Sustainable Development Goals in the UK follow up: Hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity in the UK

Thirteenth Report of Session 2017–19

Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report

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**Environmental Audit Committee**

The Environmental Audit Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to consider to what extent the policies and programmes of government departments and non-departmental public bodies contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development; to audit their performance against such targets as may be set for them by Her Majesty’s Ministers; and to report thereon to the House.

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Summary

The UK Government has committed itself to “working tirelessly for the full implementation” of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the UK, as well as overseas, but there continues to be a “doughnut-shaped hole” in domestic implementation of the SDGs. We support UKSSD’s conclusion that “while there is an enormous amount to celebrate, the most vulnerable places and people in our society are increasingly being left behind.” This report uses SDG 2: Zero Hunger, as a case study through which to review Government’s broader progress against the domestic implementation of the SDGs.

Food insecurity is a significant and growing issue in the UK, with figures from The Food and Agriculture Organisation and The Food Foundation showing that levels are among the worst - if not the worst- in Europe, especially for children. The issues of food insecurity, hunger, malnutrition and obesity should be considered in parallel in the UK context as they are often co-located and correlated. Government has failed to recognise and respond to these issues within the UK. The Government's obesity strategy makes no mention of food insecurity, and the only Department to address hunger in its Single Departmental Plan (SDP) is the Department for International Development.

Since the SDGs are intended to be entrenched through the SDPs, we are concerned that an item as significant as hunger and food insecurity in the UK has fallen between the cracks. We call on Government to appoint a minister for hunger, to ensure cross-departmental understanding and action on this important issue. We welcome examples of excellent local initiatives working to reallocate the UK’s surplus food and to tackle hunger. Government needs to engage with civil society to understand the scale, causes and impacts of food insecurity in the UK, implement strategies for improvement, and monitor progress.

In their present format, Single Departmental Plans (SDPs) are insufficient to deliver the SDGs in the UK. Government’s failure to ensure that all SDG targets are covered in the SDPs has left significant gaps in plans and accountability. We call on the Cabinet Office to lead in ensuring that no SDG target is left out, and to lead the cross-departmental working which the SDGs require. The Voluntary National Review (VNR) offers Government an opportunity to audit its own performance and raise the profile of the SDGs. However, we are concerned that Government has not left enough time to engage fully in stakeholder consultation to meet its commitment to allow Parliamentary scrutiny before the VNR is submitted in May 2019.

The Office for National Statistics(ONS) has made progress in developing metrics to measure performance against the SDGs, but many gaps still exist, and the SDG indicators are not yet embedded in the SDPs. Similarly, awareness of the SDGs has grown in some parts of civil society and business, for example through the Better Retail, Better World project. However, the Government has not yet done enough to drive awareness and embed the SDGs across the UK—including within Government itself. We reiterate the recommendation made in our predecessor Committee’s 2017 report that the Government should do everything it can to support partners (government agencies, local government, civil society, business and the public) to contribute towards
delivering the Goals. The Government should show leadership by introducing an SDG impact assessment as part of the cost-benefit analysis undertaken by Government, or for politically strategic events such as the Queen’s Speech and Budget.
1 Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals

1. In September 2015, 193 UN Member States, including the UK, adopted The United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the Agenda or Agenda 2030). This committed them to working “tirelessly for the full implementation of this Agenda by 2030.” Agenda 2030 consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (the Goals or SDGs), broken down into 169 targets.

2. Unlike its predecessors, the Millennium Development Goals, the SDGs are “universal”, applying to the entire world, “developed and developing countries alike.” It also includes a pledge that “no one will be left behind.” This recognises that the Goals and its targets should be “met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society,” and promises to “endeavour to reach the furthest behind first.” The UK championed this approach during negotiations on the Agenda.

SDGs in the UK

3. The Single Departmental Plans (SDPs) are the principle vehicle by which the Government intends both to implement the SDGs and measure progress in delivering them:

   In their Single Departmental Plans, each department outlines how planned activity will support the delivery of the Goals. Departmental reporting against the Single Departmental Plans include evidence of progress in implementing the Goals, allowing DFID and the Cabinet Office to track delivery.

4. The SDGs were first included in SDPs in December 2017, when just two departments made specific reference to them. The SDPs were updated in May 2018 when, following a letter of protest from this Committee, Government committed to “work with departments to ensure Goals are embedded within them.” All departments now reference the SDGs by name.

5. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is responsible for reporting the UK’s data to the United Nations. It presents the UK’s performance against the SDG indicators in an online reporting platform, which went live in November 2017 following a period of consultation. ONS aims to disaggregate all reported data by “sex, age, geography, race, ethnicity, disability, migratory status and income, where applicable.” Currently, ONS reports against 64% (157 out of 244) of the SDG indicators, with a further 9% in progress.

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1 United Nations Resolution, A/RES/70/1, para 2
2 A full list of the SDG goals can be found in the Appendix.
3 United Nations Resolution, A/RES/70/1, para 5
4 Ibid, para 4
5 WWF (SDF0009); Bond (SDF0012); Health Poverty Action (SDF0013)
6 Sustainable Development Goals in the UK: Government response, p.7
7 Office for National Statistics, Sustainable Development Goals, accessed 5 December 2018
8 ONS, UK Data for Sustainable Development Goal indicators, accessed 5 December 2018
9 ONS, Sustainable Development Goals
10 ONS, UK Data for Sustainable Development Goal indicators
### Sustainable Development Goal 2

6. SDG2, Zero Hunger, aims to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.” There are eight targets which make up SDG 2: 2.1 - 2.5, which are largely domestic in focus, and 2.a - 2.c, which are chiefly international targets. A full list of the targets which make up SDG2 are below.

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<td><strong>2.A</strong></td>
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<td><strong>2.B</strong></td>
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<td><strong>2.C</strong></td>
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Source: Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform

7. This report will focus on targets 2.1 and 2.2, the domestic targets which aim to “end hunger”, “ensure access by all people … to safe nutritious food all year round” and “end all forms of malnutrition.” The full set of indicators which make up these two targets are below.

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11 Ibid., Sustainable Development Goals and Targets
12 Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform, [SDG2], accessed 5 December 2018
Figure 2: Indicators for Targets 2.1 and 2.2

<table>
<thead>
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<td>2.1 By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round</td>
<td>2.1.1 Prevalence of undernourishment</td>
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<td>2.1.2 Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)</td>
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<td>2.2 By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons</td>
<td>2.2.1 Prevalence of stunting (height for age &lt;-2 standard deviation from the median of the World Health Organization (WHO) Child Growth Standards) among children under 5 years of age</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.2.2 Prevalence of malnutrition (weight for height &gt;+2 or &lt;-2 standard deviation from the median of the WHO Child Growth Standards) among children under 5 years of age, by type (wasting and overweight)</td>
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Source: Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform

Our inquiry

8. This report examines what the Government is doing to implement SDG2 in the UK, focusing on the nutrition targets 2.1 (end hunger) and 2.2 (end malnutrition). It then uses SDG2 as a case study through which to review Government’s broader progress against the domestic implementation of the SDGs. The report follows up on our predecessor Committee’s 2016–17 inquiry, Sustainable Development Goals in the UK, which found that “the Government has shown little interest in, or enthusiasm for, implementing the Goals in the UK”, and that a focus on action abroad had left a “doughnut shaped hole” in the UK. This report will be the Committee’s first annual review of the Government’s domestic progress against the SDGs, with each review focusing on a different Goal.

9. The report builds on work of the International Development Committee, whose report in June 2016 found that “the Government’s response to domestic implementation of the SDGs has so far been insufficient.” It also builds on the March 2017 report by the Women and Equality Committee, Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5 in the UK, which expressed concerns that it was “not clear that effective lines of responsibility” had been established in the Single Departmental plans for handling cross-departmental towards Goal 5.

