



Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Covid-19 and food supply, HC 263

Tuesday 23 June 2020

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Neil Parish (Chair); Ian Byrne; Geraint Davies; Dave Doogan; Rosie Duffield; Barry Gardiner; Dr Neil Hudson; Robbie Moore; Mrs Sheryll Murray.

Questions 180 - 216

Witnesses

I: Kate Nicholls, Chief Executive, UKHospitality; Andrew Kenny, UK Managing Director, Just Eat.

II: Professor Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy, City, University of London; Anna Taylor, Executive Director, The Food Foundation.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[- UKHospitality](#)

[- Just Eat](#)

[- Professor Tim Lang](#)

[- The Food Foundation](#)

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Kate Nicholls and Andrew Kenny.

Q180 **Chair:** Welcome, everybody, to our inquiry into Covid and the food supply. We are fortunate to start today with our panel of Kate Nicholls and Andrew Kenny. Would you like to introduce yourself, please, for the record?

Kate Nicholls: Hello, I am Kate Nicholls. I am chief executive of UKHospitality, which is the trade body representing hospitality businesses, from single-site independents to the national chains, including pubs, bars, restaurants, coffee shops, hotels and visitor attractions.

Andrew Kenny: Hi, I am Andrew Kenny, UK managing director of Just Eat. I have been in charge of co-ordinating Just Eat UK's response to the coronavirus pandemic, helping support over 36,000 restaurants and takeaways we work with closely up and down the country, to ensure the continued supply of food to our customers. We are the leading food delivery platform, so can hopefully offer a perspective on the impact on the takeaway sector.

Q181 **Chair:** Thank you both very much for joining us. I am going to ask the first question. This is for Kate Nicholls, please. Did the Government consult with you on how the sudden closure of food services business would impact on consumers and suppliers? What advice did you give the Government?

Kate Nicholls: We have been in discussions with the Government since early February about the impact of coronavirus, particularly on international tourism and travel, given our wider hospitality remit. There were discussions ongoing about food supply, et cetera, and business continuity. We were in regular dialogue with Defra as we got closer towards the coronavirus impact happening in March, with its impact on our businesses in terms of footfall and downturn in revenue.

There was no meaningful consultation prior to the decision taken to close premises, prior to the announcement on 16 March that customers were going to be advised not to visit pubs and restaurants. That took the industry a little bit by surprise, but over the week prior to and the week of that announcement we were in preparation and in dialogue with the Government about what that would mean, and with Defra about how we could support supply when retail was coming under pressure.

Q182 **Chair:** The impact was on both consumers and suppliers. Certainly on suppliers, with Freshways in particular, there was a big issue over milk, which was going into the food service industry and then had to be converted and go into the retail. Were you talking to Government about that? Were you talking to Government about the situation regarding consumers as well?



Kate Nicholls: We were talking principally about consumers in the first instance, looking at the downturn happening in our town centres. The impact of Covid on footfall in restaurants was starting to be felt quite acutely at the start of March, where you could see a significant downturn in business activity in town and city centres. The impact was being felt from fewer consumers in sight. Then, as I say, in that critical period it was very fast-moving. There was no ability to have a detailed consultation but, in that period from 16 March to the week after the closure period took effect, we were providing information to Defra in real time as to what was happening, on the streets, in the town and city centres, and as our restaurants, takeaways and coffee shops closed down.

There was an initial closure period, with the messages from the Prime Minister about not going to pubs and restaurants, and then closing them, but allowing takeaway and delivery. There was an assumption that the larger proportion of our estate might stay trading for longer, but it was quite clear after that weekend of the 23rd that consumer reaction to the lockdown had meant that there was almost an entire closure. Everybody stopped going to work; everybody did obey the lockdown and stay at home, so coffee shops, takeaway venues, cafés, lots of those businesses that the Government initially thought may be able to stay trading in some way, shape or form, closed down. That had an immediate impact on the supply chain.

We worked very closely with Defra as we went into that lockdown period. There were daily food supply and food resilience calls to manage that in real time, to talk about the impact of our premises shutting, the impact of that going up the supply chain, how we could shift and pivot food production and food distribution away from catering towards retail, to support the shortages that were being seen on supermarket shelves. It is not terribly easy to do, but we were trying to work our hardest on that. We were also looking at how we could preserve as much food as possible that was in the hospitality supply chain and could not be reused for retail. A system was put in place and stood up very quickly. It worked extremely well to make sure that the real-time effects of the decisions that were being taken were understood.

Q183 **Chair:** With the benefit of hindsight, how much more could have been done to keep the takeaways open and the deliveries more open than they have been? I know that, when you are producing the food, you have to make sure you have the protective clothing and you are distancing. With the benefit of hindsight, what could have been done differently, in your view?

Kate Nicholls: I do not think it was anything to do with their inability to cope with social distancing. They had been dealing with that as we went into the pandemic situation during February and March. It was the sudden and immediate switch-off of consumers and footfall. For those of us who were involved in those discussions, there was an assumption that



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lockdown would not be necessarily as effective as it has been and you might have more people who were still going to work, more people who were still going out, more consumer demand. It was the fact that, straight away, consumers reacted very differently from how we had forecast they would. Where businesses stayed trading in that weekend between the Prime Minister's announcement on Friday 20 March and Monday 23 March, when the legislation was brought before the House of Commons, there was quite a big consumer backlash against businesses that stayed open, even those that were not closed by legislation. You saw a progressive closing of that, in response to consumer reaction, but in response also to the fact that there was an almost immediate drop-off of footfall in our city centres.

Over the course of February and March, we were tracking footfall on a daily basis. You could see during February and into early March that footfall had declined by about 20% over most of our town and city centres. It then accelerated as we ran into the political announcement. It was already down 50% to 70% in the run-up to 16 March. It dropped off to about 90% down in town and city centres after 20 March. It was more a consumer reaction. There was a total switch-off of demand.

Chair: A lack of demand, basically, was why so many of the companies stopped business.

Q184 **Mrs Murray:** Good afternoon, Andrew. Basically, I would like to know what barriers business faced redistributing surplus food or doing other things to help vulnerable people.

Andrew Kenny: Thank you for your question. In general, we have been incredibly heartened by the extent to which restaurants up and down the country were going out in a very challenging time to support local care homes and frontline workers, distribute surplus food or even reposition their businesses. Some that remained closed were still coming in to try to serve those in need.

Just Eat, in partnership with our longstanding charity partner FoodCycle, which traditionally distributes food through dozens of centres up and down the country, had to shift its business model very rapidly to one geared towards delivery and collection. We were in a position to help FoodCycle link up with suppliers to distribute surplus food, and to support it through our logistics partner, Stuart, in getting the delivery channel and the logistics part of the equation solved. There have been a huge number of initiatives to support.

A great deal of work went specifically into the NHS, on behalf of restaurants and Just Eat in partnership with restaurants, where we were able to serve over 2 million meals to NHS workers and their families.

Q185 **Mrs Murray:** Trying not to stray into other people's questions, I have some food manufacturers in my constituency that did a lot to help NHS workers, food banks, people like that, throughout the pandemic, really.



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Do you have any evidence of people who perhaps you would not have expected, such as food manufacturers, making donations directly to the vulnerable to help them?

Andrew Kenny: Our exposure is predominantly further down the chain, within restaurants. I am best equipped to answer that part of it. As I said, that is something we saw en masse up and down the country.

Kate Nicholls: We have a couple of really good examples. We worked with quite a few of the wholesalers and Brakes, so we could supply food to pubs that they could sell and support growers, farmers and artisan manufacturers. As another example, we work with a charity called Only A Pavement Away, which deals with the homeless, particularly in London. We dealt particularly with people in the hospitality sector who were in danger of becoming homeless, to help top up. We had donations from Nestlé and from soft drinks manufacturers, such as Coke and Pepsi. Over the 12 weeks, that charity has done 39,000 meals for homeless people, 70,000 soft drinks, 75,000 snacks and £4,000 a month to top up salaries and keep people out of being homeless.

