of trustees, registering with the Charitable Trust Commission and been successful in obtaining funding from a Locality Budget Scheme run by Stevenage Borough Council, and setting up a network of donation points across the town. We chose to use a voucher system in order to use the expertise of agencies such as the CAB, children's centres, YMCA etc. We are currently applying for Charitable Status.

There has always been a section of society whose birthright has declared them 'poor'. Unfortunately there always will be as long as our society breeds a 'top' and a 'bottom'. In my view, people I know who have been 'poor' for a long term are quite ingenious in making ends meet with little means. They are what I call 'savvy' in budgeting and accept, rightly or wrongly, a lower standard of living than most. It was not our intention in setting up the food bank to have an unrealistic aim to feed everyone in this category. More so, we were primarily concerned with supporting people who through sudden circumstance changes were finding themselves in a situation that meant that they couldn't cope financially. A basic human right, has to be - to have food to eat. These may not be benefit claimants - it could well be a person/family with a mortgage who have a lot further to fall when faced with financial constraints beyond their control.

As people seemed to be losing their jobs on a massive scale during 2012 -13 we wanted to offer basic foodstuffs so that as they needed to adjust, apply for jobs, face new challenges their health wouldn't suffer and subsequently they could focus on what they needed to do rather than be one preoccupied with being hungry, feeding themselves and/or children.

We made a decision to give three weeks supply of food which would cover a situation where people would be able to get through to their next payday, at the time this was the time the DWP were taking to process claims, since it has risen considerably, and this three weeks would give some time to think, plan and act.

The cases we see at the food bank vary greatly. We have people who are homeless with no abode, who receive a subsistence pack, homeless with abode - people who are in temporary accommodation awaiting entitlement awards and housing, people who have fallen behind with their rent - both following housing benefit changes as well as working people whose rent has increased beyond their means, unexpected loss of employment, benefit changes, disabled people who have lost benefits, people who have had a domestic emergency e.g their freezer has broken and they have lost their food and need help until payday, families in school holidays who need help providing all meals for their children (free school meals children), young people setting up home alone who have exhausted their funds on necessary bills/expenses, people who have fled from domestic abuse, probationers, refugees who are not supported in any way from benefits, mentally ill people who are being declared fit for work but are unsuccessful in gaining employment, people who have been sanctioned, which seems to be now commonplace, people who are on debt management courses and pensioners.

One thing that is not reported about food banks is the importance of people having the knowledge that society cares, which can have a profound effect on people's self esteem. Letters we receive thanking us always state that it was as important to people not to feel alone in their crisis.

What I can report is that the people in our town are supporting our food bank, clearly not wanting people to go hungry. The vast majority of people understand that there are times when people should have support and do not vilify them. After all, anyone who works for a living can find themselves without a job unexpectedly, have a health problem that makes them unable to work,

Norfolk

Number of food banks: 9 (7 Trussell Trust + 2 others)

Number of people using the food bank: 2013/14: 20912

Case study: Louise Hampton – YMCA Great Yarmouth

“How can you apply for enough jobs when you’re too depressed to get out of bed.”

Currently, there isn’t a formal food bank in Great Yarmouth. There are moves to set one up, and the Salvation Army deliver food parcels.

The YMCA houses and supports vulnerable young people across Norfolk. Many of them have issues with state benefits, such as sanctions lasting months. Louise has seen cases where young people have been sanctioned for not applying for enough jobs when the young person is so depressed they struggle to function.

The YMCA found that an increasing number of their clients were having problems affording food. So they set up their own in-house scheme to collect food, toiletries and other items, and distribute them to their clients. Louise explains that having a good relationship with three local churches, who donate food, is vital to run a scheme like this.

Suffolk

Number of food banks: 7 (3 Trussell Trust + 4 others)

Number of people helped (Trussell Trust): 2013/13: 4979

Case study: Stour Valley Vineyard – Andrew Stewart-Darling

“One thing we have to do is be a place of mercy.”

The Stour Valley Vineyard started distributing food parcels soon it opened in 2007. Reverend Stewart-Darling explained the church has a long history of compassion programmes.

Since then, the demand has steadily climbed. They work with work with referrals from Councils, local organisations like the CAB, housing trusts, and other churches. In the last year they had more support from other churches and other groups including businesses & business leaders. The food bank also became a partner with the local Waitrose, and has opened up 23 collection points since Jan 2013.

The storehouse started as a cupboard, and now has offices of its own. Reverend Stewart-Darling said the last month was their busiest ever. Referrals to them have tripled since October 2013.

He also says the rise is not just down to short-term welfare reforms. He sees the impact of long-term factors like rises cost of living, food becoming more expensive, and wages not keeping up. “Our role is not to get political, it is to say what we see is working and what is not.”

