



Growing Hungry: The Call for a Childhood Hunger Commission for London



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The Call for a Childhood Hunger Commission for London

Foreword

Nearly a quarter of a million children in London are living in food insecurity. But with the rapid increase of inflation and energy costs coinciding with a stagnation in incomes this year, it is highly likely that this figure has already increased. We will continue to see even more children who might go to school or bed with their tummy rumbling, who are not able to have friends around for dinner, or who feel guilty as their parents go without eating to ensure that they don't have to.

It cannot be right that in the capital city of the sixth richest country in the world some children do not have enough food to eat, to safely grow, learn and play.

We knew that before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, almost four in ten children in London were living in poverty. The pandemic exposed, exploited and exacerbated the adverse impact of the social determinants of health. We know that many Londoners lost their jobs or survived on reduced pay packets as the necessary virus-limiting lockdowns suppressed London's economy. We saw children, many of whom live in poverty, learning from home without immediate access to broadband connectivity or laptops, required for remote learning. We also witnessed the devastating impact on the food industry as supermarket shelves lay bare resulting in the Mayor of London stepping forward to support food banks which were on the verge of collapse.

The coronavirus pandemic resulted in the biggest national emergency since the Second World War, with the Government imposing extensive national restrictions to suppress the spread of the new virus. The Government listened to the calls from businesses, charities

and local authorities and provided a level of support not seen before in many of our lifetimes, as more than one million Londoners were furloughed within three months.

Since then, statistics show that food insecurity remains high in London, especially amongst those on lower incomes. The uplift in Universal Credit brought in during the pandemic, reduced the levels of food insecurity for those receiving the extra £20 per week. This action provides clear evidence that Government interventions can reduce food insecurity.

Londoners are now facing a severe cost of living crisis during what should be a period of economic recovery. In addition to the disruption caused by the pandemic, Londoners are facing record high inflation, predicted to go even higher, putting pressure on their finances as energy and food costs surge whilst real incomes stagnate or in many cases decrease. Londoners will see a drop in their disposable income more than double that witnessed during the 2008 financial crash and greater than what was experienced during World War Two. As a result, we will see increasing numbers of Londoners plunged into poverty. Put simply, this means more children in London will be at risk of going hungry.

But it does not have to be this way. We have seen in the past that the right policies reduce child poverty and childhood hunger. By working together, national government, local government and the Mayor of London could tackle this issue in London and across the country.

Instead, we have a Government whose policies risk fueling the perception outside of London that the capital is paved with gold. Evidence of this can be found in the first round of funding for the Levelling-Up Fund. London boroughs such as

Hackney were only allocated 16p per head, in stark contrast to wealthier Bromsgrove in Worcestershire which will be receiving £148.33 per head.¹ In reality, London has always had some of the highest levels of deprivation and some of the starkest health inequalities. Pitting London against the rest of the country is short sighted and disingenuous. London is not homogeneous and levelling-up cannot be at the expense of the poorest Londoners. Efforts to ensure that those with the lowest incomes get the support they need continue, such as the current debate to increase benefits in line with inflation rather than wages. I hope that the Government U-turns on this like they did with the reversal of the plan to abolish the top 45p rate of tax.

The roadmap to recovery must include children – this is our chance to rebuild a fairer, more equal society. The first 1,000 days in the life of a child have the greatest impact on life outcomes. This is our opportunity to re-set the slate, change the norms, and revolutionise a way of living for all those children who have lived through the pandemic and the cost of living crisis, or those born during and after. Without action to tackle children’s hunger in London, we let them down with a failure of policy and imagination.

I would like to thank the campaigners, activists and volunteers who work hard to tackle the issues of food insecurity and poverty in London. It was important that their voices and expertise were reflected in this report and I consulted with the Trust for London, Child Poverty Action Group, 4 in 10, Trussell Trust, Coram

and Gingerbread when researching this topic. I am very grateful for their time and comments. Finally, I would like to say a special thank you to Pecan, a community-based organisation who amongst many projects, run a local food bank. Pecan carries out crucial work in my constituency of Lambeth and Southwark and are partners in launching this report. I am grateful to all those who have provided me with insight into the struggles that Londoners face when trying to access the basic requirement of food. The expertise and dedication of these individuals gives me confidence that, with the right political action, we can end childhood hunger in London.



Marina Ahmad
Assembly Member for Lambeth and Southwark

Foreword

We need to address the impact food insecurity is having on children.

It is unacceptable that more than a quarter of a million children in London are living in families that do not receive a minimum income to be able to buy the necessities they need in life. And that is a conservative figure which I think we probably all know is actually much higher.

Before I started doing what I do now, I was a greengrocer. I've worked with suppliers, supplying wholesale markets with fruit and veg. I now work closely with charities working to improve life for children in the UK, particularly when it comes to making sure they have enough healthy food to eat.

I have seen first-hand the difficulties many people are facing just trying to feed their families during this cost of living crisis. I have also seen how businesses are struggling to supply food as budgets become ever more constrained.

There is no silver bullet. Hunger cannot be wiped out with food donations or food banks, tips and tricks to reduce your shopping bills or food swaps alone.

The cost of food is at a record high across the board, and on top of rising energy prices - incomes are just not keeping pace.

I am concerned that more and more people, especially children, are going without the basic necessities, such as food, as this report shows.

We need more policy interventions, like we have seen with the Healthy Start Scheme, to support people through these difficult economic times. We must ensure that children are getting those all-important nutrients they need to grow, develop, learn and maintain a healthy start.

A Childhood Hunger Commission can tackle the issue of hunger strategically across London. It could explore the expansion of Free School Meals. And it could map out healthy food monitoring and support services for mothers and infants from antenatal care to the beginning of primary school.

Nobody should be going without food. It is a travesty that children are going to bed, and going to school, with empty stomachs. And that's why I am supporting the recommendations in this report.

It isn't easy to fix this, but it is possible, it is doable, and it is necessary. We have an obligation to feed and look after the children in our communities, in our boroughs, and in this country. This is something that I feel hugely strongly about, incredibly passionately about and if we all work together, we can fix this. And we must fix this.



Chris Bavin
TV Presenter and Cook Book Author

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Mayor of London should form a Childhood Hunger Commission for London.

Recommendation 2

The Mayor should lobby the Government to take immediate action to tackle the cost of living crisis by raising incomes substantially and providing immediate monetary support to low income families.

Recommendation 3

The Childhood Hunger Commission should map out healthy food monitoring and support services for mothers and infants from antenatal care up to the beginning of primary school. This should identify any gaps between services during this period and identify actions which can guarantee children have access to nutritious food prior to attending primary school.

Recommendation 4

The Mayor should lobby the Government to extend Universal Free School Meals to all children in early years education, primary school and secondary school, during term time and school holidays. The Child Hunger Commission should explore the feasibility and impact of these measures.