Over and above that, businesses such as Leon, Wasabi, Dishoom and Pizza Pilgrims all volunteered to give meals to the NHS. A third of our hotels stayed open during the pandemic to house homeless, vulnerable people, NHS and critical care workers. There were lots of donations from local food producers and manufacturers, to make sure they could give food to those people when they were staying in the hotels for accommodation. It really has been, from the big national manufacturers to the small SMEs, a real collaborative and co-operative effort to support people.

Q186 **Chair:** Andrew, before we leave this question, Just Eat facilitates placing the order, getting the restaurant to produce it and then deliver it. How confident are you that we are going to get the system moving much more quickly, especially now with reduced social distancing and the like? Where do you see it? Do you see more takeaway and more food coming through a lot more quickly?

Andrew Kenny: To add to the point Kate made at the beginning, we absolutely saw a demand shock in the initial couple of weeks, where customers were not accessing online portals such as Just Eat as regularly as they usually would. Fortunately, that demand came back reasonably quickly. The challenge was still that only roughly 50% of restaurants we typically see on our platform were open. Therefore, as a sector leader, Just Eat felt it was our responsibility to encourage as many restaurants as possible to stay open. We launched an £11 million support package for those 30,000 independents on the platform to encourage them to operate in what was a very difficult environment, often having to restrict their menus, reduce their delivery radius and make a whole bunch of other operational changes. It was by no means business as usual.



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That trend has continued. Although we are seeing many more independent restaurants and larger QSR chains now reopening, in many ways the hard work begins now. We are working with them on ways to cut costs and adjust to the new normal.

Q187 Dave Doogan: Can I ask the witnesses if they think it took too long to review the two-metre rule, given that the commitment was given almost a month ago, or do you feel it was appropriate?

Kate Nicholls: It was right that the Prime Minister and the Government kept that rule under review. Obviously, it would have helped the sector to have had more time to prepare for reopening if we had had the answer that this two-metre rule could be relaxed more quickly, but we had to be led by the science, as the scientific community and the Joint Biosecurity Centre made recommendations about the risk level. It was helpful to know that that was being considered on a very regular basis and was part of the Government's discussions and considerations.

It is unfortunate that it took so long to get an answer published, but we have a good answer today, which allows us to move forward with confidence, and crucially allows us to rebuild consumer confidence. It is one thing to open the venues; it is quite another thing to have our customers feel safely able to come back. With that decision on the Friday by the four Chief Medical Officers, it was the right time for us to confidently say, "We can do it. We can keep you safe. We have one metre-plus and we have mitigation". It is challenging, because we have so little time to prepare for 4 July, but it means we should be able to do so full of confidence.

Andrew Kenny: I agree with Kate. It is a huge boost to both the takeaways and the traditional dine-in restaurants that this ruling has taken place today. They have had to adjust their business models very significantly. Where delivery drivers come into a restaurant that then reopens for dine-in food, it is extremely challenging to operate outside a two-metre radius. We certainly welcome the decision and I agree with Kate's point on timing.

Q188 Dave Doogan: In terms of preparation, what level of consultation was undertaken between the industry and sector and the Government, and who was involved in that?

Kate Nicholls: There has been an awful lot of consultation and regular dialogue with the industry across three main Government Departments that hospitality covers. Hotels and tourism falls within DCMS. Defra deals with food production and supply. Then BEIS is looking after high street hospitality. We have had unprecedented levels of engagement across all three Departments, making sure that as soon as this crisis hit we had calls at least once or twice a week. In the case of Defra and food supply, in the early days we were having them daily, twice a week with BEIS and twice a week with DCMS.



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Over the last three or four weeks, two main taskforces have been set up to look at Covid-secure reopening, one dealing with pubs, bars and restaurants and the other dealing with the visitor economy. The industry has been working with Government to identify the ways in which we can reopen safely.

Predating that, we did the guidelines on takeaway and delivery in consultation with BEIS. As UKHospitality, we have a large number of multinational businesses that have been successfully reopening with social distancing and Covid-secure workplace guidance in place, from China, Hong Kong, across the Far East, Middle East and into Europe. We have brought all that expertise to bear to develop fantastic industry protocols, to help businesses manage and navigate this new process of one metre-plus and mitigations. There has been really extensive engagement and dialogue with the industry.

Andrew Kenny: We certainly welcome the collaborative approach that the Government have taken to developing guidance for the sector. We had the opportunity to feed into it directly, as well as through our trade body, the British Takeaway Campaign. We participated in biweekly food delivery forums with Defra, BEIS and other supporting Government Departments. We would also call out the work done specifically at Defra to support the sector and rebuild confidence with its “food heroes” campaign, which was welcomed by the restaurant partners up and down the country. It played a key role in building both restaurant and, importantly, customer confidence.

To tie this together, critically, this collaboration allowed us to cascade guidance and information to a very fragmented part of the hospitality sector, independent takeaway restaurants. That allowed us to get the message out, to support and to use our position to make sure restaurants knew that, if they could operate safely, they should be open for business and, importantly, the demand through channels such as Just Eat was there to meet them.

Q189 **Geraint Davies:** First, can I simply ask whether you feel there is enough time between now and 4 July to get ready and be open for business? What proportion of the businesses will be ready to roll?

Kate Nicholls: We have had 4 July as an aspirational date to work towards since 11 May. We have not had it confirmed and we have not had the details of the guidelines, but we have had that date to work towards. Over the last four or five weeks, we have been working with a lot of our members, including the independents, to share best practice and think through the risk assessment templates. It will be tight. We have only 10 or 11 days to start, but we were always anticipating a phased reopening.

As for today’s change with the one metre/two metre social distance, about a quarter of our pubs, bars and restaurants would have been totally unable to open with that social distance in place. We anticipate



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that, with an increase in revenue, and the increased capacity they can accommodate with the reduced social distance and the mitigation measures, you will see more of those businesses reopen. We anticipate that, over the course of July, we will get 70% to 80% of the hospitality sector fully operational again.

Andrew Kenny: I agree with Kate. In particular for the restaurant trade, like all businesses, the more time there is, the better. Will they all be operating in the most optimised fashion from 4 July? No, probably not, but they will certainly be working as hard as they can between now and then to get ready.

Q190 **Geraint Davies:** Can I now ask a possibly more difficult question? What further measures need to be taken to reassure customers and, indeed, workers about safety? Naturally, people will feel that one metre distancing in a pub is not very safe, because obviously one metre is one arm length. You are sat right on top of someone. What mitigation can be provided in, for instance, a bar situation to reassure people and genuinely protect them from viral infection?

Kate Nicholls: Our first priority has to be keeping our teams safe and making sure our workers feel safe and able to come back to work. We have a lot of experience in the sector now from successfully reopening takeaways, delivery and the other parts of the sector. We work closely with the Food and Drink Federation and the British Retail Consortium. We have looked with both of those at how to develop the risk assessments to keep our people safe.

First and foremost, it is about carrying out that detailed health and safety risk assessment and making sure we have taken account of all the measures. Some of the mitigations were touched on by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons earlier today. We have not seen the final guidance, so I do not know exactly what those businesses will be required to put in place for one metre-plus, but that plus is a very important one. We understand that it will suggest seating only, so you can manage social distancing; you are not standing inside the pub, if we are talking pubs specifically. It will be minimising the time people spend at a bar or counter ordering point, with people encouraged to consume while they are sitting down so you can manage social distancing.

Over and above that, in particular, the key infection control measures are hygiene, sanitation and good ventilation. When we are talking back of house and kitchens, the same things apply, but equally it is about orientation: side-by-side working, back-to-back working and providing any further protections that are needed as you go through your risk assessment. Those are the key priorities for risk and infection control that you would have in place as part of that. We wait to see what else is required under the guidelines, but as we understand it businesses will be encouraged to adopt the measures that they feel are necessary, appropriate and proportionate for their own sites.



