



Select Committee on Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment

Corrected oral evidence: Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment

Tuesday 4 February 2020

10.40 am

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Lord Krebs (The Chair); Baroness Boycott; The Earl of Caithness; Lord Empey; Baroness Janke; Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick; Baroness Sanderson of Welton; Baroness Sater; Lord Whitty.

Evidence Session No. 6

Heard in Public

Questions 46 - 52

Witnesses

I: Tom Andrews, Programme Manager, Sustainable Food Cities; Steve Butterworth, Chief Executive Officer, Neighbourly; Alex Holt, Programme Lead, Food Act!ve.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is an uncorrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.
2. Any public use of, or reference to, the contents should make clear that neither Members nor witnesses have had the opportunity to correct the record. If in doubt as to the propriety of using the transcript, please contact the Clerk of the Committee.
3. Members and witnesses are asked to send corrections to the Clerk of the Committee within 14 days of receipt.

Examination of witnesses

Tom Andrews, Steve Butterworth and Alex Holt.

Q46 The Chair: I warmly welcome the panel of witnesses to this evidence session in our inquiry on food, poverty, health and the environment. I mention for formality that the lists of interests that have been declared by Members are available and that the meeting is being broadcast via the parliamentary website. You, the witnesses, will have an opportunity to comment on the transcript of the Committee session that will eventually be published on our website. If you wish to make any corrections, you will have an opportunity to do so.

We have a little under an hour for this session. I would like to kick off without further ado by asking each of you very briefly to introduce yourselves. Can you say who you are and what organisation you are involved with?

Steve Butterworth: I am chief executive of Neighbourly. We are a community investment platform for business, helping businesses to donate time, money or surplus products such as food to local community projects.

Tom Andrews: I work for the Soil Association, but my main role is running the Sustainable Food Cities programme across the UK. We support cross-sector partnerships in towns and cities across the UK to develop a vision of how they want to make healthy and sustainable food a defining part of where they live. We work with them to try to turn that vision into a reality over a number of years.

Alex Holt: I work for Health Equalities Group. I am the programme lead for Food Act!ve. We support local authorities and other organisations around the healthy weight agenda.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I will kick off with a general question. We will go into some of the issues in more detail in subsequent questions, so perhaps you could try in the first instance to give us a general overview of your position.

Before starting my question, I declare relevant interests. I work part-time as an adviser to Marks & Spencer. I chair a programme at Oxford University to do with meat consumption and the environment. It is about healthy diets and environmental impacts. I am also an adviser to a Japanese food company called Ajinomoto. I am a trustee of the Nuffield Foundation, which has an interest in poverty and well-being.

Could you outline for us your understanding of the relationship between food, poverty and inequalities, including health inequalities and all kinds of malnutrition? If that is not enough, could you also mention what you think the impact is on the environment and what initiatives might tackle the issues in conjunction, rather than in isolation? Who would like to kick off? It is quite a big question. It covers virtually everything. I leave it to you to choose how you want to answer it.

Alex Holt: Food poverty does not exist because there is not enough food. It exists because families cannot afford to purchase and consume healthy diets. They are too poor to afford healthy diets and are therefore at greater risk of poor health and associated non-communicable diseases and health inequalities.

It is important to note that people in poverty are not necessarily going hungry. Lower-income households tend to spend a high proportion of their income on food, but to make that income go further, many are buying cheaper and less nutritious food. We therefore have the issue of modern malnutrition, where there are high rates of obesity, but those who have obesity are consuming nutritionally poor diets.

The food that makes up our diets has a large impact on both ourselves and the environment. A recent study by the University of Minnesota and the University of Oxford found that the foods that are healthier for our diets are also generally better for the environment—things such as grains, nuts, seeds, vegetables and fruits. As a nation, we rely a lot on convenience foods: hot-food takeaways, pre-packaged meals, and packaged snacks and sandwiches. Eating those convenience foods threatens the environment in ways we may not even be aware of, through transportation and packaging. A high percentage of waste is involved in convenience food. That sums up our position on the issue.

Tom Andrews: It is a huge topic. Ultimately, it is about a very complex system. I would like to throw out some thoughts that may be relevant. I completely agree that food poverty is not about food and that it is about poverty. It is interesting that health inequalities and the incidence of food poverty map perfectly on to income inequalities, if you look at a map of the UK. They also map on to the distribution of fast-food outlets and takeaways, so this is also about the food environment. It is not just about income.