Childhood Hunger in London: The Scale of the problem

Child poverty has increased dramatically since 2010, despite consistently falling between 1998 and 2010. Four in ten children in our city live in poverty; higher than the national average of almost three in ten.² Childhood hunger is a direct consequence of poverty.

The most recent data available³ indicates that prior to the pandemic, overall poverty levels after housing costs in London had decreased marginally since 2016/17, from 28% to 27%.⁴ But this is not felt equally. Londoners from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background had a poverty rate of 39%, nearly twice the rate for groups identifying as White. Single parents are also far more likely to live in poverty, with 54% of these families living in relative poverty.⁵ Location is another indicator of the chances of living in poverty as 51.4% of children in Tower Hamlets are living in poverty after housing costs, compared to 15.6% in Richmond Upon Thames.⁶ Some outer London boroughs have seemingly overall lower average figures for child poverty but this masks the fact that there are pockets of high deprivation in some of their wards.⁷

35% of London's children live in households that fall within the government definition of poverty⁸ which equates to more than 600,000 children going without the essentials in life.⁹ This is more than at any other time since the Family Resources Survey data series began in 1994/95. The latest available data from End Child Poverty published in 2022, found that five of the ten UK local authorities with the highest child poverty rates were in the capital, even before Londoners felt the economic impacts of the pandemic and the current cost of living crisis.¹⁰

London accounts for five of the top ten UK boroughs with the highest levels of child poverty; in Tower Hamlets, the borough with the highest level of child poverty in the UK, more than half of children live in poverty. The first local authority to rank outside London is Luton which has the fifth highest level of child poverty. Seven out of the top twenty poorest boroughs in the UK are in London.

It is difficult to understand how London has not been given a higher priority when assessing access to the Levelling-Up Fund, given that these statistics were readily available before the start of the pandemic.

Being **food insecure means** that at times a person's food intake is reduced and their eating patterns are disrupted because of a lack of money and other resources for obtaining food, something that many Londoners witnessed early on in the pandemic.

Each year, the government publishes a survey of income poverty in the UK called **Households Below Average Income (HBAI)**. This survey sets the poverty line in the UK at 60 per cent of the median UK household income at that time. In other words, if a household's income is less than 60 per cent of this average, HBAI considers them to be living in poverty. This is a measure of relative poverty. Data on income is collected through the yearly Family Resources Survey.

Local Authority	Per cent of children below 60% median income after housing costs, 2019/20
UK	27%
Tower Hamlets	51.4%
Newham	49.5%
Barking and Dagenham	46.4%
Hackney	45.3%
Luton	42.6%
Waltham Forest	42.6%
Newcastle upon Tyne	42.4%
Birmingham	42.2%
Manchester	42.0%
Middlesbrough	41.2%
Greenwich	40.1%
Bradford	39.8%
Sunderland	39.7%
Sandwell	39.6%
Brent	39.5%
Oldham	39.3%
Redcar and Cleveland	39.3%
South Tyneside	39.1%
Hartlepool	39.0%
Peterborough	38.9%

Source: End Child Poverty Coalition

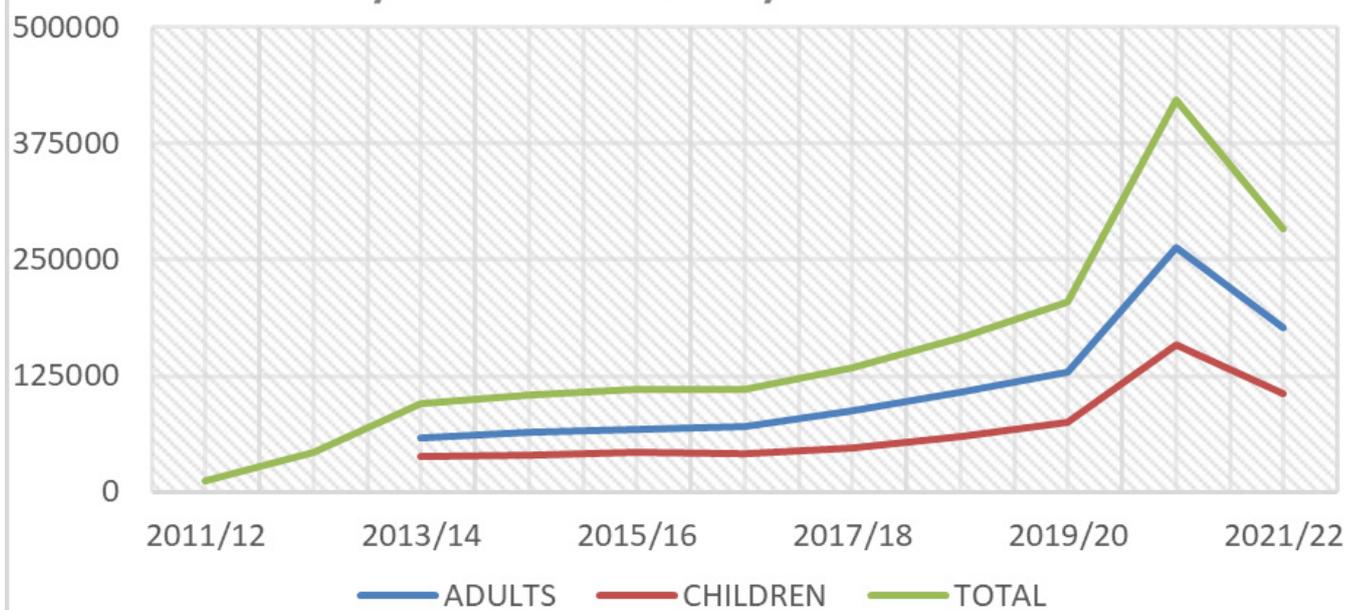
While the Mayor does not have many statutory powers over the economy, in 2020 he stated that his administration's 'core business must be to help Londoners and give them a helping hand'.¹¹ One of the ways the Mayor can do this is through lobbying the government to ensure London's poorest areas do not lose out in any attempt to 'level up' the country. In addition, the Mayor can take work closely with the local authorities most impacted by child poverty to both provide advice and support to struggling Londoners and help these areas in their pursuit of good growth, including those most in need.

The analysis published by the End Child Poverty Coalition demonstrates the impact of the £20 Universal Credit uplift, which is likely to be the

reason why child poverty levels have declined slightly in 2020/21. There is a real concern that with the removal of the Universal Credit uplift and increases to food and energy bills, poverty levels will rise again.

When COVID-19 hit in March 2020, food banks saw a rapid rise in the number of Londoners receiving emergency food parcels to the point where London's food banks were overwhelmed and almost ran out of food over the Easter weekend that year. An effect of the present cost of living crisis is that food banks are now short on donations as people do not have spare food capacity to donate as they previously did.

