



Call for Government Action on Food Poverty

With as many as two million adults and children forced to rely on food banks in the UK every year, and millions more unable to afford an adequate, nutritious diet, food poverty has become one of the greatest challenges facing our society.

Food banks are a crisis response to the immediate needs of people who are hungry, but they are not a solution to food poverty. Experience elsewhere clearly shows that when food banks become too well established they legitimize charity as a response to food poverty and undermine fundamental rights enshrined in our welfare system. This must not happen.

The causes of food poverty are complex, but ultimately it is the result of poverty and the growing income inequality between rich and poor. Today, most of those living in poverty are in employment, a consequence of reduced wages and a proliferation of exploitative, zero-hours contracts. Many are unable to find work at all. Changes to the benefit system, including an increased use of sanctions, delays in processing claims and low benefit levels have removed an essential safety net for poorer households.

The members of the Sustainable Food Cities Network believe that access to good food is a basic human right. We call for urgent action to reduce benefit delays, review how benefit sanctions and welfare reforms are being implemented, and eliminate unnecessary hardship, hunger and distress.

We believe that programmes such as Healthy Start Vouchers, Free School Meals and Meals on Wheels must be safeguarded and extended to reach all those who are eligible. We believe local and national governments must adopt policies that ensure work is a pathway out of poverty and increase access to healthy, affordable food through local enterprise and community initiatives.

We pledge to work with those affected by food poverty and those in a position to end it – from Westminster to local government – to ensure that all citizens have access to good food as a matter of course, not as a result of charity.

The Sustainable Food Cities Network asks that local food partnerships and other city-wide organisations in the UK join us in calling for government action on food poverty. To sign on to the declaration, please visit www.sustainablefoodcities.org or email foodpoverty@sustainweb.org.