The very cheapest food—the sort of thing that becomes “Buy one, get one free” in many supermarkets—tends to be highly processed. It is high sugar, high salt and high fat. These products are mass produced, easily transported and have long shelf lives. That is why people with lower budgets tend to buy them. They are often worried about wasting food, so they want to buy things that they can use and keep for a long period.

I will not go into the detail now, but there is a systemic issue, which is that the whole basis of the food industry is predicated against low-processed food. There is no money in selling a head of broccoli. There is money only in high-level processing, which is about value added, and in very significant packaging, because it is about selling. The driver is to sell and make profit as a food business, so the whole system works towards selling the kinds of products that are probably causing most of the problems.

I have one final, slightly separate comment, which will lead into what Steve is going to say. Food aid is not a long-term solution to food poverty. As part of our programme, we accept that it is a necessary

short-term solution, but we have to find a long-term solution that is not about giving people food charity.

Steve Butterworth: That is a wonderful segue into the areas we work in. The platform is there to facilitate the redistribution of surplus food to organisations across the UK that feed those in need. I echo Tom's sentiment that we are not there to condone or institutionalise long-term food poverty. It is about how, right here, right now, we can help to support those who are struggling with poverty. When it comes to the food piece, with 14 million people living in poverty in the UK, there is a huge need to support those with the most core needs on a daily basis. Food is part of that.

We as an organisation are less involved in the nutritional side of things. We redistribute everything that is available. As I will go into in more detail later on, there are different causes that provide a broader range of foods that might be less highly processed, with more fresh fruit and vegetables. If the system begins to change, which, as Tom said, is not simple or straightforward, a greater amount of surplus food that would be more nutritionally beneficial to individuals will make it to the right people through the causes that we support, but the underlying problem is the poverty that is causing the issue in the first place.

Food waste is a significant topic that is very front of mind right now. I sit on the Courtauld 2025 steering committee. Our latest report last week was on progress that we have made against the 2015 baseline. I am delighted to say that it is tracking in the right direction. However, we still have 9.5 million tonnes of waste food in the UK every year, and 70% of that is at home. There may be big initiatives further up the supply chain, through food manufacturers, producers or retailers, but we need to work across the whole spectrum to educate all stakeholders in the process of making sure that, in a utopian concept, food waste is eradicated. As long as they are available, we must respect the world's resources by ensuring that they go to the people who need them most. That is what we are based on.

Q47 **Baroness Boycott:** I need to declare interests. I am the chair of Feeding Britain and the chair of Veg Power. I sit on the Food Foundation. I am an adviser to the food strategy, and I will be the chair of a new APPG, which at the moment is called the APPG on hunger but might turn into something else.

I absolutely take the point that food poverty is a much more complicated system. What should central government do to enable and encourage people, particularly those on lower incomes, to consume a healthy and sustainable diet? We all know that just telling people to eat five a day has not been a success. What can central government, as opposed to local government, try to do? Someone else will come on to local government in a bit. Tom, you made the very categorical point that food aid is not a solution. Everyone in this room would agree with that.

Tom Andrews: One of the questions earlier was whether initiatives or interventions can tackle these issues at once. What is really interesting about the food system is that, although there are some interesting individual interventions that will have an impact in one or two areas, it is such a complex system and is so linked to so many different issues that, at government level, there has to be a systems approach to food, health and the environment.

On sustainability, the new Agriculture Bill, which looks as though it is focused on public goods, could be very positive in bringing environmental benefits and sustainable diets to a wider group. The question for me is, what could come out of the national food strategy that would enable us to push the organisations and companies that provide most of the food and create the food environment to internalise the externalities that are currently in the system?

The Agriculture Bill will potentially subsidise producers to prevent or reduce those externalities in the wider environment. What could happen through a national food strategy and national food policy to do the same thing with food manufacturing and food retail? At the moment, of course, we pick up the cost of the impacts of diet-related disease through taxation and through the NHS, however many billion pounds that is, depending on the estimate. We scrub nitrates out of water, et cetera. For me, it is about how a strategy could enable us, through a sort of polluter pays principle, to get food companies to internalise those costs.

That is not an answer to food poverty. We have been working on food poverty for years and years. Fundamentally, the Government need to find a way of making sure that people have enough money to feed themselves well. I do not think there is any other way. That is the case whether or not there is change to the food system and the manufacturers. We still need to provide people with the income.