Increase in food bank usage between 2011/12 and 2021/22



Source: Trussel Trust Latest Stats, London Region

Table 1: End of year statistics from The Trussel Trust in London, year runs from 1st April to 31st March

Year	Adults	Children	Total	% change on year	% increase since 2011/12
2011/12			11,866		
2012/13			42,064	254%	254%
2013/14	58,315	37,324	95,639	127%	706%
2014/15	64,756	40,043	104,799	10%	783%
2015/16	67,861	42,503	110,364	5%	830%
2016/17	70,422	40,679	111,101	1%	836%
2017/18	86,607	47,637	134,244	21%	1,031%
2018/19	106,737	59,775	166,512	24%	1,303%
2019/20	129,424	74,864	204,187	23%	1,621%
2020/21	262,436	158,990	421,426	106%	3,452%
2021/22	177,355	106,207	283,562	-33%	2,290%

Using figures from the Trussell Trust, we can see there has been an increase in Londoners receiving food parcels in the last decade, and exceptionally during the height of COVID-19. Despite the Government interventions during the pandemic, a record number of Londoners relied on emergency food parcels to get by. The end of year data for 2021/22 indicates that there has been some decrease in the number of emergency parcels being supplied since the height of the pandemic when access to food was limited, but the figure remains higher than before COVID-19 and with a massive increase of 2,290% since 2010.

Moreover, these figures are for just those accessing emergency parcels at Trussell Trust food banks. The true number is likely to be much higher as the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN), which represents more than 500 independent food banks operating across the UK, has identified at least 1,034 independent food banks across the UK in addition to food banks in the Trussell Trust network, Salvation Army, and school-based food banks.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, London saw the largest percentage increases for food bank usage compared to the previous financial year and is the only region of the UK where the number of parcels distributed by the Trussell Trust has more than doubled, an increase of 106%. In comparison, other regions in England have seen smaller percentage increases, between 13% and 52%, while overall England has on average saw a 41% increase.¹² The Trussell Trust reported an 81% increase for emergency food parcels from food banks in its network during the last two weeks of March 2020, compared to the same period in 2019 – including a 122% rise in parcels given to children, as the coronavirus pandemic began to unfold. Food banks in the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) reported an average 59% increase in need from February to March 2020, 17 times higher than the same time in the previous year.¹³

The subsequent food shortages in supermarkets and loss of income in the first wave of the

COVID-19 pandemic saw food banks in London struggle to stay operational resulting in the Mayor of London coordinating supplies to ensure Londoners received the food that they needed. While the exact nature of the coming cost of living crisis is different to the food insecurity witnessed under the pandemic, the Mayor will once again need to coordinate a robust response with London boroughs to ensure we tackle food insecurity in the coming months.

Children going hungry in 2022

Londoners are now in the midst of a cost of living crisis. In July 2022, inflation rose to a 40-year high of 10.1% but had dropped marginally to 9.9% in August.¹⁴ The increase in inflation is currently being driven by food prices, which are rising at a rate of 13.1%¹⁵ but modelling suggests it could go as high as 20% come April 2023.¹⁶

The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) at the Spring Statement in March 2022 expected the Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation to peak at 8.7% in quarter 4 of (October) 2022 and be above 7% from April 2022 to January 2023 – much higher than the forecasts peak of 4.4%.¹⁷ In actuality, inflation rates and predictions continue to climb. In August 2022, the Bank of England forecast that rising energy prices will push CPI inflation to over 13% by October.¹⁸ Goldman Sachs has since warned that UK inflation could rise to 22% in January 2023 which would be devastating for many Londoners.¹⁹

Since then, the new Prime Minister Liz Truss vowed to cut taxes to boost the economy and help people with rising living costs. On the 23 September at the fiscal event also known as the mini-budget, the then Chancellor, Kwasi Kwarteng made a series of big announcements, such as a reversal of the national insurance increase, scrapping the planned rise in corporation tax and removing green levies. The interventions announced by the former Chancellor could potentially have big impact on Londoners, especially for the poorest Londoners

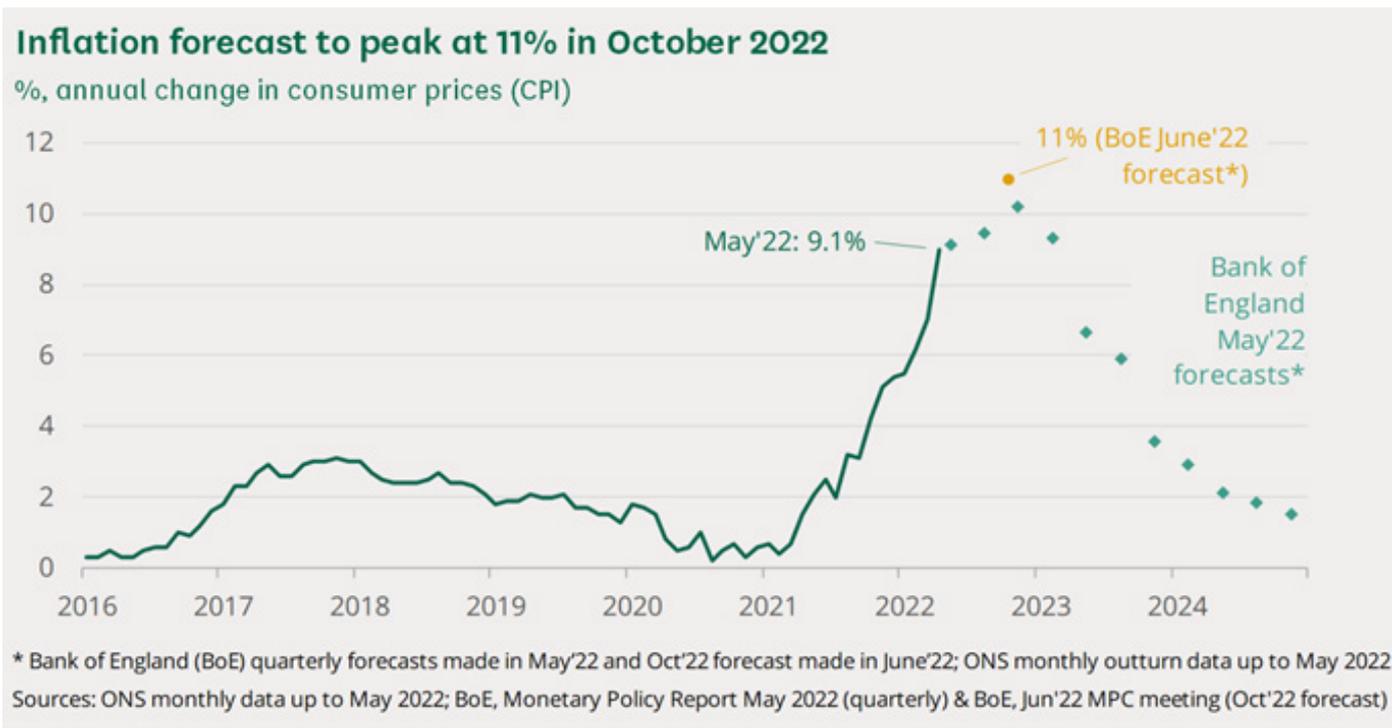
who will not benefit much from the announcements. The announcements led to economic turmoil as the the pound fell to a record low of 1.03 against the US dollar after the former Chancellor doubled down on his £45bn package of tax cuts by pledging to go further.²⁰ The Bank of England triggered an emergency £65bn bond-buying programme on 28 September to stem the crisis triggered by the fiscal statement, which put entire pension funds at risk of insolvency.²¹ This was done to prevent spill over into households and businesses. The government has maintained the market reaction was due to external, global factors, but the Bank of England stated the UK was an outlier.²² The upcoming interest rates raise which is expected on the 3 November 2022 to tackle the economic crisis on top of the existing cost of living crisis is a worry, especially for those Londoners with mortgages.