10. As part of this inquiry we issued a call for evidence and received 39 written submissions. This included responses to nine specific requests for evidence from major UK supermarkets. We held a public evidence session, where we heard from a range of NGOs, the Office for National Statistics, and Ministers from the Cabinet Office, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Department for International Development

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13 Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform, SDG2, accessed 5 December 2018
14 Environmental Audit Committee, Ninth Report of Session 2016–17, Sustainable Development Goals in the UK, HC 596, paras 7 and 59
15 International Development Committee, First Report of Session 2016–17, UK implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, HC 103, para 74
16 Women and Equalities Committee, Eighth Report of Session 2016–17, Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5 in the UK, HC 885, Summary
and Department for Work and Pensions. We also held four outreach events, collecting evidence from users and staff of a homeless shelter, two social supermarkets and a food redistribution charity. All written and oral evidence can be found on our website, and a summary of the outreach events can be found in Appendix 2. We are grateful to all those who contributed.
2 Hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in the UK

11. The UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development, a cross-sector network of organisations working to drive action on the SDGs, have highlighted a number of nutrition-related challenges in the UK. In their July 2018 report, Measuring Up, UKSSD found that, in the overall implementation of the SDGs in the UK, “while there is an enormous amount to celebrate, the most vulnerable places and people in our society are increasingly being left behind.”. The report drew attention to the UK’s current struggle to “address malnutrition in all its forms”, with “food insecurity and obesity rising.” It summarised that:

The ‘average’ situation in the UK hides large variations according to socioeconomic status, and two juxtaposed challenges: high and growing levels of obesity and diet related disease, and among the highest levels of household food insecurity in Europe. These challenges are underpinned by a food system which is struggling to provide healthy, sustainable, diverse diets for everyone in the UK.

12. UKSSD assessed the UK’s domestic performance against the targets which underlie Goal 2. It judged that all relevant targets were either amber (where “there are some gaps in policy coverage, the UK is not performing well enough or performance is deteriorating”) or red (where “there is little or no policy in place that adequately addresses the target, performance is poor.”)

17 UKSSD, Measuring Up: How the UK is performing on the UN Sustainable Development Goals, (July 2018), p.4
18 Ibid., p.23
19 UKSSD, Measuring Up report, p.22
20 Ibid., p.6
13. This chapter looks at the UK’s performance against targets 2.1 and 2.2, where performance was poorest. It therefore focuses on current levels of food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition in the UK. It assesses what Government is doing to handle these challenges, and whether it is on track to meet its Agenda 2030 targets to end hunger; ensure access by all people to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round; and end malnutrition.

**Scale of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in the UK**

**Hunger**

14. There is no single, nationwide Government measure for hunger in the UK. The Committee heard evidence of the high and growing number of people experiencing hunger in the UK. The Food Foundation estimates 1.97 million people within the UK may be undernourished. However the British Association for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (BAPEN) places the number of malnourished, specifically undernourished, people at 3 million, of which 1.3 million are over 65. While 93% of undernourished people are living in the community, BAPEN also found issues in social care. They calculated a risk of undernourishment in:

- 25–34% of people admitted to hospital;

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21 UKSSD (SDF0027)
22 The Food Foundation, in UKSSD’s written evidence (SDF0027)
24 Ibid.
• 30–42% of those admitted to care homes;
• 18–20% of those admitted to mental health units; and
• 10–14% of people living in sheltered housing.\(^{25}\)

15. City Harvest calculated that in London alone, 9 million meals are needed per month to alleviate hunger - or about 300,000 meals per day.\(^{26}\) Moreover, the number of people requiring food support services is growing.\(^{27}\) The Trussell Trust, which provides approximately 60% of the UK’s food banks, reported that in 2017–18 they alone had distributed 1,332,952 three-day emergency food supplies to people in crisis (nearly 484,026 of which went to children), compared to 913,138 in 2013–14, an increase of 46%.\(^{28}\) They noted that the most likely groups to require foodbanks were “disabled people, people dealing with an illness, families with children and single parents,”\(^{29}\) In 2016 The Food Foundation have estimated that “17 times the number using Trussell Trust food banks are food insecure. This is because people may use non-Trussell Trust food banks, or more likely, because many people don’t access food assistance at all.”\(^{30}\)

16. The Food Foundation told the Committee:

> In a country such as the UK with a developed health and social care system and consistent food security, it should be feasible to achieve nearly undetectable levels of undernourishment.\(^{31}\)

**Food insecurity**

17. Food insecurity is a “limited access to food ... due to lack of money or other resources.”\(^{32}\) The level of food insecurity can be measured on the Food Insecurity and Experience Scale (FEIS).

![Figure 4: Food Insecurity and Experience Scale](source)

Source: Scale from The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations\(^{33}\)

\(^{25}\) Ibid.
\(^{26}\) City Harvest London (SDF0039)
\(^{27}\) WWF (SDF0009); The Food Foundation (SDF0017); End Hunger UK (SDF0021)
\(^{28}\) The Trussell Trust, *End of Year Stats 2017–18*, accessed 16 October 2018
\(^{29}\) Ibid.
\(^{30}\) The Food Foundation: Anna Taylor and Rachel Loopstra, *Too Poor to Eat: Food Insecurity in the UK, 2016*, p.6
\(^{31}\) The Food Foundation (SDF0017)
\(^{33}\) Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, *The Food Insecurity Experience Scale*, accessed 16 October 2018
18. A 2018 report by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), averaging data from 2015 to 2017, estimated that 2.2 million people in the UK were severely food insecure.\(^{34}\) This is the highest reported level in Europe, and means that the UK is responsible for one in five of all severely food insecure people in Europe.\(^{35}\) In June 2017, UNICEF found that in the UK approximately 19% of children under age 15 live with an adult who is moderately or severely food insecure, of whom half are severely food insecure. The Food Foundation suggest that this makes the UK “one of, if not the, worst performing nations in the European Union,” (see graph below).\(^{36}\)

**Figure 5: Levels of food insecurity among children under 15 in EU nations**

![Graph showing levels of food insecurity among children under 15 in EU nations](source: The Food Foundation, 2017 analysis using data from 2014 and 2015.\(^{37}\)) Reproduced with permission, emphasis added.

19. Some groups may be more vulnerable to food insecurity than others. Almost half of young mothers (aged 16–24) surveyed by Young Women’s Trust admitted regularly missing meals to provide for their children.\(^{38}\) A study by the Food Standards Agency found

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\(^{35}\) Calculated based on the FAO’s figure of 11.2 million severely food insecure people in Europe. Ibid. p.137  
\(^{36}\) The Food Foundation, *New Evidence of Child Food Insecurity in the UK*, (June 2017)  
\(^{37}\) Ibid.  
\(^{38}\) Young Women’s Trust, *What Matters to Young Mums?*, (March 2017), p.2
that in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, food insecurity concerns particularly affect the unemployed (47%) and those in the lowest income quartile (34%), and that women were more likely to live in food insecure households than men (10% compared to 6%).

20. The Food Foundation noted that the prevalence and role of food insecurity does not seem to be understood in Government:

DEFRA’s Single Departmental Plan does not include a measure for food insecurity and the Department of Health and Social Care’s plan focuses solely on obesity. This limits Government’s awareness of the prevalence of food insecurity in the UK and prevents it appropriately reporting on SDG2 and implementing a proportionate solution to tackling the problem.

21. Iain Bell, Deputy National Statistician at the ONS, highlighted the current difficulties resulting from a “confused set of requirements” on measuring food insecurity in the UK.