Q191 **Geraint Davies:** Obviously, it would be safer sitting outside than inside. If you are inside, you are safer if at least some people are wearing masks some of the time. Is there any further guidance, or is there a lot of confusion? Will there be any signage on what people should do? You come into a pub, more people come in, there are gatherings, people cannot get away from the bar and people feel concerned. Have these things been thought through, do you feel?

Kate Nicholls: Yes, I do. This is going to be directed by the Health and Safety Executive and Public Health England. We have experience of dealing with them in the consultation that Andrew referred to. It was carried out about four or five weeks ago, so we have a lot of scientific information and advice to support it.

I am not an epidemiologist or a virologist, so I am not really competent to answer what we need to do in terms of masks. I am guided by the medical establishment, which will provide the input into the guidance for Covid-secure workplaces. What I do know is that the hospitality sector is well-versed in managing and making sure we have responsible socialising going on. If you are talking about the pub and restaurant sectors, they are dealing with food hygiene, food safety and food standards. They have to deal with infection control day in, day out. In the pub sector, they are dealing in a very professional way with managing their customers, making sure that on a night out people are kept safe, the relationship is managed and the experience is curated. I know we are able to be responsible and ensure responsible socialising takes place.

Over and above that, if the guidance published later today follows the one that was adapted for takeaway and delivery, the primary resource for workers is the health and safety risk assessment. There will then be guidance in the premises to talk to consumers about what is safe. That will change to communicate to them that one metre is not an unsafe distance. One metre is safe if you have the other hygiene and sanitation measures in place. That will be the reassurance to provide to consumers.

Then we work collectively to make sure that we, as customers, are responsible when we go out, take a common-sense approach, are responsible for our own behaviour and follow the rules and guidelines. I am quite heartened by the fact that, today, we have a suggestion that the guidance will be based on a common-sense application, it will be site specific, it will be pragmatic and proportionate and we will be able to move forward. We need to communicate to consumers that, if we open in accordance with these guidelines, when they are published, it will be perfectly safe and they can be reassured that the hospitality sector in the UK will keep them safe and do everything to minimise infections.

Q192 **Geraint Davies:** Do you think people will be confused by the fact that they have to wear a mask on a bus or a train, but not in a pub?

Kate Nicholls: I am not really qualified to answer that. I can only be guided by what the medical advisers say about the use of face coverings.



It is quite clear from the guidance we have that, if our workers need protective equipment or face masks for their normal work, that is a different matter. As far as I understand, from the last version of guidance I saw, there was no suggestion that workers would need additional protection. That was guidance from Public Health England. I have to defer to the experts on that one. If they told us that it was needed, or the public felt that it was needed, I am sure the public would act appropriately, but you cannot sit and eat and drink with a mask on.

Q193 Geraint Davies: No, but you could alternate, I suppose. Andrew, do you have anything to add to that? Obviously, you are a bit safer if you are getting deliveries than going to a pub or somewhere that people assemble at close quarters. What are your thoughts?

Andrew Kenny: One of the first initiatives we put in play was contact-free delivery, which essentially means that, if a customer orders food from a takeaway or a restaurant, they do not have any interaction with the driver on arrival and it is left at the front door. That was key. From the get-go, safety has been front and centre for us, and for the takeaways and restaurants we work with.

To answer the question with a slightly different angle, our role is to use the guidelines that have been published, to use our channels and to share that best practice with the takeaway and restaurant industry. We have been working with them to figure out one-way systems, dedicated areas for delivery drivers to collect food in the restaurant, best use of Perspex screens. We are providing face masks for our fleet of independent couriers. Hand sanitiser is available. It is about utilising all the resources that are available. As the leading participant in the industry, we are making sure we can cascade those guidelines that the Government have released and support restaurants in that way.

Q194 Geraint Davies: Do you think the guideline should have been, "One metre is acceptable, but two metres is safer", as a general rule of thumb for people going to hospitality?

Andrew Kenny: The guidelines are still coming out. I defer to Kate on that one, if she has anything to add.

Geraint Davies: What do you think, Kate?

Kate Nicholls: As I understand it, that is what the Prime Minister said in the House of Commons earlier today: two metres where you can manage to achieve it. Where it is not practical or it will stop you reopening, open at one metre, provided you have the additional mitigation measures. I go back to the fact that a third of our hotels have stayed open through this crisis, looked after the most vulnerable and at-risk people, housed them effectively. We have not had one case. Our infection controls in the food industry are second to none. We will put in place all the measures we need, to make sure you can safely operate at one metre.



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One metre is not unsafe. The World Health Organisation is quite clear that one metre is safe and two metres is safer. That is what I heard the Prime Minister say in the House of Commons today. Equally, outdoors is safer than indoors, but you can be indoors. You can be at one metre. If you have infection control, hygiene measures and good ventilation, you can be perfectly safe. We need to reassure our consumers that we have taken those steps to keep them safe.

Chair: Thank you very much for the clear answer, Kate.

Q195 **Dr Hudson:** We have seen in recent weeks that the provision by the food service sector has been going up gradually, with more and more takeaway and delivery provision. Now, with the announcement today and the expectation of 4 July, it is going to go up to a greater level. What impact do you feel that reopening will have on the food and drink suppliers to the food service sector, with this step change up? Will they need further support?

Kate Nicholls: We go back to the fact that, in an ideal world, we would have had two to three weeks' notice to allow our supply chain to pivot. It took them a while to pivot towards retail and the smaller pack sizes that they needed. It will take a little while for some of them to pivot back. The best way we can support our small food manufacturing and supply businesses is to get the hospitality operators up and running as quickly as possible. That is how we make sure we can place the orders and have the orders fulfilled.

There will undoubtedly be glitches. We will be looking to see how we can accommodate menus with social distancing in kitchens. It will not be a smooth passage, but I think it will be done progressively. It is not the case that we are going to stand up all those businesses overnight. It will be a gradual phased reintroduction, which means that our supply chains should have time to keep up and catch up with us, if there are any glitches in supply, as there was when we were going into lockdown.

The biggest challenge that we have undoubtedly had in the pub sector is disposal of beer, the collection of kegs and crates and the redelivery of beer. That takes time. Some pubs might find that they cannot get all their stock in time for 4 July, but it will give us time to get the supply chain up and running again.

Andrew Kenny: I agree with Kate. We have seen at times shortages of particular line items that restaurants need in order to operate. They have been as flexible as they can be around supply shortages throughout the crisis. Thankfully, that solved itself relatively quickly. It will undoubtedly be a challenge as businesses ramp towards 4 July, but larger businesses will no doubt be coming back in, in a phased manner. It will not be completely stable from day one, but hopefully it will normalise very quickly.

Q196 **Dr Hudson:** That is encouraging. There is broad optimism that, as we



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reverse through this process with a phased reopening, the sector will be able to adjust and respond, because it knows a bit more about what is going on.

My follow-up question is more of an overview question. What do you feel is the outlook for the food service sector longer term, as a result of this whole coronavirus pandemic?

Andrew Kenny: I will speak specifically about restaurants and takeaways. The industry has been under significant pressure for some time due to issues around immigration and food cost inflation. The coronavirus pandemic has added significantly more pressure to that equation. As we look forward now, a lot of the support that has been put in play already has been incredibly helpful for the sector. However, we are now at a significant turning point. It is clear that there is no single magic solution.

From our ongoing dialogue with restaurant partners, both directly and through our trade body, the British Takeaway Campaign, there are three clear outcomes we need to achieve to really help the sector. They are access to funding. Getting going again from standing start is incredibly challenging for businesses big and small. Support is needed from a cost perspective. Rent is front and centre in that equation. We welcome the Government's recent decision to extend the current measures that prevent struggling companies from being evicted until the end of September, and we will call for that support to continue as long as is needed.

To come back to the point we started with earlier, driving that demand and consumer confidence is absolutely critical. We would add our voice to calls for the Government to consider introducing temporary flexibility within the tax system, for example by reducing VAT to relieve some of the pressure on these businesses and boost demand. We certainly welcome the current speculation that measures such as VAT reduction are being considered by the Chancellor. Today's news about the two-metre rule relaxation hopefully will instil further confidence in the sector.