We can expect to see a new report from the OBR on the 31 October 2022 when the new Chancellor will make his fiscal statement, and that will provide independent forecast of how the economy will perform in coming years. The refusal of the Government to publish one alongside the fiscal event on 23 September 2022

means that we do not have a current up to date forecast.²³

The Resolution Foundation's analysis of the rise in inflation in May 2022 found that in practice low income households face a higher rate of inflation than higher income households. This is because items which have seen the highest price rises such as gas, electricity and food make up a higher proportion of spend for people in low-income households. This means that whilst CPI was 10.1% in July 2022, it was 10.9% for the poorest tenth of households. The Resolution Foundation predict that by October's inflation announcement the lowest income households will face inflation rates of 15%, compared to 11% for the highest-income households.²⁴

Households on welfare support will find this winter increasingly difficult as benefit rates do not keep up with inflation, and it requires government intervention for this to change. Benefits are usually uprated in April using the previous September's rate of CPI inflation but given the rapid nature of inflation increase, any uprating based in September could be significantly out of date by March. The Resolution Foundation expect that unemployment benefits for example, will be 11% lower in real terms



Source: House of Commons Research Briefings

by March 2023 than they were in October 2021 or 31 per cent lower than they were in September 2021, when the £20 Universal Credit uplift was still in place.²⁵

The energy price cap rose by 54% in April 2022. In October 2022 the Energy Price Guarantee for domestic users was introduced. Whilst this reduced the impact on households of volatility of the energy market, it still increased average energy prices significantly. Analysts at Cornwall Insight had previously forecast the typical bill would be £5,386 a year.²⁶ We are awaiting new forecasts following the changes to the Energy Price Guarantee announced 17 October 2022.

These price rises will be very difficult for the poorest households as energy costs make up a larger proportion of their spending. This is especially true for those on pre-payment meters of which the Resolution Foundation believe will need to find £700 a month in the coldest months of January and February just to keep warm.²⁷ But this sharp increase in energy prices, in addition to inflation and falling wages will be unsustainable for vast numbers of Londoners. Given the Mayor's role in tackling health inequalities, it will be important that City Hall looks at the risks this poses for older Londoners in particular who may struggle to heat their homes this winter.

As inflation increases this year, wages will not

keep pace with the rising costs, cutting pay by real terms and causing big squeezes on incomes. This follows 15 years of weak pay growth and a forecast sharp fall in average real pay up until 2023, bringing the level down to where it was in 2007. The Resolution Foundation project median incomes will fall by 10% between 2021/22 and 2023/24, equivalent to £2,800 in absolute terms.²⁸

The Resolution Foundation had some stark predictions regarding poverty levels in the UK in the absence of policy interventions. They predict that absolute poverty will rise from 17% in 2021/22 to 22% in 2023/24 bring more than an additional 3 million people into poverty.

When looking at the number of children this will impact, the Resolution Foundation project that absolute child poverty will increase from 23% in 2021/22 to 31% by 2024, affecting another one million children across the UK.

This means additional pressures on families' household budgets as food prices, energy costs and childcare costs continue to increase and wages do not. Some Londoners find themselves making the difficult choice between eating or heating their homes. We have evidence that parents are missing meals so that they can feed their children in this cost of living crisis which is an unacceptable choice.

Measures of poverty

- JRF's Minimum Income Standard (MIS) – MIS itself is not a measure of poverty, but is what the public has said is sufficient income to afford a minimum acceptable standard of living
- relative income poverty, where households have less than 60% of contemporary median income
- absolute income poverty, where households have less than 60% of the median income in 2010/11, uprated by inflation
- material deprivation, where you can't afford certain essential items and activities
- destitution, where you can't afford basics such as shelter, heating and clothing.

Relative and absolute poverty can be presented before and after housing costs (these include rent or mortgage interest, buildings insurance and water rates) and are presented after direct taxes and National Insurance, including Council Tax.

Data showed that in the period 3 to 13 March 2022, as inflation started to increase, 83% of adults reported their cost of living had increased over the last month, which included rising food shop prices, rising energy bills and rising fuel prices.²⁹ Polling by the Greater London Authority (GLA) in June 2022 found that nearly half of Londoners were struggling to make ends meet.

- 83% of adults in London said their households cost of living has increased over the last six months
- 28% of Londoners were 'just about managing'
- 15% were 'financially struggling'
- 12 per cent of Londoners said they have regularly or occasionally been unable to buy food or essential items or relied on outside support in the last six months.³⁰

We can expect those figures to have increased in the four months since June as inflation continued to increase.

It is important to note that single parents disproportionately face higher outgoings and are more likely to experience problem debt, compared to couples with children. Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, 13% of single parents were in severe problem debt, compared to 5% of couple parents and 4% of single adults. The reality of this means that:

- 66% of single parents had to cut back on food for themselves as a result of making debt repayments.
- 20% of single parents had to cut back on food for their children as a result of making debt repayments.
- 19% of single parents in problem debt had recently used a foodbank, compared to 12% of those not in problem debt.³¹

The most recent Family Resources Survey 2019-2020 found that the uplift in Universal Credit brought in during the pandemic, reduced the levels of food insecurity. The Food Foundation's



analysis in 2022 shows that whilst the prevalence of food insecurity was still high, for those households in receipt of Universal Credit, food insecurity was 37% lower when the uplift was in place compared to before the pandemic.³² Furthermore, for people on legacy benefits³³ who did not qualify for the uplift, food insecurity levels remained elevated. This demonstrates the positive impact that can be achieved with targeted support towards those on the lowest incomes.