What we are doing at the moment is working with colleagues around the table and wider colleagues across Government to get to the bottom of what is the requirement for the data on food insecurity. Then we can go about setting the best way of measuring it. In order to do that, we are going to need administrative data from HMRC and DWP to make sure we have the full set. Whether we end up on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale or the US set of questions, I believe we will need some changes to our household surveys. I can assure the Committee we will make any necessary changes once we have clarity of requirement.

**Malnutrition and obesity**

22. The Food Foundation argues that “when interpreting Goal 2 in the UK context, the challenges of food insecurity, poor nutrition and obesity need to be considered under the heading of ‘malnutrition in all its forms’”. This is supported by Sustain, UKSSD, WWF and End Hunger UK.

23. While most focus in the UK is on obesity, malnutrition is interpreted both in terms of wasting (underweight) and overweight. Malnutrition in the form of obesity affected 12% of children aged 4–5 in Wales and 10% in England in 2016. It also affected 6% of children aged 4–6 in Scotland in 2015 and 5% of children aged 4–5 in Northern Ireland in 2014. Among 4–5 year olds, malnutrition in the form of being underweight affected 1% of children in England and 0.8% in Wales in 2016, and 0.4% of children in Scotland in 2015. Data on Northern Ireland are not currently available. Data on the prevalence of

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40 The Food Foundation ([SDF0017](#))
41 Iain Bell, Q24
42 The Food Foundation ([SDF0017](#)), p.23
43 Sustain: The Alliance for Better Food and Farming ([SDF0018](#)); UKSSD ([SDF0027](#)); WWF ([SDF0009](#)); End Hunger UK ([SDF0021](#))
44 Agenda 2030, Indicator 2.2.2
45 ONS, *Indicator 2.2.2*, accessed 4 December 2018
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
stunting in the UK are also not currently available, but ONS are working to include it in the National Childhood Measurement Programme, which is run through local authorities and through NHS Digital.  

24. Crucially, obesity can also coexist with other forms of malnutrition. This is key to understanding how high levels of food insecurity can sit alongside relatively low levels of underweight children, and high levels of obese children. End Hunger UK describes how food insecurity can contribute to both obesity and under-nutrition, and how all three can coexist:

Insufficient access to food can result in compromised health for a number of reasons. It can lead to the adoption of risk-averse food purchasing habits, where, in the face of having little to spend, households prioritise purchasing foods that will not go to waste and that are most filling. Often this means a reliance on cheap foods that are nutrient-poor but calorie-rich.

Figure 6: FAO’s Pathways from inadequate food access to multiple forms of malnutrition

25. This has led to a call by some, such as the Patient’s Association, to develop a definition of under-nutrition which includes both underweight and overweight individuals, and an assessment tool for identifying it. Currently, such an indicator or tool does not exist. The Patient’s Association has expressed concern that:

The issue of malnutrition amongst children has traditionally, although not exclusively, focused on malnutrition in the developing world. However, malnutrition or undernutrition in children in the UK is an increasing problem.

49 Iain Bell, Q8
50 End Hunger UK, SDF0021
26. This mismatch in focus is reflected in the Government’s update on its Agenda 2030 progress. The update addresses “hunger and malnutrition” in its “Around the World” section, but misses it out entirely when addressing the UK Government’s approach to delivering the SDGs “At Home.” While the “At Home” section does cover “healthy and balanced diets”, this is done within the context of Government’s obesity strategy. The obesity strategy does not mention malnutrition or food insecurity, and while it does indicate that obesity levels are higher amongst children from more deprived backgrounds, it fails to put this in the context of food insecurity.

### Causes of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in the UK

27. The evidence that we collected outlines how a broad range of complex factors may cause and worsen food insecurity in the UK. For example, the Food Foundation detailed how poverty, resource constraint, family dynamics, gender, disordered eating and mental health issues can all play a role in obesity:

> There are a number of explanations given for this including that the cheapest food is often the most energy dense and least nutritious, that mothers act as the nutritional buffer in households and where meals are irregular and uncertain they may develop unhealthy eating patterns which create risks of obesity or where anxiety and stress about securing enough food to eat triggers a raft of mental health problems which expose these women to additional risks of obesity.

28. The increased prevalence of severe food insecurity amongst a range of more vulnerable groups (see previous section) suggests that the presence of several concurrent issues may reduce an individual’s ability to endure a period of hardship without falling into food insecurity. For example, we heard anecdotal evidence of individuals suddenly encountering financial difficulties due to redundancy, ill health, pension changes or benefit sanctions, and who experienced greater difficulty in accessing replacement income through employment or benefits due to caring responsibilities, computer illiteracy or benefit delays and sanctions. In instances where that individual may not have had savings or family or friends who could support them, this financial difficulty often pushed them into food insecurity, as well as spiralling debt and sometimes homelessness.

29. A full factor analysis of the causes of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in the UK is beyond the scope of this report. Nonetheless, three themes emerged in the evidence we collected relating to the causes of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition:

- Low incomes and rising living costs;
- Universal Credit and the benefits system; and
- Cuts to funding for local social care services.

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53 DFID, Agenda 2030, pp.5–6
54 Ibid., p.6
55 HM Government, Childhood Obesity: A plan for action, 2016, and Childhood Obesity: A plan for action Chapter 2, 2018
56 The Food Foundation (SDF0017)
57 See Outreach Events, Appendix 2
58 Ibid
**Low income and rising living costs**

30. UKSSD’s written evidence described how “poverty and inequalities are major underlying factors in the nutrition targets of SDG2.” Sustain: the Alliance for Better Food and Farming argued that “welfare payments and wages need to be tied to actual living costs” to ensure that Goal 2.1 is achieved “at a time when welfare payments are frozen, wages are stagnating, and living costs are rising.” Kath Dalmeny, Chief Executive of Sustain, explained how shortfalls in household income and high living costs can contribute to hunger in the UK:

> It is generally the food budget in a household that gets squeezed first when other costs are high, and boy-oh-boy other costs are very high at the moment.

31. End Hunger UK has highlighted the significant challenges faced by the poorest households to achieve a healthy diet. “For households with children in the bottom two deciles, earning less than £15,860, 42% of after-housing disposable income would have to be spent to meet the [UK Government’s] Eat Well Guide costs.” Given that the UK imports 51% of its food, and that fruit and vegetables are the largest import group, there is a risk that fluctuations in the value of the pound may cause even more people to struggle to afford a healthy diet.

32. Our witnesses emphasised how challenges relating to low income and high living costs affect both those who are not in work and the working population. Adam Smith, founder of The Real Junk Food Project, told us how working people were having to “choose between heating their own homes and going out and getting food.” He told us:

> We come across a lot of people who fit into that bracket who are forgotten about in this country—people who are suffering right now, who are actually going hungry, who are working, not in receipt of benefits, and cannot access foodbanks. … People should not be in a situation where they cannot afford to feed their own children, while they are going to work and earning an honest living.

In 2018, the Trussell Trust attributed 28% of its emergency referrals to “low income”, and a further 9% to “debt.”