It is certainly going to be a very challenging future for the restaurant and takeaway sector. Unfortunately, the reality is that not all businesses will be able to survive.

Kate Nicholls: The broader hospitality sector as a whole is having a real crisis. It is an existential crisis at the moment. We were first into coronavirus. We will be last out. The impact on our sector started to be felt at the end of January and beginning of February this year, with the downturn in business travel and in people coming to our town and city centres for work, both of which are going to take longer to recover, and with a drop in footfall. We have had a long period of suppressed revenues and then an extended period of closure.



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If you look at the latest ONS stat about the impact of coronavirus on GDP, a third of that slump in GDP was directly attributable to a decline in hospitality revenues. We have gone down 95%. We are having a significant drag on the economy, and we can have a significant impact on its growth. It is undoubtedly going to take a longer time for us to recover. Demand will be suppressed. We did a latest survey just last week on consumer confidence. Half of people are now working from home. Two thirds of those think that will be a longer-term trend and they will be more inclined to work from home going forward. That will have a real impact on our town and city centres, our retail, the restaurants, bars and coffee shops that are built around our office spaces. Of those consumers, 39% feared that as a result of coronavirus they would have a lower disposable income.

We are going to see a continued squeeze on demand in the sector going forward, from a drop in inbound tourists, a restriction on the numbers of people returning to work in town and city centres, and a softening of consumer confidence. We do not think it is forecast to recover until the start of 2022. We will have a long, slow recovery for this sector, and therefore need additional support.

On that same survey, however, I am optimistic. Seven out of 10 said they would really like to come back to pubs, bars, restaurants and hospitality, but only 50% of them were confident to do so now. We need to work to bolster that consumer confidence. We need to work to support those independent businesses. Let us not forget that 95% are SMEs in hospitality, and our supply chain is largely SMEs. We need to work to support those people who are providing really valuable jobs in local constituencies. We are the third largest employer in the UK, with 3.2 million people and jobs at every skill level, particularly for young people. We need to make sure they are protected and sustained. Andrew has outlined a number of the measures of support that will be necessary as we go through this sub-economic recovery, so that we can get back into growth and start generating the jobs, growth and investment in our high streets that we have been renowned for over the last decade.

Dr Hudson: Thank you both for your clear and thoughtful answers. The take-home message you have reiterated, that the hospitality and tourist sectors will be slower to recover than other parts of the economy, really adds strength to members of all political parties, who are all working together to call for targeted and further support for those sectors that are going to take longer to recover. That adds weight to our cross-party calls for that. Thank you for your evidence today.

Q197 **Chair:** Thank you, Neil. I would echo your words. I think we all realise, in our constituencies, that the hospitality sector has had huge problems and will need greater help to see you through. I also think that consumer confidence will be key to your recovery and you make a really good point, Kate, about people's disposable income after coronavirus. Will it be as much, and will that effect their spending? Of course, the answer is that it



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probably will. Government will need to deal with that. Andrew, you make the point on perhaps VAT and others. Reducing the rate would certainly be very helpful in stimulating the economy.

As a final question before we leave your panel, which has been very good. The British Beer and Pub Association is concerned over the collection and storage of personal consumer data. It poses significant legislative challenges. Kate, are you concerned about the requirement to collect consumer data and should the Government provide additional support?

Kate Nicholls: We want to work with the Government to understand the requirements they have for this. We want to play our part as a responsible sector in helping the Government to track and trace. It will be so critical in managing any future local spikes, so we want to play our part in doing that. We need to understand what kind of information they would like, how we can store it and how we can provide it at a local level. For our hotels, restaurants and visitor attractions, an awful lot of that will be captured at the point of booking or reserving tables. The challenge then is for those walk-in visits to the pub and the coffee shop.

We would need to work with the Government to understand what they are looking for, and then work to make sure that the data we have on our customers, from wi-fi, credit card transactions and bookings, can be shared. We need the Information Commissioner to give us certainty that the data protection regulations will not be compromised as a result. We need more information.

Q198 **Chair:** You need the Government to come back to you clearly on what they require, how this information is going to be held and that it is not going to be released to anybody else. Is that right?

Kate Nicholls: Absolutely, we need to start to have that dialogue, to understand what is required and how we can help.

Q199 **Chair:** Andrew, I do not know if you have anything else to add on that point.

Andrew Kenny: No, we invest hugely in data protection and privacy, but this question specifically is probably more relevant to how it interacts with the broader hospitality industry.

Chair: Kate and Andrew, thank you very much for a very good session and very clear answers. It will be very much part of our inquiry into Covid-19 and food availability. We wish you all well in your sector to open successfully, consumers to return, profitability to hopefully return and the economy to start building back up again. We all want to be safe, but we also want an economy that will restart and rejuvenate. We wish you well. Thank you very much.



Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Tim Lang and Anna Taylor.

Q200 **Chair:** Anna, you are an executive director of the Food Foundation. Would you like to introduce yourself?

Anna Taylor: Good afternoon, everyone. I am Anna Taylor. I work for the Food Foundation. We are a charity working to deliver a sustainable food system, which delivers health and wellbeing to everyone. We have done a lot of surveying on food insecurity since lockdown.

Chair: Then we have Professor Tim Lang, professor of food policy, Centre for Food Policy, City, University of London. Professor, give us a short introduction, please.

Professor Lang: Hello, Chair and members of the Committee. I am professor of food policy at the Centre for Food Policy. I work right across the food system and am particularly troubled by how we are and are not managing the food system in Covid-19. Thank you for inviting me.

Q201 **Chair:** Welcome to you both. I am going to start off with the first question. How prepared were the Government for disruption to the food supply chains caused by the pandemic?

Professor Lang: At one level, as we heard from the previous two witnesses, Kate Nicholls and Andrew Kenny, there was a period of disruption and discombobulation in the food service sector when it was closed down. As they were rightly saying, the run-up to the official closedown sent signals to the public to start stockpiling, acting differently and preparing for some emergency. This troubled me.

We ought to be a country that is incredibly well prepared. Barry Gardiner might remember when Labour was in power with the milk lorry blockade in 1999 to 2001. The Labour Government created the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to prepare exactly these systems, creating local resilience forums. I declare an interest: the only official body I am on at the moment is as a member of the Mayor of London's London Food Board. We sought and, indeed, got engagement two and a half years ago onwards with the London resilience, as it is called, when there was very little understanding about food systems. At the Centre for Food Policy, where I work, we wrote briefings for resilience forums, saying we probably ought to be taking this seriously, because of no-deal Brexit.

Britain really ought to have been very well prepared, because thinking had gone in. The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 stipulates that 13 critical infrastructure Departments should prepare resilience analyses. Indeed, any of you who read my recent book, *Feeding Britain*, will know, because I have summarised it, that the Defra resilience statement is extremely complacent. There should have been better understanding in the last four years, surely, than we had.



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Instead, we had ad hoc management, very understandable crisis management and heroic actions by civil society. I would like to pay tribute to Anna Taylor and the Food Foundation, and groups such as Sustain Alliance that have submitted witness statements to you. They did amazingly good things to try to address pockets of missed need.

My main point, Chair, is that the assumption was that, by focusing upon supply, it would automatically resolve problems of consumption. It did not; it has not. It exacerbated inequalities in diet and availability. To their credit, the Government set up the shielding system, a blunt instrument. Some of the food sent out in the parcels, as Anna and I know only too well, was hopelessly inadequate. This is my second point: that the fundamental issue was a lack of preparedness to address the nutrition and public health needs of the population as a whole. The Prime Minister rightly said, "We are all in this together", but that was not what was delivered by the food system.

I am not being critical of the retailers, by the way, or the food service. Indeed, as Kate Nicholls knows, I was arguing that food service, which is in localities and communities, could and should have been used, as indeed happened in the Second World War—

Chair: I think that is a long enough answer, Professor. We have the gist of what you are thinking. I will hand over now to Anna, please.