Baroness Boycott: Can we stay with that for one second? When you talk about the polluter pays, are you seeing that across the system? Are you incorporating the person who makes the doughnut as a kind of physical pollution, as well as a polluter who puts chemicals in the water? Is it right the way across the system? That is a broad definition of polluter, in terms of externalities in the system.

Tom Andrews: Yes, absolutely. The system has created an obesity epidemic. When I was brought up, it was about the tragedy of the commons. The tragedy of the commons was about the environmental commons. There is now a tragedy of the public commons. The cost of the system is being put on to the people consuming the food, whether that is through a poor diet or through consuming too much. Somehow we have to shift the system.

The other thing I want to throw out is that we always come back to the point that it is consumer choice and that we are following what people want. We are fooling ourselves if we believe that it is all about consumer choice. The power of choice editing and the amount of money spent on

advertising are unbelievable. The moves in London recently to ban public advertising of fast food are absolutely vital, and we will start to see the changes. There is a real opportunity for the Government, through multi-stranded policy, to change the way food is sold, how it is advertised and how it is perceived. We also need to make sure that, fundamentally, people can afford it.

Alex Holt: I agree with Tom that people need to be able to afford a healthier diet. We also need to ensure that there is joined-up working across the system and that dietary impacts are considered in decisions and policies. There needs to be joined-up working between government, food retailers and food production.

We need to make sure that we have healthier places to live. Our policy calls include improving the food environment and looking at junk food marketing. People with obesity are more affected by junk food marketing, and those at the most deprived levels of the community tend to have higher levels of obesity. Junk food marketing affects those people. There needs to be work around price and placement promotions, to make sure that promotions are on healthy food, not unhealthy, high-fat, high-salt and high-sugar foods. There must be tighter regulations on food produced for infants and young children. The food currently produced is very sweet, so it sets children up to want sweet foods.

Education is only some of it and we need to fix the environment, but it is about tailoring public health messages to those they do not resonate with. The current public health messages are very middle class. We need to make sure that they are more tailored to those on low incomes and, perhaps, those from religious and racial minority ethnicities.

Steve Butterworth: I will avoid repeating anything that Alex or Tom has said, which I endorse, but I want to pick up the education point. To the extent that people are able to afford a healthy diet, it is more a question of saying what that is. That needs to be very much at grass-roots level. Coming back more to central government, initiatives across the board on education as to what makes up a healthy diet are critical. The national food week conversation, which is set for the middle of May, is one initiative that will help. It will hit schools specifically, but it is a springboard to a longer dialogue beyond that. That is the sort of initiative that central government can support and that both local government and the private sector can get behind.

The Chair: Do you have examples from other countries that have tackled this at a system level? Tom, you said very eloquently that it cannot be tackled piecemeal, as there is a whole system that drives production and retail towards unhealthy foods that are cheaper, have a longer shelf life, are highly processed and have a bigger environmental impact. Are there any countries that have moved the dial?

Tom Andrews: There are some places, particularly in continental Europe, that have prevented the dial going as far as it has the wrong way, although they are not necessarily pushing it back at the moment.

There are some very interesting examples. I am happy to look those up and get them through to the Committee. They are in places such as Malmö and Copenhagen.

The Chair: That would be helpful.

Tom Andrews: Historically, Rome did some great stuff around this, until the mayor changed and got rid of everything. There are some very good examples. My sense is that it is partly because in continental Europe local government is seen as having, and takes, a more proactive role in municipal management processes. It is allowed to be more hands on.

The Chair: Tom, if you, Steve or Alex have any examples of cities, regions and places where success has been had in shifting the dial, it would be great to hear them.

Q48 **Baroness Janke:** You have partly answered this question. It is about central government and what it should be doing to encourage people, particularly people on lower incomes, to consume a healthy diet. I was interested in what you said about systems and advertising. It certainly seems that some advertising is almost conditioning in its frequency and intensity, with constant messages to buy or eat this or that food. I was interested in the answer about getting the food industry to look at what action it can take on that.

Do you feel that there is any help in local production systems, for example? When I had experience of some of this in my area, in Bristol, the whole issue of food distribution and availability was a big problem, but that was a while ago. Quite a lot of work was done with local production, involving local schools and children learning much more about production. We felt that changing the system of learning about food was something that might have an impact. What do you think about that?