**Universal Credit and the benefits system**

33. The End Hunger UK coalition’s research with food banks and other emergency food aid providers attributed a “surge” in demand for emergency food aid to “excessive Universal Credit waiting times; delays in receiving payments; debt and loan repayments; and welfare benefit sanctions.” The Work and Pensions Committee’s recent inquiry on

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59 UKSSD (SDF0027)
60 Sustain: The Alliance for Better Food and Farming (SDF0018)
61 Kath Dalmeny, Q1
62 End Hunger UK (SDF0021)
63 The Food Foundation (SDF0017)
64 Adam Smith, Q12
65 Ibid., Qq12–13
66 Trussell Trust, *End of Year Stats*, 2018, accessed 5 December 2018
67 End Hunger UK, SDF0021
Benefit Sanctions heard evidence that “sanctions could have a profound and long-lasting financial impact,” and pushed for DWP to conduct “research to understand the impact of sanctions … there is too much at stake not to.”68

34. In 2018 the Trussell Trust attributed 24% of its emergency referrals to “benefit delays” and 18% to “benefit changes.”69 It found that, on average, 12 months after Universal Credit rollout, foodbanks see a 52% increase in demand, compared to 13% in areas where Universal Credit has been in place for 3 months or less.70 This increase exists even after accounting for seasonal and other variations and suggests Universal Credit as a causal factor.71

35. Delays in processing benefits and benefit sanctions can exacerbate food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition. For example, the Government’s “Healthy Start” initiative, which distributes free vouchers for milk, fruit and vegetables, formula milk and vitamins to pregnant women and parents of children under four, requires recipients to be on benefits to qualify.72 More broadly, some recipients of food support told us how delays in accessing benefits had pushed people they knew into arrears with rent and other bills, which they could not repay once the benefits started. They described this as putting them at higher risk of stress and homelessness and placing greater strain on their food budgets.73 The Trussell Trust found that during the wait for the first Universal Credit payment, 70% of people referred to a food bank had experienced debt, 57% had experienced issues with their mental or physical health, and 56% had experienced housing problems.74

36. Justin Tomlinson MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Family Support, Housing and Child Maintenance at the Department for Work and Pensions, explained that through Universal Credit, Government was looking to provide “personalised and tailored support to make sure that particularly the most vulnerable in society get that support.”75 He said that under the previous benefits system

It was no surprise that over 700,000 families were missing out on an average of £285 per month. We all see this in our casework as individual constituency MPs; people, particularly the most vulnerable in society, missing out on the support they are entitled to get. Under Universal Credit, they will be able to get that personalised, tailored support, helping get the money to the most vulnerable people in society, which then leads into tackling the issues of food insecurity.76

37. We find the Minister’s optimism about the Universal Credit system to be misguided and ill-judged.

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69 Trussell Trust, End of Year Stats
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
72 NHS England, Healthy Start, accessed 4 December 2018
73 See Outreach Events, Appendix 2
74 The Trussell Trust, Universal Credit and Foodbanks, 2018
75 Justin Tomlinson, Q39
76 Ibid., Q40
Cuts to funding for local services

38. Against this background of increased food insecurity, Lindsay Boswell, Chief Executive of FareShare, emphasised the impact of cuts to local authority funding on food banks.

What we are hearing time and time again - ...these organisations are turning to us to supply them with surplus food because their funding has been dramatically cut. There is a piece of joined up work and thinking that needs to be done around the impact and the implications of cuts to local authority funding.  

39. He described food banks as “the bread and butter of the social care and social provision that takes place on our high street.” The concurrency of food insecurity alongside a large number of other vulnerabilities means that food support services often serve as a centralised point for a number of services, such as providing advice on medical issues, overcoming barriers to accessing benefits and developing career skills. Lindsay Boswell described their role as extending far beyond providing food:

These are mental health facilities, domestic violence refuges, and organisations that provide a safety net for all of the forms of vulnerability that we have as human beings: addiction, drugs, alcohol and so on.

40. Kath Dalmeny, CEO of Sustain, described the “hokey-cokey” effect of policies that support the food insecure being brought in and withdrawn over time, through a failure to monitor their value. She argued that:

We have not taken seriously maximising household income. We have not taken seriously championing the solutions and letting the individual institutions that could be responsible and accountable understand what role they play, and celebrate when they do play that role.

Civil society’s response

41. City Harvest estimates that 13 million meals are thrown away each month in London alone, by supermarkets, restaurants and food outlets. This is more than enough to cover the 9 million meals that they calculate are needed each month in London by those in food poverty, but at present they estimate that just 1 million meals are redistributed to those in need. Adam Smith, The Real Junk Food Project, told us that

77 Lindsay Boswell, Q14
78 Ibid.
79 See Outreach Events, Appendix 2
80 Lindsay Boswell, Q14
81 Kath Dalmeny, Q1
82 Ibid.
83 City Harvest London (SDF0039)
84 Ibid.
If we want to end hunger we need to stop feeding the poor; we need to start feeding everybody and make sure that everybody has the human right to have access to this food. That is what needs to happen. We waste so much of it in this country that we could feed everybody with just the waste alone\textsuperscript{85}

42. The Committee heard evidence from several food redistribution charities, such as FareShare, which distributed enough food for 36.7 million meals to nearly 10,000 community groups and charities across 1,500 towns and cities in the UK. Almost all the supermarkets that we heard from explicitly described processes to redirect surplus food, including donating it to redistributing organisations like FareShare, or processing it for animal feed and anaerobic digestion.\textsuperscript{86} We heard evidence that some restaurant chains, such as Nando’s and KFC, also donate surplus food for redistribution.\textsuperscript{87}

43. Lindsay Boswell told the Committee that while businesses had been “exemplary” in driving forward action to reduce food waste (SDG 12.3), he “did not think the Government have done anything … to drive the awareness of the sustainable development goals forward.”\textsuperscript{88} We heard that while some central offices might mandate that food surplus is donated or reallocated, this message is not always known or understood by the person managing waste “at the back door” of individual stores.\textsuperscript{89} Several volunteers that we spoke to emphasised the role of personal relationships and educating supermarket and restaurant staff in facilitating the reallocation of surplus food to feed the hungry and food insecure, and that more could be done.\textsuperscript{90}

44. In addition to sourcing and providing food for people experiencing hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition, many of the civil society organisations that we spoke to were providing more than food support.\textsuperscript{91} Recognising that food insecurity is often co-located with other difficulties, the charities that we spoke to at our outreach events had developed into centres of resources tailored around the issues that their service users were experiencing.\textsuperscript{92} These included mental and physical health support, money management and cooking courses, and benefits advice (including IT courses helping people with computer illiteracy to complete their benefits forms online).\textsuperscript{93} We heard about the different ways that they tackled the knock-on effects that food insecurity can have on families and society. One group we spoke to highlighted instances of young people getting involved with gangs as an accidental by-product of seeing their families struggling, and that their local social supermarket held parent support classes and outreach events for families.\textsuperscript{94}

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\textsuperscript{85} Adam Smith, Q12
\textsuperscript{86} Waitrose & Partners (SDF0037); Aldi UK (SDF0036); The Co-op (SDF0034); Ocado (SDF0033); Tesco PLC (SDF0032); Sainsbury’s (SDF0030)
\textsuperscript{87} Outreach Events, Appendix 2
\textsuperscript{88} Lindsay Boswell, Q35
\textsuperscript{89} Outreach Events, Appendix 2
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
The Government’s response

45. Kath Dalmeny, CEO of Sustain, set out criteria for an effective government response to food insecurity, explaining “what would it look like if our country did care about fixing food insecurity.”

We look to the UN’s Right to Food guidance on this. They are looking across the world at countries and states that are addressing food poverty in a systemic kind of way. These are the key indicators of a country that would be doing something about it. We would be measuring food insecurity, we would be identifying the solutions systematically, we would be adopting a strategy, allocating responsibilities and accountability, legislating for change and then monitoring progress and ensuring effective redress.