Anna Taylor: I would like to pick up on the point about whether we were prepared enough for the food insecurity at a personal or household level. We have tracked this very actively since the beginning of lockdown. This is an area where we were really underprepared and we need to think quite clearly about the scenarios going forward in terms of food insecurity, so we are prepared for what is to come and can put in place the right measures to protect people.

We found that, within the first three weeks of lockdown, 15% of adults reported food insecurity. On this, we asked them three questions: "Have you skipped meals because of not being able to get food or afford food? Have you gone hungry for the same reasons? Have you actually gone without eating for a whole day for the same reasons?" If people answer yes to one or more of those questions, they are classified as food insecure. There is usually a quantitative reduction in food, not just quality.

It was 15% of adults in the first phase of lockdown. That fell, for the second month of lockdown, to about 9.3%. Baseline figures, equivalent pre-Covid figures, are about 3.8%. We are still at levels that are more than double pre-lockdown, and we saw a fourfold increase in the first phase of lockdown. In numbers of people, that is 4.9 million adults and 1.7 million children who are currently experiencing food insecurity.

We have a problem, which is still extremely concerning, in terms of the numbers of people being affected. When we look forward to what is



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coming economically in the coming months, there is uncertainty about food prices as well. The IFS has recently reported the levels of inflation experienced since lockdown and we are at about 2.5% at the moment. That will have a knock-on impact on households that are struggling to afford food.

The challenge now is that we are where we are, but we need to really seriously think about the scenarios, and have a common understanding of the scale of need and a sense of where central Government policies, local authorities and the charitable sector fit in, in addressing that need.

Q202 **Chair:** You lead me on to a supplementary. Are Government, local government and charity working together, or is there still a disconnect? What is your view?

Anna Taylor: There are lots of good examples of where they have worked together on particular challenge issues. The problem we have is that we do not have a national co-ordination mechanism, as I would call it: somewhere that those three constituency groups essentially come together with a common understanding of what the need is, where it is and who is experiencing it. That would then drive an allocation of who is going to do what to try to address it.

The problem has been dealt with in quite a piecemeal way. I would argue that Defra, in fact, has done a quite incredible job in trying to bring together different parts of Government to address the issue of food vulnerability. It has stepped into a leadership vacuum and brought in different parts of Government, but the policies it has leverage over for tackling this issue are reasonably limited. We need to protect the leadership role that Defra has and that needs to continue, but we really need to strengthen that cross-Government leadership, bring in the local authorities and civil society, and come up with a proper national plan for the coming months. The chances are that this is going to get a lot worse before it gets better.

Q203 **Chair:** It is very much about joined-up government, across not only central Government but local government. Though you believe that Defra has done a pretty good job, it needs to be across Government, not just in Defra, basically.

Anna Taylor: Yes, that is right. The cross-ministerial taskforce is a really good step in the right direction. That group needs to be broadened and needs to be grounded in a common understanding of the level of need. That is what we are missing.

Q204 **Barry Gardiner:** Welcome to both Professor Lang and Anna Taylor. I want to explore the difference between a centralised approach and a community-based approach in the way in which we have gone about this. First, I want to pay tribute to, in my own patch, the SUFRA food bank, the Alpertons Covid kitchen and all the Covid support groups around Brent that have done a fantastic job locally, working with local people to stop



food poverty.

We have a hugely diverse community in Brent. It is one of the most ethnically diverse in the country. It has pockets of enormous deprivation and some of the 10 most deprived wards in the country. Our council found at the beginning that no account had been taken in the Government supply of the sorts of food that people would eat and the nutritional value. In particular, we have a very high diabetic problem, because of the large south Asian population that we have. There is no point in giving people who have diabetes Coco Pops for breakfast. These were the sorts of problem that we came up against at a local level.

Did the Government recognise quickly enough the importance of local community-led solutions, to ensure that the food supply, particularly for physically and economically vulnerable families, was adequate? Did they grasp it quickly enough? How did they inflect what they were doing to meet the needs that were being fed back to them from a local level?

Anna Taylor: There are a few things there to address. First, with respect to the food parcels for the shielded, your experience in Brent is something I have heard from a number of different local authorities, where local authorities stepped in very quickly and tried to fix some of the issues with those parcels. It signals a wider issue around food parcels that they are typically driven by supply. "What can we find? What can we put in the food parcel?" We saw photos of food parcels with four-litre bottles of orange squash going to medically vulnerable people, with some of the risks you have identified. It points to a sense that it was food, full stop. "It does not matter what it is. Let us just get it out to people. Nutrition is a nice-to-have, but not essential at this stage".

We are in a situation now where large numbers of people—our latest data shows close to a million—are reliant on food parcels. This is going on for some time. We need to address the nutritional standards around food parcels, particularly when they are funded by Government. We need to acknowledge that pre-Covid our diets were our biggest risk factor for poor health, and we have now seen evidence that nutritional status is important in terms of our risk of getting Covid and the long-term consequences of Covid on us. It is really important and we need to deal with the issue of nutritional standards around food parcels. That is a really important part of the next step for Government leadership.

In terms of community response, you have put your finger on a really important part of it where we see the most transformative action. It is where communities are doing things that are very responsive to local need, and setting things up that draw in local suppliers and meet local demand. We have seen this with the school voucher scheme, where schools have decided to put in place their own parcels. They have come up with schemes that suit the children in their school, and have designed schemes that are often really creative and you can see are dealing with safeguarding, educational and nutritional needs all at once, in a way that a national scheme is just limited in its ability to do.



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The national scheme was important, in this instance, as a safety net, but the importance of community-led responses has been shown over and over again. We need a conducive policy environment at the national level to allow all that stuff to flourish.

Q205 Barry Gardiner: Professor Lang, perhaps you would like to address some of those issues around local versus national. I know of the work you have been doing to ask, “What is a good food system?” Do we have that? How can we improve it? How can we prepare it for perhaps the future challenges to our food system that Covid may be a precursor of?

Professor Lang: You are the politicians, not me, but this is a highly political issue about whether Britain is right to have such a concentrated food system. In my own view, both economically and in terms of social policy—the sorts of things that Anna and I are concerned about—it is not. We have a highly centralised system. That meant that Defra could do emergency planning when it decided to get going on it by dealing with nine retailers. The problem is that it destroyed 1.8 million people’s jobs in food services, as we have just been hearing, which became a knock-on that disrupted but then ultimately profited those retailers. That is the political economy element to your question.

I would like to echo that in a different way. I have made available to the clerks, Chair, a letter that colleagues and I wrote to the Secretary of State at Defra and to the chief executive of Public Health England, saying, “Could we please have a public health nutrition-focused supply template to give better signals to the British food system?” That picks up on your point. I would like to read to you two sentences from the replies. Defra’s reply, which came some weeks later, basically said, “Public Health England is responsible for the health of the public and the effect of nutrition”. When Public Health England replied it said, “This is a matter for Ministers”.

There, just between those two state bodies, is an illustration of what we have in a much wider system. I do not want to disagree with Anna, whom I respect greatly, but I think there was much less co-ordination than I would like to see, both between and across Departments. I think we are beginning to get some of that, but we are not getting it across the levels. Good food systems analysis and food systems preparation for a country as rich as Britain ought to be multisector, multilevel and multi-actor. We do not have that yet, and I would really love to see your Committee coming up with that as a recommendation.

At the heart of it, surely, Chair, you from a rural constituency know that, unless public health drives what happens on the land, we get a disconnect. We cannot have that happen. Whatever happens in the trade deals your Committee is dealing with, and the trade deals being mooted at the moment, this really has to come out of Covid-19. It is an early warning. I completely agree with Anna about that. Some good firefighting has gone on. Some heroic stuff has gone on between some local authorities, like you are saying, Mr Gardiner, and particular communities



and certain areas. I do not know whether Anna would agree, but certainly, from watching what has happened across London, in those boroughs of London where there was well-developed civil society engagement with food and poverty, the preparation to do emergency action was further ahead than those areas where they had not even thought of it as an issue. That patchiness is a critical issue across the whole country. I hate the phrase “postcode lottery,” but it does matter where you are poor, where you are elderly and whether you have a good mix of trading standards, environmental health and directors of public health who take food as the heart of a public health system. That is unacceptable. When we look at other countries around the world and how they have dealt with this, they have dealt with it much better.