Tom Andrews: There are a lot of very good initiatives, which my colleagues will probably be better able to speak to, that at a micro level—a very local level—enable people who may not have access to fruit and veg and healthy seasonal produce to get access by cutting out the middleman, essentially; but it is not a systemic answer to the issue. My worry sometimes is that we have lots of amazing initiatives, which are extraordinary, mostly run on a volunteer basis and have a fantastic impact, but they allow us to say, “Well, that’s solved”. Actually, it is much more fundamental. There are some very good local initiatives that are replicated nationally and have a positive impact, but that might be a separate question.

Baroness Janke: Some of the work in local production is supposed to help people who are on low incomes and people who may be depressed or whatever by involving them in production and helping them to educate others. That seems to be something that has value.

Tom Andrews: Yes, absolutely. The social benefits of being able to get involved in community growing or small-scale commercial growing are

very valuable. Bristol Community Farm is a perfect example. It also helps people to re-engage with real food, to get involved and to enjoy the conviviality of being involved in food, but I do not think that it is necessarily a clear part of a systemic answer to a very big problem.

Baroness Janke: What about food distribution and availability? A plan was produced in my city that said that only about six communities in the city had a fresh fruit and veg outlet that was easily accessible. Some of the poorest areas of the city did not even have a supermarket or ready access to food. The whole food issue was about buying large amounts of food a long way away. Do you believe that there is any value in that sort of approach?

Tom Andrews: We have six key issues. It is a framework, and one of the issues includes that point very precisely. It is about access to affordable, healthy food. Alex may want to pick up on that.

Alex Holt: Those living in the more deprived areas often have less access to healthy food. Supermarkets may be a long way away. There may also be less access to healthy fruit and veg. There are some schemes; for example, Alexandra Rose provides fresh fruit and veg vouchers in deprived local communities in London and Liverpool. It is not a solution to the problem, but, going back to your earlier question, any solution needs to take a top-down and bottom-up approach. We need to do systems thinking, to make sure that it is all joined up, but we also need to get communities involved, to get them to come up with their own solutions on a local level.

The Chair: Steve, do you want to add anything?

Steve Butterworth: I will repeat what my colleagues have already said. The education piece, through awareness of what makes a healthy diet, and ease of access to that will be key. We support hundreds of good causes around the UK in deprived areas, where people have less access to good food. Those organisations bring that in. Whether it is in food parcels that are bought at minimal cost, whether it is pay as you feel or whether it is free, there is always work to be done by the causes to try to make sure that what is being delivered is a healthy, nutritious, balanced diet.

Whether it is FoodCycle, which cooks the food for people to eat, the Bread and Butter Thing in Manchester, which has a mobile pantry, or the Matthew Tree Project in Bristol, which brings in and distributes food, they use food as a convening force to try to tackle the systemic issues that are causing the poverty problem in the first place. If you can put food on the table, conversations can begin around tackling debt, tackling unemployment and so on. That begins to address the problem, rather than just relying on the food piece. The food piece is the starting point.

Baroness Janke: I was thinking more about educating people to value food. I will not go on about it, but the whole business of cooking food, preparing it, eating it and being aware of it and what it does for you is

something that seems to me to be tackled much more successfully in some areas than in others.

Steve Butterworth: Yes, but the infrastructure needs to be there to make that happen. It can be done through education in schools. A growing number of causes bring out recipe cards to give people ideas. There are parts of the country where people have not come across certain fruit and veg. They do not know what to do with a sweet potato or what combination of foods makes a healthy meal. The education piece is always going to feed into that, whether it comes through schools, local government organisations or charities. They all play a part.

Q49 **The Earl of Caithness:** I know that it is short term and palliative, but can you tell us what your opinion is of how supermarkets are dealing with their surplus food? Are they more proactive than they were five years ago?

Steve Butterworth: There has been a huge push. There have been efforts across the board by the retailers. It is fair to say that the media, government and consumers have turned the focus on them. They are responsible for only 3%—a single-digit percentage—of overall food waste, but they drive both the food production process and consumer buying behaviours.

We have worked with Lidl, Aldi and M&S, which have all invested heavily in platforms, processes and procedures to ensure that their food waste is kept to a minimum. If we look at the results, it is fair to say that we reduced food waste annually by about half a million tonnes from 2015 to 2018. A lot of the reductions have been at domestic level and manufacturing level. There has been a marginal increase at retail level, but that is because retailers are taking responsibility and accountability for the role they play in the food waste challenge. Retail has really stepped up to the plate in recent times. The point is that it is investing to make things better, rather than just pushing the problem on to others.