46. However, as illustrated above, there are still no UK-wide indicators for measuring hunger or malnutrition, and the scale and causes of these issues are still not fully understood. While the prevalence of food insecurity appears to be worsening, the Government has taken no specific action to redress it, for example by including it in their obesity strategy or Agenda 2030 review. In the Government’s Agenda 2030 analysis, on addressing food supplies, they celebrate that “year on year, since 2013, food prices have fallen”, without exploring why food insecurity and food bank use is continuing to rise. In their written evidence, City Harvest told the Committee that:

Data acquisition on food insecurity in the UK is insufficient and as a result minimizes effective management of food insecurity. As the government currently does not measure household food insecurity, a standardized approach must be developed, and the government needs to continuously generate realistic data on food poverty if we are to tackle the hunger issue. It is dramatically difficult to fight hunger when data is ambiguous, not collected, and cannot be clearly articulated.

47. Similarly, while Government is aware of the scale of obesity, it has not yet contextualised it within the framework of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in the UK. It does not mention malnutrition or food insecurity in its obesity strategy, and, while it does indicate that obesity levels are higher amongst children from more deprived backgrounds, it fails to put this in the context of food insecurity. Again, the Government’s Agenda 2030 update on the UK Government’s approach to delivering the SDGs at home and abroad, lists actions to address “hunger and malnutrition” in the “Around the World” section, not the “At Home” section. The “At Home” section approaches “healthy and balanced diets” through the lens of reducing childhood obesity and Healthy Start, with their action plan focusing on a soft drinks levy and reducing sugar content in food.

95 Kath Dalmeny, Q1.
96 Ibid.
97 DFID, Agenda 2030, p.6
98 City Harvest London (SDF0039)
99 HM Government, Childhood Obesity: A plan for action, 2016, and Childhood Obesity: A plan for action Chapter 2, 2018
100 DFID, Agenda 2030, pp.5–6
101 Ibid. p.6; Cabinet Office, Department of Health and Social Care, HM Treasury, Prime Minister’s Office 10 Downing Street, Childhood Obesity: A plan for action, (August 2016)
Taylor, Executive Director of The Food Foundation, attributes these shortcomings in measurement, strategy, legislation and progress to the lack of specific responsibility and accountability for hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in the UK.

This is a cross-departmental responsibility but at the end of the day, unless somebody is a nominated lead, nothing is going to happen. The key question is who is responsible to reporting on food insecurity in the UK in the SDG framework. At the moment that question is unanswered.

48. The Committee questioned ministers from DFID, Cabinet Office, Department for Works and Pensions and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about who had responsibility and accountability for tackling hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in the UK. The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Food and Animal Welfare, David Rutley MP, told the Committee that this was “a cross-cutting Government responsibility” on which Defra was taking the lead, but as noted above, tackling hunger does not feature in Defra’s Single Departmental Plan.

Chair: Who is responsible? Which of you is responsible for ending hunger in the UK? None of your single departmental plans mentioned it.

49. Single Departmental Plans are intended to be the vehicle for delivering the SDGs. Despite the growing severity of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in the UK, and despite the Government’s pledge to implement SDG2 in the UK as well as overseas, the only department to mention hunger in its SDP is the Department for International Development (DFID). Similarly, the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust noted that the Environment Agency only mentions the SDGs once in its 2017–18 annual report.” Anna Taylor (Food Foundation) elaborated on the “shortfalls” in Government’s current approach to tackling the SDGs through SDPs:

50. Significant areas can fall between stools and there is not a comprehensive overview of all elements of the SDGs across those plans. If we take food insecurity in the UK and look at how the Government is reporting on that within the single departmental plans, you see quite a strong response on childhood obesity and quite a strong response on directions of travel on sustainable agriculture, but food insecurity and food poverty is absent in terms of laying out what the Government is going to do in this area.

51. The Government has made several pledges relating to British food quality and labelling, which may help safeguard against deterioration of British food standards and help consumers to make more informed choices in the future. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs assured the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee that there would be no lowering of British standards in the event of Britain leaving the European Union:

Kerry McCarthy You have said repeatedly … that there will be no lowering of British standards post-Brexit. Can you give the same assurance that we will not sign up to any trade deals that would allow produce into this country that is produced to lower standards than we allow?
Michael Gove: Yes.

...

Kerry McCarthy: Does that apply to standards that we would currently apply by virtue of our membership of the EU?

Michael Gove: Yes.\textsuperscript{105}

The Secretary of State has also announced that Government is “already looking at how we can review labelling”, in particular “at the whole suite of protections that we give people in order to ensure that all of us can feel safe when buying food.”\textsuperscript{106}

Conclusions and Recommendations

52. Food insecurity is a significant issue in the UK, with levels amongst the worst in Europe, especially for children, with 19% of under 15s living with an adult who is moderately or severely food insecure, of whom half are severely food insecure. The growing prevalence of food insecurity in both the working and non-working population appears to be linked to rising living costs and stagnating wages. Particularly vulnerable groups include the unemployed, those in the lowest income quartile, people with disabilities or illnesses, families with children, and single parents. Surges in demand for emergency food aid have been linked to Universal Credit, due to waiting times, delays in payments, debt and loan repayments, and benefit sanctions.

53. Despite the need for joined-up cross-government action, hunger and food insecurity has fallen between the cracks in Government plans. Government continues to see hunger and food insecurity as overseas issues, with DFID the only Department to include them in its Single Departmental Plan. Government has failed to ensure that the key SDG targets relating to hunger, and food insecurity are included in planning and performance frameworks, and there is no clear ministerial accountability for combatting hunger in the UK. We are concerned at the Government’s turning a blind eye to UK hunger and its lack of progress in measuring and acting on hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in the UK. Performance is unlikely to improve in the UK and reach the SDG targets for SDG2 unless significant and co-ordinated action is taken.

54. The issues of food insecurity, hunger, malnutrition and obesity should be considered in parallel in the UK context. They are often co-located and share causal factors. For example, insufficient access to food may lead to risk-averse purchasing habits and prioritisation of low-priced, filling foods with long shelf lives - which are often nutrient-poor but calorie-rich. The Government does not fully understand the relationship between food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition. By addressing obesity in isolation, it is missing the opportunity to effect widespread change.

\textsuperscript{105} Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, \textit{Oral Evidence: Scrutiny of the Agriculture Bill, HC 1591, 31 October 2018, Qq 298–300}

\textsuperscript{106} “Government to review food labelling law after Natasha Ednan-Laperouse Pret a Manger death”, \textit{ITV News}, 1 October 2018, accessed 8 January 2019
55. We welcome the many excellent local initiatives providing food and support to tackle the causes of hunger and related issues. However, these services are not available in all areas, and even where they are users can be vulnerable to a “hokey-cokey” effect of funding being introduced and later removed.

56. We recommend that the Government appoint a minister with responsibility and accountability for combating hunger and food insecurity within the UK. They should work with civil society to explore the scale, causes and impact of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition; implement strategies for improvement, and monitor progress.

57. We recommend that targets for ending hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms are included in Single Departmental Plans. To be effective, targets in the SDPs must include UK-wide metrics, for hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition, and set out specific mechanisms for action if performance is poor. Individual targets should make explicit links to Departments with responsibility for policies which contribute to the delivery of the primary goal, for example, reducing food waste (SDG12) and monitoring the living wage, in respect of goals 2.1 and 2.2.

58. We recommend that the Government update its obesity strategy to take account of the close relationship between obesity, hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in the UK. We support the call from the Patients Association for Government to create a definition of under-nutrition which includes both underweight and overweight individuals, and a tool for identifying it.

59. We recommend that the Government work with the Office for National Statistics to measure the potential impact that Universal Credit may have on rates of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms in pilot Universal Credit areas. To be effective this measure should account for the rates of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition before and after the implementation of Universal Credit and compare these rates with areas where Universal Credit has not been applied.”