To go back to the previous witnesses, for my last point, the Government at the beginning understandably said, “Sorry, folks, you are locked down from eating out. Get it delivered”. There was no preparation for that delivery system. That was exactly my point in my earlier reply to you, Chair, when I said the food service sector was trying to become community feeding hubs. Let me just remind you, as a Government of Conservatives, for those of you who are Conservatives, that this is exactly what Churchill and Lord Woolton did in 1940, and what a success it was.

I agree with Anna that we have to do scenario planning. In the nightmare scenario, we to address the issue of how to get smoother supply chains at the local level. Wherever you are MPs for, that must be good news for the embers of the local food system you have.

Q206 **Barry Gardiner:** Anna, could I perhaps just ask you a couple of brief questions? The Chair has already touched on one. For the national voucher scheme, you mentioned that there were a limited number of providers incorporated into that. Why do you think it was that some of the supermarkets that traditionally provide to the poorest people in our community, and to the people who really needed those vouchers the most, were not on that scheme in first place? What disconnect was there that led to that, and was it remedied quickly enough?

Also to Anna Taylor, you have provided in the past this phrase about the comprehensive cross-Government co-ordination mechanism that the Chair picked you up on. How precisely would that work in practice?

Professor Lang: I agree with Anna’s position. Professors Millstone, Marsden and I made that our number one point in our submission to the Committee. Indeed, that is what we said to the Secretary of State and Duncan Selbie, the chief exec of Public Health England: there really ought to be an equivalent to SAGE. We have SAGE, whatever politicians think about that. The relationship between scientific evidence and policy-making, as we know, is fraught and complex, but there was not even a FAGE. There was not a food advisory group of experts. There should have been, because we need it. If we believe in a market economy of supply



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and demand, there has to be something to provide requisite good, solid evidence about the consumption side and the access and availability side.

Now to answer your question, Mr Gardiner, I do not know the answer for why certain companies were given the contracts for doling out the vouchers. You will have to ask them. I, frankly, was shocked by it. I speak as a London Food Board member, and my fellow members were equally shocked. I really think it is one of the scandals that we have had. We have to clean that up.

Anna Taylor: With respect to the free school meal vouchers and the retailers that were not on that scheme, my understand—and you probably should clarify this with DfE—is that the scheme was created for this purpose; it did not pre-exist, though the platform, Edenred, did. There were technical reasons that prevented some retailers being able to access the scheme, to do with how the vouchers were going to be redeemed. IT issues and so forth were involved. You are right. We had a situation where Waitrose and M&S were on the scheme from day one, and Aldi and Lidl were not, which did not seem to make very much sense. In the end, I think the Co-op did its own version of vouchers.

Professor Lang: And Morrisons, Anna, as well.

Anna Taylor: It was, frankly, a bit of a mess for quite a long time and had knock-on impacts on children. Our data shows how many children were missing out on vouchers for quite a significant time because of those problems.

Q207 **Barry Gardiner:** How many was that?

Anna Taylor: In the first month, about a third of children did not get any substitute. That has fallen since then.

On the second point about cross-Government co-ordination, there are two points to make here. One is that we understand that Defra has been doing some surveys on food insecurity, which are not yet in public domain and would valuably be in the public domain, so that we have a clear, common understanding of the scale of need. We have been doing a lot of surveys, putting them straight in the public domain, sending the data into Government Departments and making sure that it is very widely available.

Until we have a co-ordination mechanism agreed between Departments, with civil society at the table, involving the key agencies, such as FareShare, Trussell Trust and IFAN, and local authorities, which have stepped up hugely in this space, all with a common understanding of the scale of need and, therefore, what the response is, we are still scrabbling around in the dark to some extent.

Secondly, we are now seeing the voluntary and community sector, along with the emergency partnership that has been set up and led by the Red Cross, jumping into this space and trying to get a very detailed map of



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food insecurity across the country that can guide the voluntary sector response. Again, in the absence of Government being at that table, we are still only looking at half the picture, because many of the things that they identify will be problems that can only be solved by central Government policy.

We still have this disconnected system. I have worked a lot in humanitarian emergencies around the world. I worked for Save the Children for many years. In a typical humanitarian response, you very quickly convene all the key actors, you do a needs assessment and you work out who is going to do what. We have not had that.

Q208 **Chair:** I think that message comes across quite clearly. Also, with the food parcels finishing, and the Government scheme in particular ending on 1 August, Anna, do you see what is going to take its place? Are the charities ready to take that place? What do you consider to be the situation?

Anna Taylor: No. The shielded parcels are just a tiny piece of the bigger food parcel picture that local authorities and the voluntary sector are doing. I am really concerned that there are multiple cliff edges coming up. We are starting to now see local authorities running out of money, a concern to pass the caseload of people they have been supporting to the food charities, which are already struggling with way too many people needing help.

We do not have a plan in place for those who are still dependent on in-kind food assistance. Do not forget; some of those people could be helped with money. They do not necessarily need in-kind food assistance, but some do. There are those who are isolating and do not have another way of securing the food they need. No, we do not have a plan in place and we desperately need one, because we have the furlough scheme ending and then all the other things, economically, coming down the chute that are going to play out in the overall numbers of those experiencing food insecurity.

Professor Lang: Could I just flag one additional point to Anna's there? The issue that troubles me and, I am sure, Anna, having talked with her about this, is debt. We have rising debt. We went into this crisis with already a staggering lack of assets. I do not know if people on this Committee read the ONS Wealth and Assets Survey, but I summarise it in my *Feeding Britain* book. The bottom 50% of the population has assets of precisely £400 and median net property wealth of zero. In that context, to enter the crisis that we have had immediately creates a pool of need that we have to address.

Some people raised their eyebrows when colleagues and I wrote a letter to the Prime Minister very early in this crisis saying that we need to have a public health template applied. Call it rationing; call it food for all needs. I do not mind what it is called, but we have to have a template under which all bodies are the same, whether they are rich or poor. Life



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expectancy is not the same. We have to prevent damage of Covid-19 being added to by debt. StepChange and the debt charities are deeply troubled by this, and they are finding that food is cropping up. People are choosing between debt payments and food. This is in the fifth richest economy in the world, I need to remind us.

Barry Gardiner: I could not agree more with Professor Lang at the end there. It is tragic.

Chair: On school vouchers, the Education Department now has made the vouchers much more redeemable in many more supermarkets, including Aldi, Lidl and others, but no doubt there was a slowness in the approach. That is something we can learn in the future, because it is necessary to get that food into all types of supermarkets, especially those, perhaps, where some of our least well-off population are shopping. We get that message loud and clear.

Q209 **Robbie Moore:** Thank you both. My question is verging on from Barry's question to do with health and nutrition. Probably it would be useful if in this question you could comment on some of the actual food parcels that were delivered. I was involved in one of my community hubs in Keighley, my constituency. Seeing the make-up of some of the parcels, there were concerns at that time to do with their nutritional value. In ensuring that people had enough food, do you think the Government placed enough emphasis on ensuring people had access to healthy food over the last 11 or 12 weeks?

Anna Taylor: No, the Government did not pay enough attention to that from the start., Right from beginning, we should have had nutritional standards, particularly for those who are medically vulnerable and are often suffering from conditions that are made worse by diet, very high on the list of priorities for food parcels. We can do a lot better, frankly, than we did on that issue. Going forward, this has come out more recently through the Select Committee inquiry going on in the Lords at the moment, chaired by Lord Krebs, into social security and the extent to which people can afford a healthy diet when they are either on the minimum wage or in receipt of benefits. Those basic minimums are not used as a basis for estimating how much financial assistance people should receive.