However, Universal Credit is not a panacea for food insecurity. The cost of bringing up a child in London is much greater as a result of higher costs for housing and childcare. Research has found that Universal Credit provides only enough childcare support to enable London parents to work about half the time.³⁴

Despite rising levels of inflation, the £20 Universal Credit uplift was removed in October 2021. The result of this as seen by the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) is that food banks are unable to meet rising demand and "are reaching breaking point".³⁵ Worse still, people are returning items to the food bank because they cannot afford to cook them. Food banks are also experiencing fewer food donations.³⁶

The Mayor's Survey of Londoners in 2021-22 found around one in seven (14 per cent) parents in London had children living in low or very low food security, not a statistically significant difference from 2018-19 when it was 17 per cent.³⁷ Using the 2021 census data, we have calculated that this amounts to 237,129 children

aged under 16 across London. We also know that parents are more likely to experience food insecurity than their children as they prioritise their needs over their own.

Table 2: Estimated number of children living in food insecurity in London

Borough	No. children in food insecurity	Borough	No. children in food insecurity
Inner London	82,004	Outer London	155,126
Camden	4,628	Barking and Dagenham	7,941
City of London	90	Barnet	11,116
Hackney	6,947	Bexley	7,059
Hammersmith and Fulham	3,996	Brent	9,075
Haringey	6,737	Bromley	9,022
Islington	4,654	Croydon	11,208
Kensington and Chelsea	2,862	Ealing	10,032
Lambeth	6,815	Enfield	10,144
Lewisham	8,126	Greenwich	8,285
Newham	10,489	Harrow	7,185
Southwark	7,244	Havering	7,319
Tower Hamlets	8,103	Hillingdon	8,977
Wandsworth	7,549	Hounslow	8,294
Westminster	3,800	Kingston Upon Thames	4,561
		Merton	5,900
		Redbridge	9,542
		Richmond Upon Thames	5,477
		Sutton	6,126
		Waltham Forest	7,843
London	237,129		

Sixteen per cent of adults in London had low or very low food security, equivalent to 1.2 million adults, a reduction since 2018-19 when it was 21 per cent (1.5 million adults).³⁸ This is likely to be a result of government intervention during the pandemic such as the Universal Credit uplift. Lower-income Londoners were more likely to be food-insecure.

There is no definitive measure of food insecurity and the Survey of Londoners itself, especially when it comes to measuring children's food insecurity should be read with caution. This survey was a self-completion survey of 8,630 adults aged 16 and over living in London and ran from November 2021 to February 2022.³⁹ However, inflation has significantly increased since then, so we expect the figure to currently be much higher. As parents are giving answers on behalf of their children, it should be acknowledged that there may be some under-reporting of their children's circumstances, as parents are not always aware of their children's experiences with food. It can only provide us with a snapshot of the past and not predict the



number of Londoners expected to be in food insecurity this coming winter.

It is clear that childhood hunger is not going to disappear in the near future given the current economic situation. Interventions on food insecurity and child poverty must be introduced as a matter of urgency to stop children going hungry.

Percent of Londoners living in food insecurity by income bracket



Base: Londoners aged 16 and over with an annual income of: less than £14,900 (867); £14,901-£24,300 (631); £24,301-£37,900 (888); £37,901-£58,900 (931); more than £58,900 (1,465)

Source: Greater London Authority, Survey of Londoners 2021-22

Why must we tackle childhood hunger?

The past couple of years has revealed the appetite for tackling poverty is as strong as ever, as demonstrated by the outcry over the lack of free school meals during school holidays. This campaign was triggered when the Government rejected calls to fund Free School Meals during school holidays during the pandemic in October 2021. This campaign was led by professional footballer Marcus Rashford, who himself had grown up with Free School Meals and showed many people the reality of growing up in poverty. The overwhelming support and coverage that ensued highlighted the strength of feeling for tackling child hunger since the pandemic began. This is backed up by polling conducted from 4 in 10 which found that 85% of Londoners believe that politicians should do more to prevent and reduce poverty in London.⁴⁰

Tackling childhood hunger is not just a moral issue, but an economic one as well. Children growing up with hunger suffer reduced life chances. Children growing up with hunger tend to have lower cognitive development scores. Children growing up with hunger tend to receive lower qualifications. Because of poverty, children in this situation have fewer opportunities, and often do not have the access to equipment or space needed to learn and achieve well at school.

We know that access to a nutritional meal at school lunch time supports children with their progress at school, as highlighted by two evaluations of Government policies on free school meals.

An evaluation of the Free School Meals pilot prepared on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department of Health in 2013 found that the universal pilot had a significant positive impact on attainment for primary school pupils.⁴¹ Pupils in the pilot areas made between four and eight weeks' more



Childhood hunger amongst parents wellbeing is something that the government needs to really focus on. I signed my children up to the holiday sports camp so that I know they would be fed a hot nutritious meal without me thinking about what to buy and cook which won't be too expensive.*

Now not only do I have to think about the cost of food I purchase I also need to think about how much gas and electricity it will cost to prepare the food.

Personal quote from a current Parent Champion volunteer*

* Parent Champions are parent volunteers who give a few hours a week to talk to other parents about the local services available to families. Coram Family and Childcare developed the Parent Champions programme in 2007 to help marginalised or isolated parents who miss out on vital information about how to access local family services.

made greater progress than similar pupils in comparison areas, with the biggest improvements in attainment amongst pupils from less affluent families. By contrast, the extended entitlement pilot did not significantly affect attainment for either primary or secondary school pupils.⁴²

The Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) policy was introduced from September 2014 and entitled all infants in state-funded schools in England (comprising of Reception, Year 1 and Year 2) to receive a free school meal. A more recent evaluation of the policy found that pupils entitled to UIFSM and who take up the offer of a free school lunch have stronger educational performance at both age 5 and age 7.⁴³ Moreover, UIFSM was found to be beneficial for children's health as it reduces the likelihood of the child developing obesity and benefits children from a wide range of households.⁴⁴ Significantly, a child receiving UIFSM equates in a reduction of family spending on food shopping

and would go some way to support Londoners with children in this cost of living crisis. The research found that a household with two adults and two children of whom one is in the age-range receiving UIFSM, saves approximately £20 per month during term-time.⁴⁵

Childhood hunger and health impacts

Children born into poverty will either not get enough food or get inexpensive, calorie dense food of low nutritional value, leading to the child having poor health and struggling at school. It hugely increases the likelihood of developing type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and obesity later in life. There will also be an adverse impact on psychological health and poor educational attainment.