60. In the event that the UK leaves the EU, the Government must deliver on its promises that British food standards will be maintained. We welcome the Government’s intention to review food labelling to enable consumers to make more informed choices and believe that the final system should be accompanied by an awareness campaign.
3 The Sustainable Development Goals in the UK

61. Our predecessor Committee’s 2017 inquiry on the Sustainable Development Goals identified what it called a “doughnut-shaped” hole, where the Government saw:

“the Goals as something for the UK to help other countries do, rather than drawing on other countries’ experiences in implementing the goals here at home … suggest[ing] that it has little interest in, or enthusiasm for, maximising the opportunities and benefits presented by the Goals.”

62. The inquiry looked at Government’s approach to the SDGs in the UK across three broad areas:

- Implementation;
- Awareness and Engagement;
- Measuring, monitoring and reporting.

63. This chapter will report on Government’s progress in these three areas. It will also examine Government’s readiness for the Voluntary National Review, which the Government is due to complete in 2019.

Implementation of the SDGs

Single Departmental Plans

64. Single Departmental Plans are the principle vehicle by which the Government intends both to implement the Goals and to measure progress in delivering them. Oliver Dowden CBE MP, Minister for Implementation at the Cabinet Office, told us:

The approach that we decided to take as a Government was rather than having separate metrics for each of the sustainable development goals, we wanted to entrench them in everything that the Government did through our single departmental plans, which are the guiding principles for each Government Department.

65. Our predecessor Committee’s 2017 report found that only two departments, DFID and HMRC, mentioned the SDGs when their SDPs were published in 2017. The Government’s response in December 2017 committed to “work with departments to ensure Goals are embedded within them”. The Chair of the Committee subsequently wrote to the Cabinet Office in January 2018:

We were disappointed that only two Departments - DFID and HMRC - mentioned the Goals in their SDPs. We found that the read across from

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107 Environmental Audit Committee, Ninth Report of Session 2016–17, Sustainable Development Goals in the UK, HC 596, Summary
108 Oliver Dowden, Q47
109 Sustainable Development Goals in the UK, para 55
110 Government Response, p.6.
the Goals to identified departmental priorities was rarely explicit and sometimes obscure. ... In the absence of well-defined references to the Goals, we would like to know how the Government intends to deliver on its commitment to report publicly on progress against the Goals in its Annual Reports and Accounts.  

SDPs were updated in May 2018, with all departments referencing the SDGs, apart from the Department for Exiting the European Union.  

66. The Fairtrade Foundation in their submission welcomed the revision of the SDPs, but cautioned that it has not yet gone far enough:  

We believe there is still a lack of clarity regarding what concrete action the Government is taking to progress against the SDGs. The absence of mapping action against specific targets within the SDGs is concerning and reflects this lack of detail. We would emphasise that whilst the SDGs provide a clear and universal set of outcomes for all countries to achieve, to ensure and quantify progress, more tailored measures and actions designed to mapped against specific targets of the SDGs are required.  

67. UKSSD concur with this analysis, noting that  

[The SDPs do not link to specific SDG targets but connect existing departmental priorities to the SDGs at a Goal level. Therefore, the SDPs are not accurately integr[ing] the SDGs and it’s unlikely they will result in their full achievement.]  

68. The Bond SDG group go further, stating that “The Single Departmental Plans ... while mapping out some activity linked to the goals, do not amount to a delivery plan.” Anna Taylor, The Food Foundation, highlighted that “significant areas [of the SDGs] can fall between stools and there is not a comprehensive overview of all elements of the SDGs across those plans.”  

69. Taking DEFRA’s Plan as an example, one of the Department’s aims is to develop a world leading food and farming system. The targets identified under this aim include an intention to:  

Support our food and drink businesses to deliver high quality food and drink to more consumer markets across the globe by negotiating greater market access and working with the sector towards a Sector Deal to increase business capability to export (contributes to SDG 2)  

70. While the department may well be correct that this will contribute to the delivery of Goal 2, it is unclear from the SDP which aspect of Goal 2 this objective is intended to

111 Mary Creagh MP, Letter from Mary Creagh MP, Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, to Rt Hon David Lidington MP, Minister for the Cabinet Office, 23 January 2018  
112 Department for Exiting the European Union, Single Departmental Plan, Updated 23 May 2018, accessed 18 December 2018  
113 Fairtrade Foundation (SDF0026)  
114 UKSSD (SDF0027)  
115 Bond (SDF0012)  
116 Anna Taylor, Q2  
implement, and whether or not the Government is achieving it—performance information under this goal looks at the value of food exports and rural productivity, neither of which map directly onto the UN indicators.\footnote{118}

71. This issue is repeated across many SDPs, making it difficult to map government policy aims against the Goals, and to determine whether an initiative has been successful in delivering against the SDG indicators. As the Institute for Government illustrated earlier this year—targets in the SDPs are insufficiently specific to allow for objective assessment of whether or not they have been achieved:\footnote{119}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure7.png}
\caption{Priorities identified in Single Departmental Plans, 23 May 2018 (indicative)}
\end{figure}

\begin{quote}
\textbf{Figure 7: Priorities identified in Single Departmental Plans, 23 May 2018 (indicative)}
\end{quote}

\footnote{119}IFG Blog, 1 June 2018, \textit{Too many priorities mean no priorities}, accessed 17 October 2018.

72. Wildlife and Countryside Link suggest:

There needs to be an alignment of the SDPs to specific targets as well as the top line goals, without which it is difficult to identify gaps in SDG implementation.

The SDPs are not sufficient for an ‘action plan’ on the SDGs and the Government needs to develop a comprehensive implementation and coordination plan at the same time as developing its Voluntary National Review.\footnote{121}

73. There are also issues in relation to the effectiveness of SDPs in addressing Goals which cross policy boundaries. Goal 2: Zero Hunger is poorly represented, with The Food Foundation noting:

DEFRA’s Single Departmental Plan does not include a measure for food insecurity and the Department of Health and Social Care’s plan focuses

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{118} Ibid.
\item \footnote{119} Ibid.
\item \footnote{120} Ibid.
\item \footnote{121} Wildlife and Countryside Link (SDF0015)
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
solely on obesity. This limits the Government’s awareness of the prevalence of food insecurity in the UK and prevents it appropriately reporting on SDG2 and implementing a proportionate solution to tackling the problem.  

74. Similarly, there is no overarching framework for ensuring that there are no gaps in delivery of the Goals. Bond Sustainable Development Group highlight the lack of central oversight:

There is no common approach for how Government Departments have aligned existing plans to the SDGs, and no analysis of gaps and what goals and targets might be missing. It is therefore unclear how the SDGs have been translated into specific Government planning processes.  

**Departmental Annual Reports and Accounts**

75. The Government’s response to our predecessor Committee’s 2017 report suggests that the implementation of the SDGs can be tracked through reporting in departments’ annual reports and accounts (ARAs):

SDPs enable a department’s contribution to delivery of the Goals to be reported publicly in Departments’ Annual Report and Accounts, and enable progress to be scrutinised by parliament and the public.  

76. Written evidence shows that at present, annual reports are simply not capable of being used to track progress on implementation, and as a result it is difficult for Parliament and the public to hold Government to account on the Goals. Several respondents to our call for evidence note that DEFRA’s 2017–18 Annual Report contains only one reference to the SDGs, and that this is lacking in any detail. Similarly, the DWP make only two references which provide no detail on how the Department is performing against the Goals for which it is responsible.  

77. Analysis by the House of Commons Scrutiny Unit shows that few departmental annual reports provide an effective means of measuring performance, either against the departments’ goals or the SDGs.