Baroness Boycott: I want to follow up on the Earl of Caithness's point, which was about the retail end, the supermarket on the high street. How do you see what is happening at the top of the food chain with regard to redistribution of waste? I know from the social supermarkets I have been involved in that a staggering amount is still sent to landfill, or, indeed, is in government contracts to feed biodigesters, for which the food companies are paid. There are still instances where food companies are manufacturing extra food entirely to support the lunatic system we seem to have. Have you seen much improvement? I work a lot with FareShare, which deals at that end. We are trying to do a much bigger move now, but it is still pretty depressing. It would be nice to have your view on the record about where you think that end of the food waste system is.

Steve Butterworth: It is still very early days as regards how the systems are being tackled and addressed. It is fair to say that the retailers we work with are involved in discussing with their supply chain how those pieces could be reduced from a food waste perspective. Those

conversations are happening. There are the sorts of initiatives Defra got behind over the last year. FareShare was one of the big beneficiaries of the first round of bids last year to access hard-to-reach surplus, but it is about not producing it in the first place. Everyone would say that it should always be sold.

Baroness Boycott: Do you have a sense of what figure one could attach to the amount of food that is wasted at source?

Steve Butterworth: I do not have an accurate figure to hand. I could get it and share it with you with no problem.

Baroness Boycott: That would be really helpful. Could you also indicate whether there is any sign of the figure changing?

Steve Butterworth: Yes, no problem.

Lord Empey: I wonder whether we are too tight on some sell-by dates. I am sure that in your personal experience you find that food that is several days over can be perfectly fine. Are we too rigid about that? How has the wonky food programme gone, to try to encourage people to buy carrots that are not perfectly triangular in shape and things like that?

Steve Butterworth: To pick up the labelling question first, there is a lot of confusion around date labelling. The charity WRAP, which works very closely with Defra, has a workstream that has been going on for some time with retailers on how to address that. The current school of thought is to drop use-by dates and just have "Best before". Just because it has gone past its best-before date does not mean that it cannot still be eaten. There is then the education piece that comes with that, when people ask, "How long after it has gone past its best-before date can I still eat it?"

There are various initiatives. The national food conversation week will tackle some of those things. It will talk about the sniff test, floating eggs, freezing food, what foods you can freeze and even what temperature you should keep your fridge at so that food does not go off more quickly. WRAP has been doing a huge amount of work, supported by the whole industry, from hospitality and food service retailers and food production all the way down to the platforms and the farms.

Use-by dates have definitely been guilty of fuelling food being thrown away far too quickly, and best-before dates will come in sooner rather than later. Asda has set a good example. It had a "Best before plus four" initiative, which meant that you could still use something for a period of time beyond the best-before date. You can still eat some food years after it has gone past its best-before date. A simplification process is required. The retailers are absolutely on board with working with WRAP to address that.

The question about how successful the wonky veg programme has been is one for the retailers to address. Many have tried it. I do not know whether it is something that they are still looking to pursue.

The Chair: Before I turn to Baroness Ritchie, could I ask this? I do not know which one of you would like to answer, maybe all of you. We have heard in the evidence so far that very often in initiatives to alleviate food insecurity at local level the burden of work seems to fall on charitable or voluntary organisations. There are questions about whether that is appropriate or sustainable, or whether it is just the way life is. Do you have a view about that?

Tom Andrews: The Sustainable Food Cities programme is fundamentally about building a working bridge between institutional society—local authorities and public health departments—and the NGO, voluntary and community sector. That is where the sustainable and long-term solution lies. It is those two: institutional and civil society organisations working hand in hand to deal with things on the ground, but it has to be in the context of an enlightened national food strategy and policy. If the system does not change at that level, it cannot change at the bottom. It is a complementarity between those two things for me.

The Chair: Do the others agree?

Alex Holt: Yes, I would tend to agree. It needs to be joined up between both local government and local charities.

Steve Butterworth: Unfortunately, I think it is a necessity, and for quite some time to come.