Malnutrition (which includes undernutrition, obesity, and micronutrient deficiencies) and diet-related disease are prevalent in the capital and risk worsening over the coming year. Research highlights that malnutrition is worse for those on a low income. For example, according to research by the Food Foundation, childhood obesity rates are twice as high amongst children living in the most deprived areas, and they are on average 1cm smaller than those in the least deprived areas.⁴⁶ But food insecurity does not only impact negatively on physical health, the Food Foundation's Children's Future Food Inquiry found that there is an association between food insecurity and children's emotional and mental health symptoms.⁴⁷ This could include aggressive behaviours, depression and anxiety. Research undertaken by Leeds University found that children and young people from food insecure households are 3-4 times more likely to experience negative emotions compared with peers from food secure households.⁴⁸

What action has been taken by the Mayor of London?

Childhood hunger is the result of poverty, which is a multifaceted issue that will require support from all levels of government. Despite not having direct responsibility over child poverty and hunger, current Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, has responsibility indirect for tackling economic inequality in London. Through these powers he has implemented measures to tackle poverty in the absence of a national focus on the issue.

Since 2016, Sadiq Khan has implemented a number of policies which aim to support low-income families, for example, by building a record number of genuinely affordable homes, keeping transport costs down with initiatives such as the five-year fares freeze and the Hopper fare, and helping families access good quality, affordable childcare through the Early Years Hubs. The Mayor launched the Strong Early Years London programme, in which he invested £150,000 to provide vital business support to private, voluntary and independent early years providers across the capital. The programme aims to support 2,500 providers (including childminders) through its universal support offer.⁴⁹

Most recently, the Mayor has launched the Cost of Living Hub, signposting Londoners to information and advice including how to claim benefits that they are entitled to, help dealing with debt, financial management and mental health support during this difficult economic period.⁵⁰

But the real levers of power lie with the Government who, as we know from previous action, can influence the level of child poverty and hunger across the capital. Therefore, the Mayor has called for the Government to urgently lift the benefit cap after City Hall research revealed that tens of thousands of low-income

Londoners were excluded from COVID-19 support measures.⁵¹ He has written to the Prime Minister calling on the Government to support those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) and those on low incomes,⁵² and called for further employment support as the furlough scheme ended because analysis from the GLA showed that London's economy may take more than three years to recover from the pandemic.⁵³

The Chancellor's Spring Statement was on 23 March and the Mayor argued that it failed to meet the needs of Londoners who are facing a 'triple whammy' of energy price hikes, tax increases and rising inflation.⁵⁴ Eight weeks later, the Chancellor announced a package of support in response to the cost of living crisis. This included:

- A direct one-off cost of living payment of £650 for households on means-tested benefits, worth £5.4 billion. DWP will make the payment in two lump sums directly into claimants' bank accounts – the first from 14th July 2022, the second in the autumn of 2022. Payments from HMRC for those on tax credits only will follow shortly afterwards.
- A pensioner cost of living payment of £300 for pensioner households worth £2.5 billion paid in November/December alongside the Winter Fuel Payment.
- A £150 disability cost of living payment to individuals in receipt of extra cost disability benefits, worth £0.9 billion, paid by September.
- A doubling of the universal rebate through the Energy Bills Support Scheme, providing an additional £200 to households with a domestic energy meter, worth £6 billion.
- A further £0.5 billion to extend the Household Support Fund by another six months, ensuring it will be in place until next April.⁵⁵

The Mayor has said that hundreds of thousands of Londoners are missing out on the support

being provided. This includes:

- the 210,000 children in low-income families in London affected by the two-child benefit cap;
- the 220,000 households claiming Housing Benefit only in London;
- the three million private renters who will be facing increased bills with the average London monthly rent jumping 10.9 per cent last year to £2,142 sending them above pre-pandemic levels for the first time by the end of 2021;
- the migrant Londoners with limited or no access to public funds who are ineligible for the benefits that qualify households for the additional support announced.⁵⁶

On the whole, whilst the support has been welcomed, campaigners have questioned the level of support provided and the length of time it has taken to provide it. Londoners are only just receiving some of the support as this report is published, and inflation rates have rocketed since March 2022.

There has been little in the way of announcements from the new Government that support the poorest Londoners through the continued cost of living crisis. The announcement on the 8 September 2022 capped energy prices to keep average household bills below or at £2,500 for the next two years as part of an estimated £150 billion package. On 17 October the Government changed this guarantee to last for six months not two years. Any support is welcome but it is still higher than what people were paying before. In 2021 the Ofgem price cap was £1,138 a year (based on a household with "typical consumption" on a dual electricity and gas bill paying by direct debit). On 1 April 2022 it increased to £1,971 a year, and on 1 October it was due to climb to £3,549 a year before the Prime Minister's intervention.⁵⁷

Questions also remain about the cost of living announcements in the mini-budget on the 23 September 2022 as the Resolution Foundation

has said that the tax plans and energy support will see Britain's richest households getting twice as much support with living costs as the poorest households. Torsten Bell of the Resolution Foundation said:

"Slowing increases in benefits so that inflation erodes their real value is also a Treasury staple. We look to be on course to uprate working-age benefits by earnings instead of inflation next year – a 4 percentage point real-terms cut that would net the Treasury £5bn, while costing a typical low-income working family with two children over £500 a year. We should be clear what this means: permanently cutting benefits to fund tax cuts for the top earners in the most unequal large country in Europe."⁵⁸

The result is that almost half (47 per cent) of the gains will go to the richest 5 per cent of households, compared to 12 per cent for the entire poorer half.⁵⁹ The Government rejected claims of unfairness instead lauding the supposed merits of growth trickling down to the rest of society.⁶⁰ However, since then there has been a u-turn on the decision to axe the 45% rate for earnings over £150,000. On the 17 October 2022 the Chancellor announced further changes with 1p cut in the basic rate of income tax no longer going ahead and the Energy Price Guarantee only lasting six months instead of two years. We await the Fiscal Statement on the 31 October 2022 for further details.

Recommendations: What action could be taken?

There is not one sole reason for the high levels of child poverty and child hunger that we see in London, and as such, there cannot be one solution to this problem.

However, economic difficulties caused by the pandemic and the handling of this cost of living crisis can act as a catalyst for change. The Mayor launched his London Recovery Programme to support the city's economy and society, and to build back better. This provides a real opportunity to embed a focus on childhood hunger as previous Governments have. In 1998/99, 3.4 million children were living in poverty in the UK. By 2004/05, the number had fallen to 2.7 million and then fell again to 2.3 million in 2010/11.⁶¹

There is an opportunity for all aspects of government, at every level, to do much more to tackle childhood hunger, especially in London which has the highest levels of child poverty. Whilst it is important to support communities across the country that have suffered from austerity over the past decade, in its 'levelling-up' agenda, policy makers in Whitehall must not abandon children living in hunger on Parliament's doorstep. There needs to be a recognition that 23% of the UK's GDP is created in London and that if London's economy succeeds, so does the economic situation of the rest of the country.

Recommendation 1

The Mayor should form a Childhood Hunger Commission for London.