**Figure 8: Tracking the SDGs through relevant SDP Actions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Is the ARA structured around SDP “Objectives”?</th>
<th>Are SDP/SDG “Actions” included in Performance Report?</th>
<th>Is SDP/SDG performance illustrated through KPI/metric/discussion?</th>
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122 The Food Foundation (SDF0017)

123 Bond (SDF0012)


125 Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management (SDF0003); Wildlife and Countryside Link (SDF0015); Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (SDF0006)

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78. The 2017–18 Departmental Annual Reports were written against the previous Single Departmental Plans, before the Government’s commitment to include the SDGs, but this analysis shows that many departments have some way to go before the ARAs will act as an effective means of holding government to account.

79. The Scrutiny Unit Analysis highlights the lack of consistency between departments. Across the whole of Government there are some examples of good practice, with BEIS in particular setting out the Goals to which it is contributing and identifying actions taken in each area:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Is the ARA structured around SDP “Objectives”?</th>
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Source: House of Commons Scrutiny Unit
80. There remain challenges in linking the actions taken by Government to the targets under each goal, but this represents a minimum level of good practice that all departments should follow.

**Leadership**

81. Our predecessor Committee’s 2017 report was particularly critical of the lack of leadership being shown by Government on delivering the SDGs, concluding that “there
is no voice at the top of Government speaking for the long-term aspirations embodied in the goals”,128 calling on the Cabinet Office to take ownership of this issue. It also emphasised the value of Government reporting an “aggregate scorecard or baseline against which to measure progress towards the Goals.”129 The Government’s response dismissed these recommendations, stating that “the Government believes that the Goals do not require a separate coordinating mechanism and are using existing mechanisms to embed and track delivery of the Goals”.130

82. However, submissions received for this follow-up inquiry suggest that further action is still needed to provide effective leadership on the SDGs. WWF state that “The SDGs have not been prioritised by the UK Government, there is no action plan in place for delivering the goals and little sign of political commitment to the goals.”131 UKSSD highlight a need for “clear Government leadership supported by cross-sector action from businesses, charities and individuals to ensure the UK achieves the SDGs as quickly as possible,”132 reiterating our predecessor Committee’s recommendation that ownership of the SDGs should be transferred to a senior Minister in the Cabinet Office.133

83. Mr Dowden told the Committee that while “each Department is responsible for all of the sustainable development goals,” “the Cabinet Office is responsible for all implementation.”134 However, he explained that SDPs “are reviewed each year by each Department”, and are “subject to clearance by the Cabinet Office and the Treasury.”135 Such reviews would allow a further opportunity for Departments to represent the SDGs at a target and indicator level in the SDPs, and highlight where the Cabinet Office should be taking a leadership role in ensuring that each Department is aware of their role in the SDGs and that each SDG target is accounted for in at least one SDP.

84. This strategic oversight might overcome the issues highlighted by our witnesses, and our findings from Chapter 2, which show an ongoing need for leadership on two levels:

- To coordinate the allocation of goals at a target level in the SDPs, to ensure that none are missed out, as happened to hunger in the UK; and
- The need to have a minister for hunger to tackle a profound and growing issue in the UK, which is contrary to Government’s objectives under Goal 2. There may be other areas in the SDGs where increased accountability is required to tackle a UK-based issue.

**Prioritisation**

85. Evidence also suggests that the doughnut-shaped hole is still present. The Government’s Agenda 2030 report offers a mismatched picture of government activity. For example, the government reports on its work overseas to address hunger and malnutrition but provides no detail on work to address this aspect of the SDGs in the UK.136

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128 Sustainable Development Goals in the UK, para 59.
129 Ibid., para 41
130 Government Response
131 WWF (SDF0009)
132 UKSSD (SDF0027)
133 Sustainable Development Goals in the UK, para 59
134 Oliver Dowden, Q56 and Q95
135 Ibid., Q50
136 Agenda 2030, the UK Government’s approach, p. 6.
86. This is indicative of a broader failure to prioritise the SDGs in the UK context. WWF told us that, in spite of the UK Government’s role in championing the “Leave No One Behind” principle during negotiations on the 2030 Agenda, “they have not subsequently applied this principle to government policy.” This view was also shared by Bond SDG and Health Poverty Action. In their Measuring Up report, UKSSD assessed that in the overall implementation of the SDGs in the UK, “while there is an enormous amount to celebrate, the most vulnerable places and people in our society are increasingly being left behind.”

87. Bond SDG recognise that the incorporation of the SDGs into the SDPs “represents some progress,” but they “do not believe that this is sufficient evidence of substantive mainstreaming or prioritisation of SDG implementation in its programme.” Similarly, looking at Goal 11, the Royal Town Planning Institute suggest that “there is no evidence that the government has an explicit action plan for responding to SDG11,” and that this would require “joined up policy across Whitehall” with “clearer direction and prioritisation from the centre of government.”

88. The necessity of a joined-up approach is also highlighted by UKSSD, who note that:

> There is a lack of policy coherence and failure to recognise that some policies may undermine the achievement of certain targets while contributing to others. This may result in inefficiencies and conflicts in the implementation of the SDGs, and the real value and benefits of the SDGs as an integrated, interconnected framework will not be realised.

89. They also highlight the potential for gaps in coverage resulting from devolution of responsibility to departments in the absence of a central guiding force.

90. There is also work to be done to make the Goals a meaningful part of the policy process. Wildlife and Countryside Link point to a failure to integrate the Goals into major policy proposals:

> The UN SDGs are mentioned in the 25 Year Environment Plan. However, they are not mainstreamed throughout the Plan, and are only referenced under Chapter 6 on protecting our Global Environment. Again, this approach de-prioritises those targets and goals where national action is needed.

**Measuring the SDGs**

91. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development commits Governments to measuring progress against the SDGs at the national, regional and global levels:

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137 WWF (SDF0009)
138 Bond (SDF0012); Health Poverty Action (SDF0013)
139 Ibid., p.4
140 Bond (SDF0012)
141 Royal Town Planning Institute (SDF0011)
142 UKSSD (SDF0027)
143 Ibid.
144 Wildlife and Countryside Link (SDF0015)
“Indicators are being developed to assist with this work. Quality accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data will be needed to help with the measurement of progress and to ensure that no one is left behind. Such data is key to decision-making. Data and information from existing reporting mechanisms should be used wherever possible.”

92. The UN stipulates that disaggregated data should be broken down “by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.”

93. The Office for National Statistics has begun publishing data on UK performance on the Sustainable Development Goals. In November 2017 the ONS launched its online data platform, which seeks to bring together all available data about the SDGs in the UK. The ONS have also published a series of narrative reports looking at specific aspects of the Goals. Recent reports include analysis of UK child mortality rates, data on domestic violence, and the proportion of people in custody.

94. This work has begun to provide a more detailed picture of domestic performance against the SDGs, although there remain several areas where data is not yet available or not of sufficient quality. ONS currently reports on 64% of the indicators (157 out of 244). It has a further 9% (22) in progress and is exploring the data sources for the final 27% (65). ONS are committed to fill these gaps and the breadth of data available is increasing all the time, with new data on undernourishment and local breed extinction risks added in September 2018. Ian Bell, Deputy National Statistician at the ONS, said that a lot of the focus is now on the disaggregation gaps, in particular aiming to “improve how we measure migration and population estimates” and “improve the income and wealth” aspects of finance data.

95. There are, however, challenges with the currency of the data in some areas. For example, on the prevalence of food insecurity in the UK, there is only a single data point from 2015, derived from the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation Survey. Data is also not of a consistent age–the most recent entry in the data series on children with malnutrition is from 2016, meaning it is difficult to get an accurate view of UK performance on the goals at any one point in time, or to track the impact of interventions across different parts of the Goals. Again, the ONS recognises this challenge and is working to address this.