Our data shows that, when you are in the poorest 10% of households, you have to spend 70% of your disposable income after housing on food in order to afford the Government's Eatwell Guide. This issue of affordable nutrition that can protect us all from ill health is something we have not paid nearly enough attention to, across a number of policy areas. The food parcel example starkly shows that. When you see somebody who suffers from type 2 diabetes receiving a whole pile of confectionary in a food parcel, it starkly tells that story.

This problem cuts right across other areas of policy, and we really need to fix it. The mortality and morbidity statistics we are seeing from the



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Covid crisis remind us again how important our diets are. We need to start taking this issue more seriously in public policy.

Professor Lang: Could I add one very quick point to what Anna said, with which I agree? As a member of the London Food Board I was joint member with London resilience, as I referred to earlier, and we spent many months trying to find out what the legal duty was of local authorities. This goes back to the Chair's opening question. As Anna might remember, it took a lot of effort. We could not find the legal duties. In the end, the City of London Corporation solicitor provided it and did the homework. Basically, there is only one bit of legislation for ensuring that people are adequately fed, and that is for children.

If there is one recommendation, Chair, that I would really love to see your Committee come up with, it would be that there is more of a duty to ensure that people are nutritionally soundly fed. Indeed, you are the EFRA Committee. I cannot believe that you would not agree with it at the same time being "sustainably fed". One thing that should come out of this, going a bit beyond Anna's interests, is that we need a food resilience and sustainability Act to fill the gap between the Agriculture Bill and the Environment Bill. Unless we deal with diet and get that to tick the boxes of health, environment and social justice—in other words, everyone has a right to a good diet—I do not think we are going to be a civilised society.

That sounds very philosophical. It is philosophical, but it is also very practical for exactly the reasons Anna has been saying, and I have been trying to agree with that. Making sure everyone in a time of crisis is well fed was one of the great successes of World War II. We are not doing it in the Covid war, and it is going to run for years.

Chair: Our opportunity to link agriculture, food production, the healthy food that we eat and the access to that is now probably greater than ever, because, for all the rights and wrongs of the common agriculture policy, it focused on just production and not actually what happened to that food.

Robbie Moore: To pick up on what Tim has just said there, it is a potential linkage that we could expand on. Thank you for those points. That is much appreciated.

Q210 **Geraint Davies:** It is on the same thing, really. I am agreeing very much with the witnesses that we have a situation where millions of people do not have enough healthy nutrition. If we were to agree, as I do, that there should be a duty to provide all people, minimally, with nutritious and healthy food, for their own rights and to fend off ill health, in a sustainable way, given that we are approaching a possible economic slump in the aftermath of Covid and possibly a no deal, what major measures should the Government put in place to deliver that duty?

I will turn to Anna first. I know Tim has already mentioned the food resilience and sustainability Act, but I just want to know what would be the major changes required to deliver those benefits. Obviously, in world



war two we did it through rationing.

Anna Taylor: Thank you for the question. First, we need to make sure that people have the income that they need to afford it. The starting point is the financial circumstances that people are in. A starting point for that would be to say, "We are moving to a situation where we have millions more people dependent on social security. We need to make sure that that social security protects them from ill health, and this is a building block for doing that, so let us look at the cost of a healthy diet and work out how we make sure that that happens".

Building on the last point, there are some opportunities coming now. I particularly want to highlight the situation for fruit and veg and the Agriculture Bill. Fruit and veg is particularly important to home in on, because it is something we need to eat a lot more of. Whether wealthy or not wealthy, we all need to be eating more of it. Particularly if you are on a low income, you are often struggling to get enough fruit and veg.

Our fruit and veg supply chains are less resilient. We are very dependent on countries that are prone to climate change emergencies. We are very dependent on countries that are water scarce for our fruit and veg. We have opportunity to grow more fruit and veg in the UK. That is not to say we are going to start growing avocados and pineapples, but there are a number of things that we can grow in the UK, which we could be growing more of and being more productive with in the UK sector.

There are opportunities to ask, "How do we help to build demand for fruit and vegetables, and come up with a really comprehensive horticulture plan for Britain that grows the market share of UK produce as well as driving up consumption?" Obviously, you do not want to do one without the other, but there are opportunities with school food, public procurement and a whole range of things. We have shown that with great veg advertising you can get people to buy more veg. There are lots of ways in which you can stimulate consumption and benefit British farmers by growing UK production. I would argue that the horticulture sector needs to really benefit from the provisions in the Agriculture Bill specifically, so that we are deliberately investing in that sector and helping it to grow. Those are just two suggestions.

Q211 **Geraint Davies:** On that point that has just been made by Anna, are you therefore saying, in essence, that this is an opportunity for the Government to intervene in food production at a farming level, to focus on nutritious, locally produced food that can be provided for people in need, as opposed to the current strategy which is to withdraw from the CAP and have an environmental scheme? I am all for the environment, but in terms of food supply, what we need to produce and what we need to make our nation healthy, in particular the poorest, is that what you are saying?

Anna Taylor: Yes, I am saying that. We did a survey in the first few weeks of lockdown of veg box schemes, and we found that their demand



had increased by 110%. Many of them were prioritising key workers in how they were responding to that demand. Many of them had cross-subsidy schemes, which allowed them to provide for people on a low income. These are often more agro-ecological businesses that are protecting the environment, producing a great product and serving their communities. There are real opportunities to grow that part of the food production system, and we have neglected it, I would argue, to date.

Q212 Geraint Davies: Tim, is there a lesson from the war?

Professor Lang: I have a very quick statistic. I agree with that. Britain has 18 million hectares of land; 6 million of those, one-third, are cropable. Precisely 149,000 are down to horticulture. It is tiny. We do not take fruit or veg, the good things for health, seriously. Anna and I are completely agreed on this. We have to get that right, and that has to be part of the lessons of Covid-19.

To go back to my preliminary remarks to you, Chair, I do not want to say this too nastily, but the danger is that there is an air of self-satisfaction among the retailers to think, "We cracked it. We did it. No one starved. There are no dead bodies in the street, so it was all okay". There are ruins in food service sector, as the previous witnesses were saying. The food service sector represented many different supply chains and much more local companies, celebrating that localism, whereas the big retailers are giant corporations addressing and using global sourcing. There is a very important issue there back into the political economy issues. I completely agree with what Anna said.

Q213 Geraint Davies: In a nutshell, you are talking about a local nutritious supply for local communities, rather than depending on everything being imported and going through big retailers, which make big margins from millions of poor people.

Professor Lang: One of the only areas of growth in the economy, as you know, is in food retailing. There is a really important issue, not for this Committee but for the Defence Committee, which I have tried to draw to its attention. A more resilient food system is a more decentralised food system. Remember, we have been fed by 41% of food coming through Europe. The system has not been tested in resilience terms yet, not at all.

Q214 Ian Byrne: Thanks very much for the evidence. It has been really fascinating, and the work you both do is awe-inspiring, to be honest. I take a real avid interest in it, certainly with what we do in Liverpool. This question, really, to begin with is Anna's. How should the national food strategy address the weaknesses in the food supply system that have been highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic? Also, Anna, is the NFS a perfect opportunity to bring the right to food into domestic legislation?

Anna Taylor: Thank you. That is a really important question. We are now in a situation where the national food strategy is going to start reporting quite soon. We are in a situation where household food



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insecurity needs a fundamental rethink in the context of the crisis as it is currently happening, and the national food strategy needs to identify the actions that could be taken to tackle that, recognising, of course, that its scope does not stray fully into the social security system. It has a food system piece around it. However, there are a number of things that the national food strategy could focus on.

With respect to your point on the right to food, our view is that we could really progress thinking around the right to food if we start with children, largely because we have food insecurity, which we have widely documented, among children, but we also have very significant inequalities in obesity among children, with double the rates among the poorest children compared to the wealthiest. We think we could progress this issue by really grabbing hold of the areas of policy relating to school food, provision preschool food provision and the range of policy instruments that directly affect children, where we think there are a number of really critical gaps and where many children are going to become more dependent on these schemes for securing their diets.