Look at Childhood Hunger Strategically

It is without a doubt that a national focus on child poverty with a more supportive social security system, increased early years education and the introduction of a national minimum wage, resulted in significant decreases to the level of child poverty from 1999 until 2010. The implementation of austerity and cuts to policies supporting children's life chances has directly led to the increase in child poverty and hunger since 2010.

In the absence of a national child poverty strategy or real focus on childhood hunger, the Mayor should work with London Councils and organisations campaigning on child poverty and food insecurity to form a Childhood Hunger Commission for London. This would look at the causes and impacts of childhood hunger in London and produce an action plan to work towards eradicating child hunger in the capital. This would include ways to reduce the high cost of living in London, such as high rents, high childcare costs and low pay. It could also go further and map the availability and affordability of food across the capital. Eventually, this Commission could evolve to have a wider focus on poverty and income in the capital. As many of the levers for reducing poverty and hunger lie with the national government, the plan should also suggest actions that the Government and local authorities could take to reduce levels of food insecurity. This would ensure that children's life chances are considered in all aspects of decision-making, as London recovers from COVID-19.

To accompany the action plan for London, the Mayor of London should continue to commission research and gather evidence, to work with stakeholders and continue to build the case for the Government to reform their welfare policies, which have directly led to an

increase in childhood hunger.

This would build on the research already carried out by the GLA which highlighted the devastating impact of the removal of the Universal Credit uplift on Londoners.

Increase the Income of Londoners

Whilst the current cost of living crisis will impact people across the UK, the cost of living has always been higher in London and the capital already had high levels of deprivation. Incomes are not keeping pace with costs putting further strain on low-income families in particular. The Mayor needs to put pressure on the Government to act now or in the very least at the Autumn Budget. We need to ensure that everyone has access to the basic right of food. This support should include, but is not limited to:

- increasing the value of working-age benefits, including reinstating of the Universal Credit uplift and increasing the total value in line with inflation;
- extending the cost of living support to those families affected by the two-child benefit cap, those claiming Housing Benefit, private renters who are facing increased bills and migrant Londoners with limited or no access to public funds;
- removing the two-child limit policy;
- uprating the benefit cap in line with inflation and setting a higher cap level for London due to the higher cost of living;
- increasing support for increased energy costs through the Warm Homes Discount Scheme which should cover at least half of people's bills given the huge increases faced

by Londoners;

- bringing the National Living Wage up to the rate of the London Living Wage for all ages in London;
- uprating the Local Housing Allowance to enable the poorest Londoners to have access to better quality accommodation, that is cheaper to run, as it will be better insulated;
- stop deducting debt repayments from benefits at unaffordable rates.

It is the overarching responsibility of the Government to tackle poverty and food insecurity, but it must be recognised that employers have a role to play too. The Living Wage Foundation campaigns for employers to pay the London Living Wage in the capital and are working with the Mayor to make London a Living Wage City. The Mayor should continue to be proactive in working with employees, anchor institutions in the capital and use his procurement powers to encourage organisations to sign up to the London Living Wage. In addition to wages, employers should ensure a good quantity and security of the hours their employees work, ensure that they have good in-work benefits such as sick pay and that opportunities for training and progression are offered.

Many Londoners continue to struggle to access fresh, affordable and nutritional food every day. We know that obesity and food insecurity coexist due to reliance on cheaper foods which are often energy-dense and lacking in nutrients, for example a packet of sausages will go further in feeding a family than a packet of apples will. In addition to the cost of healthy food, many families on low incomes may not have adequate food storage facilities, the means to cook a healthy meal (through cost or amenities) or time to prepare a meal due to work commitments. This means that there is no fridge to store food and keep it fresh or a cooker/oven in which to prepare a hot meal.

Furthermore, often people don't have the savings to replace or repair a fridge or cooker when it breaks. This is becoming an increasingly serious situation as many Londoners will feel unable to afford to cook food this winter. Inadequate incomes combined with the loss of local welfare schemes in many local authorities mean people often struggle with these one-off costs.⁶² This is also more of an issue if you are unable to access a large supermarket which has more availability and price variety than smaller franchise shops, or do not have the cash flow or income to allow you to buy in bulk which reduces costs. Increasing incomes to an adequate level directly tackles these issues.

Recommendation 2

The Mayor should lobby the Government to take immediate action to tackle the cost of living crisis by raising incomes substantially and providing immediate monetary support to low income families. London.

Access to Nutritional Food

The first 1,000 days of a child's life are a critical phase which set the foundations of development. The United Nations⁶³, UNICEF⁶⁴, NHS⁶⁵ and Public Health England⁶⁶ all recognise the crucial role this period plays in emotional, cognitive and physical development.

This process starts from pregnancy with antenatal care being delivered by midwives and doctors. Antenatal appointments encompass a range of activities which check the health of mother and baby, including ultrasound scans, blood tests and various screening tests. During these appointments, the emotional and physical welfare of the mother will also be considered,

and this can provide an early opportunity to discuss any concerns around malnutrition or food insecurity which the mother may be at risk of.

After birth, regular health and development reviews are offered to support mother and baby until the child turns two. In total, five reviews are offered throughout this period. These reviews are usually conducted by a health visitor or member of their team. During these visits, the child's health and weight will be recorded in the personal child health record (the red book). Parents can be signposted onto other services and offered support as needed.

It is clear that the optional health checks can identify issues of malnutrition as well as identifying any other physical, emotional or mental health concerns. However, those who do not attend these health checks are more likely to come from a deprived background.⁶⁷ Moreover, the pandemic has created a backlog of services including health visiting and a greater proportion of those visits which are taking place are now conducted online.⁶⁸

As needs are identified, support services can be put in place. For example, parents who receive a qualifying benefit and are more than ten weeks pregnant can receive healthy start vouchers (until their child turns four). These vouchers can be used to buy items such as infant formula, cow's milk, fruit, vegetables and pulses. However, according to NHS data, less than two in three eligible parents in London use these vouchers; with only half of eligible parents using them in some boroughs.⁶⁹ This may decrease as the scheme moves away from paper vouchers and recipients need to apply for a Healthy Start Card.

This report does not seek to set out an exhaustive list of existing services available in the first 1,000 days of a child's life. But using the examples above, it is clear that there is more work that could be done to map out these pathways in more detail. We need to understand

who is currently using these services, which families are not and setting out actions which could boost uptake. Given the importance of these early years on a child's development, having a greater focus on food and nutrition during this period could play a key role in reducing childhood hunger. It could be that the Childhood Hunger Commission takes a deeper look at eligibility and assesses the merits of auto-enrollment of healthy start vouchers – a strategy which has worked in boosting uptakes in pension schemes and the organ donation.