Q50

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick: We have probably already discussed some of this issue. Considering the interconnected nature of the issues that the Committee is examining, where do the private food sectors fit in? You have already referred to Aldi and Lidl. Where does the food industry contribute to the problems, and how can it help to alleviate them? Moving on from that, in the light of what has already been said and what you are going to say, do the Government need to regulate to enable a healthy food environment?

Steve Butterworth: I will try to avoid repetition. The private sector obviously is very much in the crosshairs on this. We have redistributed 22 million meals over the last few years as a result of the organisations I mentioned earlier. You mentioned FareShare, which does an absolutely phenomenal job with those they support and work with.

To the extent that the Government potentially need to reduce some of the barriers associated with food redistribution, such as traceability standards, which do not exist for consumer sales, along with use-by dates and sell-by dates, which we mentioned earlier, there are regulations that are no longer fit for purpose. I am not convinced that it is about legislation or regulation. It is probably more about collaboration with the private sector. There is real willingness across the retail sector. If they support, rather than getting hit over the head, they will step up, come to the table and engage in a meaningful way. A statistic I did not mention earlier is that if global food waste was a country it would be the

third largest contributor to the climate crisis in CO₂ emissions globally, after the US and China. Food waste is a massive issue.

What we now have is a very captive audience with the ability to pull various levers that could make a real impact. That obviously feeds through to what we are talking about here, whether it is malnutrition or fighting food poverty and the extent to which food can be redistributed appropriately. Equally, from a dignity perspective, how can we make sure that people on lower incomes can afford the right type of healthy food? That is probably something to pass over to you guys.

Tom Andrews: The first question was about where the private food sector fits in. It is most of the problem and it will be most of the solution. It is the thing that defines our food choices and provides what we eat. It advertises to us every single day. The private food sector is absolutely fundamental. Unless that system changes, all we will be doing is tinkering at the edges between civil society and NGOs that are trying to do a better thing.

Where does the sector contribute to the problems? Again, for me it comes back to the systems bit. The food industry predicates highly processed; the point was made earlier about value added, maximum shelf life and high sugar, salt and fat because human taste buds cannot resist it and the industry is trying to make a profit. Food is highly packaged because it needs to make a point of difference at sale.

We have to find ways that enable food organisations to make a profit, one of which is through competitive difference. It is possible. I will give you a fantastic example. There is a thing called the Food for Life catering mark, which now serves up to 1 billion meals a year through public sector catering. All the large contract caterers are involved. It is about healthy, sustainable, local food, so it is much better quality. They do it because it gives them a point of difference. They win contracts because they are able to serve a better meal. There may be means like that, through the thought leaders and the pioneers in the food industry—there are many of them—to enable them to pull everyone else up to a higher standard.

The other side is helping them to identify how to cut costs. A lot of the stuff around food aid and redistributing unused food is actually about saving food costs and being more efficient with waste resource. You need national policy to guide that process, but you also need schemes. There are many schemes such as Food for Life and Peas Please. Peas Please is doing an amazing thing where it cajoles, persuades, motivates and inspires large food producers to increase the amount of vegetables in their offering. It is good PR, so they do it, but they will only do it if they can see a benefit.

Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick: You referred to national policy. Does that include legislative measures?

Tom Andrews: Yes, I think it does.

The Chair: Would the other witnesses like to add anything?

Alex Holt: I agree with Tom that the food industry is a lot of the problem. It controls what goes into the products that it produces. The cost of a less healthy diet is lower than for a healthy diet. There is also marketing, which Tom touched on.

Highly processed and packaged foods are worse for the environment than fresh ingredients. As to whether we should regulate, I take the point that maybe we should collaborate, but the sugary drinks industry levy has had much more impact on reformulation than the sugar reduction programme, which was a voluntary measure. I think perhaps it is a combination.

Steve Butterworth: I have forgotten the point I wanted to add, so we can move on.

Baroness Sater: Steve, you mentioned that you get a lot of highly processed food from supermarkets, which you distribute. How do you think you can increase the fresh offering from supermarkets and get them into local organisations?

Steve Butterworth: The retailers we work with always redistribute everything they have available. To the extent that there is any fresh produce available, we take it all. We would not say no to anything if it is available, which means that we are not going to push anything back on the retailer that potentially could still go to those who need it. A lot of the organisations are crying out for surplus.

Baroness Sater: Are there no barriers to you in getting it from the supermarkets to the organisations, because it is fresh and it does not last very long?