Other food banks and food support

Oxfam and Church Action on Poverty estimate that in addition to 350 000 people being supported by Trussell Trust food banks, there are a further 150 000 people who have received emergency food aid from other organisations in the past year.

Our research found a further 16 food banks in the East. This is on top of the 40 run by the Trussell Trust.

All sorts of other organisations are now providing emergency food. Better coordination of these services can go a long way.

Case study: PREEN is a social enterprise which aims to tackle social exclusion and promote sustainability. It coordinates the Bedfordshire Food Action Network, which was set up by Central Bedfordshire Council to act as a single point to refer to, store food, and help food aid organisations work together. However, they have increasingly become more involved in direct provision of food parcels, and currently distributes around 1200 meals a month.

65% of people who are referred to them are families, and the biggest single reason why people are in need of food aid is benefit changes. There are also a lot of budgeting issues which are affecting people. PREEN works with local referral agencies such as the CAB, particularly where people have had to seek food aid several times.

Conclusions

The number of food banks has risen exponentially in the East, as is the case across the whole of the UK. Food banks are just one example of emergency food systems, and other organisations providing similar support are also experiencing rising demand.

The number of people seeking help is rising fast. According to the statistics provided by the Trussell Trust, the numbers of people in the South East being supported in 2013/14 are 90 006, 168% higher than the 2012/13 level. The profile of persons seeking help has expanded from the most deprived, through those in the benefits system and now encompasses the 'working poor'.

Longer-term factors in the expansion of food banks are a fall in income (wages and hours worked), and rises in food and other costs. The impacts of these fall disproportionately on those who are already vulnerable, or in areas of high unemployment.

Welfare reform, welfare cuts, and in particular the new benefit sanctioning regime, has been a significant factor driving up the numbers of people going to food banks. The introduction of Universal Credit could see another big rise in the demand for emergency food aid. Currently, food banks are filling the holes being made in welfare provision.

Huge pressure is being placed on an emergency food system that was never designed to take it. Many are now stretched beyond breaking point. Food banks and similar services depend on the continued good will of communities to donate food, and to volunteer, eventually the demand could prove overpowering.

For Greens the rise in use of food banks is a symptom of an economic system that categorically fails to meet the needs of ordinary people. We need radical solutions to fixing the economy.

Radical - Green - solutions include:

Short term:

1. Making sure emergency food aid organisations work together to be most effective
2. Ensuring that benefits are set at levels which allow people to live in dignity
3. Administering benefits better so there are not delays to payments
4. Tackling hunger in school holidays when free school meals are not available.

Short to Medium term:

5. Making work pay by ensuring the Minimum Wage is a Living Wage
6. Investing in job creation, especially for young people
7. Ensuring wage ratios (between high and low earners) are narrowed
8. Tackling the high-cost of utilities such as housing, energy, and water
9. Making allotments more available, especially to the poor; creating more edible garden schemes
10. Local authority support and Government support for Community Supported Agriculture schemes
11. Supporting organisations such as 'Foodcycle' and 'social supermarkets'
12. Update the welfare system in a fair way to ensure that any inefficiencies are not used as an excuse for further attacks on the poor.

Medium to Long-term:

13. Ending the corporate stranglehold over the unsustainable 'runaway food system' we currently have: www.frameworksinstitute.org/toolkits/foodsystem/docs/foodSystems.pdf ; Tackling global food insecurity
14. Bring utilities such as electricity, water, and railways back into some form of public ownership
15. Reforming the 'welfare' system radically to provide a Citizens' Income
16. Enabling those who wish to live off the land, whether as smallholders or whatever; enabling a larger percentage of the population to provision themselves.

The welfare system should be there to provide security for everyone, so that we can all be sure that sudden unemployment or ill-health will not drive us into poverty. That can happen to anyone, not simply those thought of as 'the poor'. Food banks have shown society's commitment to help those in need. It is to their great shame that the present Government does not appear to share this commitment.

End notes

1. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/sep/08/zero-hours-contracts-unite-survey>
2. <http://www.housing.org.uk/media/press-releases/new-data-shows-how-many-east-of-england-families-are-really-being-hit-by-th>
3. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/255513/benefit-cap-september-2013.pdf
4. <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/statistics/child-small-stats.htm#2>
5. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-26255696>
6. <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/f4a96a54-98ac-11e3-a32f-00144feab7de.html#axzzzuta6o2qa>
7. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-26239631>
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9. <http://news.sky.com/story/1035220/govt-wins-vote-on-capping-rise-in-benefits>
10. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-24192396>
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Promoted by Grace Philip on behalf of Eastern Region Green Party (address above).