Recommendation 3

The Childhood Hunger Commission should map out healthy food monitoring and support services for mothers and infants from antenatal care up to the beginning of primary school. This should identify any gaps between services during this period and identify actions which can guarantee children have access to nutritious food prior to attending primary school.

Evaluations of pilots and current policies show that not only does the infant free school meals policy work, but universal free school meals have

a host of benefits. They improve children's health by providing them with at least one hot nutritional meal a day, improves educational attainment and reach all children in poverty, including those with no recourse to public funds. Moreover, they reduce the money spent on food shopping by parents and reduce the likelihood of them having to choose between feeding their children or keeping them warm.

In order to be eligible for free school meals in England above the age of seven, a household on universal credit must earn less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including benefits). This figure does not change regardless of the number of children in the family. Because of this low threshold, many living in poverty, most of whom are from working families, aren't entitled to free school meals, despite their parents being unable to meet the costs of food.⁷⁰

As the cost of living crisis deepens, greater numbers of children are already going hungry at school. Analysis from CPAG found that across England, 800,000 children living in poverty (1 in 3 school age children) do not have access to free school meals.⁷¹ In London, this equates to 210,000 children, more than any other region in England, and a one in four children living in poverty without access to a free school meal.

Table 3: Child Poverty by Region

Region	No. of children	Proportion (out of all children living in poverty in the region)
North East	40,000	27%
North West	100,000	30%
Yorkshire and the Humber	80,000	30%
East Midlands	40,000	24%
West Midlands	80,000	25%
East	90,000	38%
London	210,000	41%
South East	80,000	26%
South West	70,000	33%

Source: Child Poverty Action Group, September 2022

Regional government in Scotland and Wales provide Universal Free School Meals to all primary school children. Currently in London, the boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets, Islington and Southwark have Universal Free School Meal (UFSM) schemes for all primary school students, funded by the local council. But this is at risk of becoming more difficult to sustain as budgets are squeezed for local authorities as highlighted by Newham Council proposing to end the scheme in 2021. Whilst Newham Council has been able to retain free school meals, it remains a precarious situation. London's local authorities are being expected to provide more services with less central government funding which has fallen by 63 per cent since 2010 and resulted in overstretched council budgets.⁷² During term time, children consume as much as 50% of their food at school, and for some, a free school lunch is their only substantial meal of the day.⁷³ That is why Free School Meals must not be a postcode lottery.

Recent cost benefit analysis on expanding free school meals in England has been undertaken by PWC, commissioned by Impact on Urban Health.

The analysis explored two different scenarios in over a twenty-year period (2025-2045) and found that both expansion scenarios presented a positive return on investment.⁷⁴

When expanding free school meals to all children in receipt of Universal Credit, every £1 invested is estimated to generate £1.38 in the core benefits but when expanded to universal free school meals across primary and secondary schools in England, for every £1 invested, it is estimated to generate £1.71 in the core benefits.⁷⁵

The report notes that providing nutritious free school meals not only benefits the individual but also to society at large in the following ways:

- savings to schools
- increased lifetime earnings and contributions
- increased savings on food costs for families
- increased NHS savings due to a reduction in wider diet-related illnesses
- and increased GVA in the wider economy through increased spending.⁷⁶

Table 4: Cost benefit analysis of free school meals in England

Expansion Scenario	Cost of Implementation	Core Benefits	Wider Benefits	Total Combined Benefits
Universal Credit - Free school meal provision for all state school pupils receiving Universal Credit.	£6.4bn	£8.9bn	£16.2bn	£25.2bn
Universal Free School Meals - Free school meal provision for all state school pupils i.e. Universal Free School Meals.	£24.2bn	£41.3bn	£58.2bn	£99.5bn

Source: Impact on Urban Health

The Government Food Strategy released in June 2022 lacks ambition and mentions free school meals just three times. There are no new policies in the strategy relating to free school meals, instead it restates the continuation of Universal Infant Free School Meals, the permanent extension of free school meals to No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) families and will continue to keep free school meal eligibility under review.⁷⁷

With the worsening cost of living crisis, Free School Meals must be expanded. CPAG is calling for an urgent extension of free school meals to all families in receipt of Universal Credit or equivalent benefits, and for England to move towards universal provision for all children, as is the case in Scotland and Wales. We agree that this should happen at the very least, but there is a strong case for the expansion of Universal Free School Meals to children in secondary school. Children aged 11 and above still go hungry and are undergoing huge transformation during puberty. For those starting the menstrual cycle, adequate food, particularly that containing iron, is hugely beneficial. There appears to be no real physiological explanation or justification as to why there is a cut off in the policy of Universal Free School Meals after the age of 7.

This is an ambitious policy, but Free School Meals are available to secondary school children whose households are in receipt of some government welfare support, highlighting that food insecurity does not end at the end of primary school. We also know that the Free School Meals policy does not capture all children living in food insecurity. A survey repeated annually in Leeds has asked children "over the last 12 months have you worried about not having enough to eat because your family didn't have enough money for food?". Researchers found that the proportion of children answering yes to this question was much higher in secondary school-aged children than primary school-aged children.⁷⁸

The extension of free school meals to all children

in education during term time and school holidays ensures that no child goes without at least one hot nutritional meal a day. It will ensure that children living in food insecurity qualify for free school meals without stigma. To further this, we support the recommendations of the Children's Future Food Inquiry to rename free school meals as the "school meal allowance".

This is a longer-term national policy solution but in the meantime, the Child Hunger Commission should explore the feasibility and impact of these measures in London.

Recommendation 4

The Government should extend Universal Free School Meals to all children in early years education, primary school and secondary school, during term time and school holidays. The Child Hunger Commission should explore the feasibility and impact of these measures.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Methodology

It is important to note that the data this report works with and produces are estimates as per the nature of collecting data on food insecurity and poverty. What we do know is that we are barely scraping the surface. The fact is nobody knows just how deep this problem goes but we know that any Londoner going without food is too many.

We decided to use an easy to understand methodology which is not so vulnerable to being changed by the fluctuations we are currently seeing in the economy.

As such we will be using a combination of the latest census data⁷⁹ and results from the Mayor of London's most recent Survey of Londoners.⁸⁰ The Survey for Londoners shows that 14% of Londoners aged under 16 face low or very low food insecurity (tab 2, F11).

Local census data gives us population figures in age bands 0-4, 5-9, 10-14 and 15-19. To estimate the number of 15 year olds we have divided the 15-19 age group by 5, assuming a roughly even distribution across each age within the band.

The survey respondent size to the Survey of Londoners for child food insecurity questions was 1,990 and there are an estimated 1,693,780 Londoners aged 0-15.

Based on a 99% confidence level, we can say these results are correct to +/-2.89%.⁸¹

These figures are very likely an underestimate given they do not take into account any of the additional cost of living pressures we have seen since the 2021-22 Survey of Londoners (which took place between November 2021 and January 2022).

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