Steve Butterworth: No. There are guidelines that they follow. Obviously, they are not going to hand over mouldy fruit and veg, so common sense is involved as well. There might be a bag where there is one bruised apple, so they open the bag, take the good ones out and make sure they still go to the right people.

Q51 **Lord Whitty:** I want to ask about your more general approach to sustainability. Tom, you give awards for sustainability. How do you define it? On what basis are sustainable cities judged? How do you trade off the different aspects of sustainability: social, economic, environmental and so on?

Tom Andrews: We think about sustainability as a direction of travel, not a destination. Essentially, you will never get to full sustainability. The purpose of our programme is to provide a framework and a motivation for a journey of continuous improvement towards greater sustainability.

Our framework is that we divide all the amazing activity across our 60 current members' places in the UK into six areas. The first one is around food governance, which is local food policy, strategy development and

food partnerships. The second is around active food citizenship—the idea that you need a food movement and you need people engaged.

The final four areas are particularly about issues that relate to sustainability. One is around food poverty, diet related to health and access to affordable healthy food, which was mentioned earlier. Another is the idea of a vibrant, prosperous and diverse food economy, because we recognise that you need to help create the sustainable food businesses of tomorrow, and that is also part of the sustainability agenda. We have a whole stream around catering and procurement because it is such a key driver. Then we have another stream around climate and nature emergency through sustainable food and farming, and food waste.

We divide it into what are accepted as the standard three pillars of health, economy and environment for sustainability. The bronze, silver and gold awards are entirely based on a process of applications over the last seven years. We do not prescribe exactly what you have to do for each level. All we are trying to do is say, “Okay, bronze is this sort of level of achievement broadly”, and there is comparability at that level. Silver has its own level and then gold is higher than that. We have been very open.

There are two cities going for gold at the moment, one of which, Brighton and Hove, I think you are going to hear from this afternoon. They would recognise, and we would say, that they are a long way from the end of the journey. It is more about getting as many places as possible to take a systematic approach to improving their food, health and sustainability at city level, to the point where, at gold, we feel fairly confident that that city is going to keep doing it for ever on that long-term journey.

Lord Whitty: More generally, on embedding those views of progressive sustainability, what more could the Government do, or is it primarily an issue for the industry to be encouraged by yourselves and others to move in that direction?

Tom Andrews: If I had my Christmas wish list, I would say that the national food strategy, Defra and the Government should be endorsing, mandating and resourcing in some way a sustainable food partnership in every municipality in the UK. We have 60 at the moment. We are about to start a five-year programme which, through funding from the National Lottery Fund and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, will help us take that to 100.

Looking at the effect of local enterprise partnerships, local nature partnerships and the recognition and embeddedness that they have in local governance, we need something similar around food. There is a fantastic example in Cambridge. Through a bit of advocacy locally, they have now appointed a portfolio leader for sustainable food. In Leicestershire, they have appointed a full-time permanent sustainable food places officer at council level. There are lots and lots of examples of

how we need to consider food as a core delivery aspect of local governance. At the moment, it is nowhere.

Years and years ago, we were asked to work with people in Plymouth and we asked John Dixon—a lovely guy who worked in planning and was very passionate about food—to ask his colleagues who could pick up on the food agenda. He went away and spoke to every department. They all said, “It’s not our business”. If it does not sit anywhere in local government, nothing is going to happen. Sorry, that is a long answer.

Baroness Janke: Having come from local government, I do not think that is the case in all local government.

Tom Andrews: No, absolutely.

Baroness Janke: There is a huge amount of interest, but the big problem is the lack of funding in local government to do anything other than the core requirements. If we are asking the Government to do something and we are expecting local services to be delivered, the resources need to be there for it as well.

Tom Andrews: I completely agree. Despite austerity over a number of years, it is extraordinary how many places are investing in this. They find it hard, and the culture of local government at the moment in the face of that austerity is a reversion to the delivery of statutory obligations and no more. National government could really help to nurture this at local level and support it.

Lord Whitty: Are there examples of other Governments in the world, or maybe the devolved Governments, where they are doing it better, or at least better in part?

Tom Andrews: In France, there is national government investment in a similar approach, but I am very proud to say that in the UK we are ahead of the game on the number of places that are doing it. It was more driven in the UK by civil society initially, whereas in other places national and local governments see their role as central to it.