At the moment we have 1.3 million children dependent on free school meals pre-Covid in England. That number is likely to go up very significantly, as the universal credit applications come through and people shift on to the benefits system. These schemes are going to become of even greater national importance. We have to make sure that they deliver bang for their buck.

We think there has just been too much slow progress around children's food generally. A number of consultations onto the obesity plan have stalled. We did a big inquiry that came out last year. DfE was very keen on it at the beginning and it has dragged its feet since. I think we need a children's right to food commission to accelerate these areas of policy of children's food across the board. It is even more urgent now, because these food provision policies are that much more important to our children's diet when you look at the national picture.

These are two things that we can really grab hold of now. I hope that the national food strategy will be able to speak to them. We have seen tremendous efforts from Marcus Rashford in the last week in making the case for support for children during the holidays. This bogus logic, frankly, that children are hungry during term time but not in the holidays has been exposed. These are all the things that this children's right to food commission needs to grab hold of, laying down the foundations for health and wellbeing among our children going forward. We have a bigger imperative now than we have ever had before and we need to grab it.

Professor Lang: Not in any way to disagree with anything that Anna has said, I am just going to say that we must not just do everything in the name of children, actually. I did my first research on food poverty nearly 40 years ago in Sheffield, Manchester and Blyth Valley. It was clear then and I learned very quickly that we can do things in the name of children,



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but unless you focus on mothers and parents you are not dealing with the total population. It is not your Committee's responsibility, Chair, but it is the Government's responsibility, and the Select Committees' as a whole. The public's health requires us to equally make sure that adults are well fed, and the elderly as well, because the knock-on to the NHS is absolutely immense. That data has been around from academics; the Wanless inquiry in 2002 to 2004 made it clear.

It is your Committee and what you do is up to you, but I would not want you just to only act on the name and behalf of children. It must be mothers in particular, and parents in general. There must be legal rights for all citizens. To give a quick example, Sweden has several contingency preparations of the sort that I think Britain should have had. As I said, the London Food Board could only find legal duties in relation to children. Those legal duties for a better diet and good diet must be more. Anna is quite right. It is not just in term time but all of the time, but it must also apply as an aspiration for the population as a whole. Otherwise, we cripple the NHS, and that is what has been happening.

Q215 Ian Byrne: As a quick follow up, if we did have the legislation in place, do we think there would have been a more coherent strategy from Government regarding the response to Covid? Obviously, part of this is to learn lessons for the possibility of encountering another pandemic. Would you both agree if it was in legislation we would have a far more cohesive strategy moving forward and it would benefit the nation as a whole?

Professor Lang: If you do not have it in legislation, you do not have indicators and it does not happen. Secondly, I am the boring academic and Anna is the people's tribune, so I will be the boring academic here. I think we are talking about institutions of governance. We do not have the right institutions of governances. Anna and I are united in wanting a food plan. We think the national food strategy is very promising, but will its arms be tied behind its back? That is a question I raise for you. Unless we have a national food council, unless we have resilience forums operating at the regional and local level, unless those local authorities start having powers that are more than just dealing with children in school, I do not think we are civilised food country.

Now go to Sweden. Sweden was getting advice in 2018 for preparing not just for coronavirus, but for emergencies. I can take you to my book where I summarise it. The contingency planning is frankly laughable in what we did when it came to food.

Anna Taylor: I take your points. I think definitely we would have had a better response, in answer to your question, if we had that captured in legislation, because I think it drives those accountability mechanisms, which we do not have at the moment. It drives an understanding of what is going on on the ground, the data and using that to really inform strategy. If we get the legal structures right, the governance arrangements are right and Parliament is involved in scrutinising those,



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we will not be in the situation we have now with such high levels of unmet need.

Q216 **Rosie Duffield:** I have a question to both of you. Should the Agriculture Bill be changed to reflect the lessons learned from the pandemic and how? For example, do we need a mechanism to ensure that reports on food security are acted upon? I know that Professor Lang has previously suggested that the Government report to the House at least once every five years on food security, for example.

Professor Lang: Yes, I would like it more than that. Linking to Ian Byrne's question, unless we have it in legislation that the goal of a food system, which is not just agriculture, but particularly horticulture, is to deliver the public health and to do it within sustainability criteria, I do not see how we can expect farmers or restaurateurs to know where they are. One of the lessons already from Covid-19—and this applies to public health generally, by the way, not just the food system—is that unless we have a shared framework no one quite knows what their bit is to do.

It is called co-ordination. Planning has not been fashionable, but we are seeing why planning is actually quite good. In fact, it is very good. We have to have it at multiple levels, which I want to stress again. We have talked about the national level and the local. We have to remember it is a devolved economy when it comes to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The problem is England. England does not have regions.

There is one thing, if we are going to resolve this in the long term. This is more your area than mine, but we need much more than having local economic partnerships. LEPs are terribly weak compared to the regional development agencies, which were abolished by the coalition in 2010. We need to have whatever else in food. We need to have regional food committees with regional powers. I have argued this at some length in my book, if you want it. I will send you one, Rosie. If you send me your address I will pay for it myself.

Rosie Duffield: Just send it to Parliament. That is lovely. Thank you.

Professor Lang: You will get it in two years' time when you are allowed back in. I have tried to spell that out. It sounds very boring and very academic. We have to have this multilevel aspect. You cannot expect restaurateurs alongside Tesco to speak with the same tune on Anglesey, an area I know very well, or London, which is bigger than many European countries, unless there is a shared framework. There has to be a shared framework of some sort.

That has to have not just the auditing that Anna was rightly referring to, but advice mechanisms. We started down that route with the banking crisis in 2007-08, and it was all closed in 2010 with the coalition Government. We have 10 wasted years. Your Committee inquiry is really important. It is picking up and running when the Government, I think rightly—and I support the national food strategy—are realising the error



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of their ways. This Committee's inquiry can really give some detail on what we want. We want a national food council, we want legislation, we want local powers, we want regional powers. All these things are about building a resilient citizenship, not just a resilient food system.

Anna Taylor: We should be looking at the Agriculture Bill in the light of the crisis. There are two areas, both touched on through your comments. One is that household food insecurity, and not just national food security, should be the focus of regular reporting to Parliament with reviewing of that data. It is really important that these become metrics of public concern, which we are actively tracking and acting on.

Secondly, there is the point around paying for public goods, which is the essence of the Agriculture Bill and a great, progressive idea. We need to be thinking about public goods in terms of health and nutrition in the ways we have covered in the earlier discussion. I would support amendments that talk about public goods in terms of public health.

Professor Lang: I agree with that.

Chair: Thank you for some very good evidence this afternoon. You have given certainly me food for thought, because I have said for a long time that within the Agriculture Bill there is not enough about food and healthy food. Therefore, this outbreak of Covid has highlighted the plight of many people getting food and getting the right type of food. It is time now, when we talk about public good, to talk about the environment but also about food and food production. Coming back to Parliament only every five years to talk about food security is not enough.

Therefore, we have an opportunity to really be positive, to look at the horticultural side, the vegetable production, the fruit production, healthy meat production that is grass-fed. All these things are really very poignant. You have highlighted for us this afternoon the amount of work communities are doing to get food out to the poorest in society. Government need to support them, but we also need to be careful about exactly what type of food parcels and food we are supplying, and to the right people. Much of this was going on before, but what has happened now has highlighted the whole situation.

To repeat myself, when we had the common agricultural policy, we did not have the ability to link food, food production and getting food to people who really need it, some of the poorest in society. We were not able to do that under the old policy, whereas now we should be able to do it. We will have to come back and consider some of these situations in the Agriculture Bill. I do not know how much of this we can get directly into our food report, but we will do our very best to link this, to make sure that we can help.

The point made is that the economy is going to take a downturn dramatically. It is bound to, in the circumstances. Let us hope it kicks back a little better than we think it might, but we are going to need to



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support the poorest in society and get food out there. What you have given us this afternoon gives us some real evidence to put in our report. I thank you both for your evidence this afternoon. I thank members for their questions. At this stage, I think I say, "Order, order," and we all disappear. Thank you very much.