Baroness Boycott: How many people do you think are now being affected and have had their diets changed, or healthy diets made accessible to them, as a result of your work over the last decade and a half? Do you have any sense of that, or is it still on the margins?

Tom Andrews: I do not. I would guess that it is many hundreds of thousands. I will give you an example. One of the key areas that we promote is around healthy catering and procurement, and the work done at local level by partnerships and the co-ordinators that support them to open doors for schemes such as the one I mentioned earlier—the Food for Life catering mark—would have had a massive impact.

We run a series of slightly more than annual campaigns, as you know. For example, Sustain and the Jamie Oliver Foundation set up a thing called Sugar Smart. A large number of our cities supported Sugar Smart,

promoting the idea of sugar reduction in local meals to a wide range of organisations—caterers, retailers or whatever. That will have had a very significant impact. I have some numbers that I can send you, but we are talking mass impact once you start to aggregate it across 60 or 100 places.

The Chair: I have a question related to that about how we actually measure the success of interventions. You have talked about various interventions. Not right now, but if you have any thoughts about how we could measure whether or not they work, perhaps each of you could write in and let us know.

Q52 **Lord Empey:** To some extent we have covered this, but you can give a very simple answer. All the work of the analysts and so on will be done for when you answer this question. What would be the most effective, long-term intervention from central government to ensure that a healthy, sustainable diet is truly accessible to everyone? Write our report for us now.

Steve Butterworth: It is not necessarily going to help, but we genuinely need to address the catastrophic levels of poverty in our communities driven by underfunding. That is the key.

Alex Holt: My response is to put social justice, public health and the environment higher up the agenda.

Tom Andrews: Mine would be to recognise that food is part of every government agenda and that government needs an integrated approach to food. I personally think that there needs to be a Minister of Food at national level. We need a national policy and a national food strategy, and to find some way to support the amazing work that is happening at local level to connect those two things.

Lord Empey: I think there was a Minister of Food during the war. You have made the point about local government needing to be involved, but it is not necessarily in the bailiwick of a number of its departments, so they do not participate. Other witnesses have mentioned the levels of welfare funding. That is part of it, but quite a lot of them said it was not all of it. You are also calling for an integrated approach from the top to central and local government.

Tom Andrews: I am talking about an integrated approach at national departmental level, and a connected approach between that and what happens at local level, probably all framed by a national food strategy. I would have thought that it needs to make reference to the roles of both within that food system to change.

The Chair: Thank you very much. In drawing this session to a close, I thank our witnesses very warmly for giving us some extremely valuable and interesting evidence. There are a few points where you have agreed, or have been asked, to write in with supplementary information. If you could contact Beth, the Committee clerk, about that we would be very grateful. Are there any other points you would like to make?

Steve Butterworth: I have now remembered the point I was going to make earlier, off the back of my colleagues talking about the role of business and the food manufacturers, producers and retailers. The interesting shift, even in the last 12 months, has been the rise of corporate purpose on the agenda. If you look at what was being discussed at the World Economic Forum the other week, among the top five priorities was the climate crisis. Boardroom discussions have shifted, and, certainly from an investor perspective, there is the rise of ESG and the role of business in society. There is a call for an end to shareholder primacy and it is very much about business acting in the best interests of all stakeholders.

I believe that will potentially form a framework for a very different conversation with business. This is not about businesses being legislated or regulated in the way they operate. They do not have a choice in the way they will need to behave, because they know that their investors will not get behind them and their consumers or customers will not get behind them. It is going to be a slow burn; it is not going to happen overnight.

There is a call to action now that goes way beyond just warm words. It is coming through almost daily. Capitalism is being reset, and the calls for that will filter down. Specifically with regard to the agenda for today, there is an expectation that the food industry should behave in a different way. I think those levers will be pulled now in a way that they have not been pulled before. Boards will be held accountable, and it will be their fiduciary duty to act in a more responsible way as a result.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That is a useful closing comment.

Tom Andrews: Can I add to that very briefly? I do not want to come across as demonising the entire food industry. There are some fantastic and positive innovations. We are in a very interesting moment. We have the national food strategy consultation going on. There is stuff happening at corporate level. There is amazing stuff happening at civil society level, and we are in this post-Brexit world where we could go in one of two directions. I very much hope that we are going to go in the direction that I assume this august body wants, but I am worried that we will end up going the wrong way.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I will now draw the session to a close after those final, final comments. I thank our witness panel very much indeed.