96. The data on malnutrition highlights another challenge, which our predecessor Committee recognised in its initial report - in some cases there is no direct data on the targets set by the UN, requiring countries to use the closest available equivalent. For malnutrition, the SDG target seeks to measure the percentage of children who are two or more standard deviations away from median WHO standards for weight/height ratio, whereas UK data is based on NHS monitoring of the number of children classified as underweight. Similarly, there are differences in data frequency and type between the nations within the UK. For example, ONS sets out obesity data on children aged 4–5, but the data is only available for Scottish children aged 4–6. While England and Wales have data for 2016, Scotland’s most recent data comes from 2015 and Northern Ireland’s from 2014.

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145 UN, Agenda 2030, para 48
146 Ibid., para 74g
147 Iain Bell, Q30
148 ONS, Indicator 2.2.2, accessed 4 December 2018
97. The ONS has also been consulting on its approach to data reporting.\(^{149}\) As a result of this consultation it is working to improve the geographic breakdown of the data reported via the dashboard, with the aim of reporting all data to the lowest possible geographic level.\(^{150}\) It is also working to address other shortcomings in data disaggregation, in particular focusing on migrant status, where it is utilising new powers under the Digital Economy Act to improve migration statistics.\(^{151}\) Iain Bell, ONS, emphasised the breadth of ONS's role in supporting data on the SDGs within the UK, beyond Government:

> The role of the Office for National Statistics is to provide evidence for a wide range of users not just Government. Therefore, if there is a combined user need covering political parties, the third sector and others, it is our job to go out and measure this.\(^{152}\)

98. The National Audit Office (NAO) has highlighted that “a good performance framework strikes the right balance between measuring outcomes and outputs, where outputs “are the direct results from an organisation’s activities” and outcomes are “the ultimate impact of these activities.”\(^{153}\) The NAO notes that the SDG indicators “primarily report on outcomes.”\(^{154}\) While it is therefore important to have some short-term metrics which are output focused while working towards the final outcomes, these should not be mistaken for outcomes.

### Awareness of the SDGs

99. Awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals is critical for effective implementation and accountability. As Wildlife and Countryside Link note in their evidence, “increasing public awareness and understanding of the goals is important for public accountability. The public cannot hold governments, businesses or civil society organizations to account for delivering on the SDGs if they do not know about them.”\(^{155}\)

100. The 2017 report described awareness of the Goals as “shockingly low.”\(^{156}\) The evidence received for this inquiry presents a similar picture. UKSSD report that they “have seen no evidence that the Government has taken any steps to raise awareness of the SDGs with external stakeholders, and particularly with children and young people.”\(^{157}\) This view is also shared by Wildlife and Countryside Link.\(^{158}\)

101. Lindsay Boswell, CEO of FareShare, told the Committee that while business had driven forward action in relation to specific individual goals, such as 12.3 (food waste) where “the business industry is exemplary,” he “did not think the Government have done anything … to drive the awareness of the sustainable development goals forward.”\(^{159}\) Anna Taylor, Executive Director of The Food Foundation, highlighted the importance of awareness of the SDGs, in creating a “framework … of accountability and reporting

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\(^{149}\) Office for National Statistics (ONS) (SDF0031)  
\(^{150}\) Ibid.  
\(^{151}\) Ibid.  
\(^{152}\) Iain Bell, Q24  
\(^{153}\) National Audit Office, Environmental and Sustainability Metrics, 2015, p.8  
\(^{154}\) Ibid.  
\(^{155}\) Wildlife and Countryside Link (SDF0015)  
\(^{156}\) Sustainable Development Goals in the UK, para 6.  
\(^{157}\) UKSSD (SDF0027)  
\(^{158}\) Wildlife and Countryside Link (SDF0015)  
\(^{159}\) Lindsay Boswell, Q35
progress that is really critical if the goals are going to make any difference to anything.”

She also highlights the opportunity for “genuine international collaboration and learning from each other.”

Surely we can do a better job by getting around the table and working out what a positive food system looks like that benefits not only the environment but also human health equitably in the future. This is a global challenge that we are not grasping. The SDGs create a framework for doing that.

102. David Rutley MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Food and Animal Welfare at DEFRA, highlighted the Department’s work in raising awareness through the Connecting Classrooms and Step Up and Serve initiatives, but recognised:

There is no question there is more to do in terms of raising awareness. When we look at issues like food waste and other issues, there is much more we can do. There is a ready and willing audience in younger people and we need to reach out to them more actively as well. I will take that challenge away and do more work within the DEFRA area but there is work ongoing, particularly on the environmental space.

Role of the National Curriculum

103. The Government’s response to the 2017 report suggested that the national curriculum “already provides opportunities for pupils to be taught about [development] issues,” quoting the Key Stage 3 Geography curriculum which teaches pupils “how human and physical processes interact to influence and change landscapes, environments and the climate; and how human activity relies on the effective functioning of natural systems.” While there is scope for teachers to cover the Goals when teaching in this area, there is no requirement for the Goals to be explicitly mentioned. Indeed, there is no mention of the Goals at all in the Geography, Citizenship, or Science curriculums at Key Stage 3.

104. Evidence from DFID for this inquiry focuses on the curriculum, stating that it “enables teachers to impart knowledge and to raise awareness of the SDGs and sustainability issues teachers are free to expand upon topics specified in the national curriculum if they choose to.” As with the Government response, it ignores the fact that inclusion of topics relevant to the SDGs in the national curriculum does nothing to raise awareness of the Goals themselves.

105. The curriculum as it stands is therefore insufficient as a tool to raise awareness of the Goals among young people, both within and in addition to the national curriculum. To

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160 Anna Taylor, Q34
161 Ibid.
162 Ibid.
163 David Rutley, Q64
164 Government response, p.2
166 Ibid.
169 Department for International Development (SDF0029)
address this, the Bond SDG group recommend that the Goals should be taught as part of Citizenship education, noting that they “provide an ideal framework for teaching children and young people about global issues and the connections between the UK and the wider world.”\(^{170}\)

106. The Environmental Association for Universities and Colleagues also highlight the challenges in higher education: “two thirds of students [have] not heard of the SDGs. We cannot hope to meet the SDGs by 2030 if we continue to produce graduates that have no idea what they are and the economic, environmental and social challenges and opportunities they represent.”\(^{171}\) They recommend that teaching of the SDGs be embedded into educational objectives, and underline the importance of teaching the SDGs beyond Goal 4 on quality education:

The Government needs to recognise the critical role of Higher and Further Education in acting across all the goals, and not being limited to Goal 4. What universities and colleges do matters to our shared ambition to create a more equitable and inclusive society, and be responsible custodians of our planet. The sector’s role in undertaking research and supporting innovation, alongside lifelong learning, underpin a global knowledge-based economy. Today’s students are tomorrow’s leaders and change-agents—there is not enough understanding of this within Government.\(^{172}\)

**Awareness of the Goals in wider society**

107. There are some good examples of awareness and engagement across wider society, but there is little consistency of approach. Bristol Green Capital Partnership report that “engagement at the regional level … has so far been limited”,\(^{173}\) although they highlight the work of Bristol City Council in appointing an SDG Ambassador for the city as an example of good practice,\(^{174}\) and note what can be achieved through citizen-led engagement, with the Bristol SDG alliance bringing together higher education institutions, charities, civil society groups and businesses to create localised targets for the City.\(^{175}\)

108. Some businesses are also engaged with the goals. For example, PWC have developed a tool to help businesses “rethink strategy and business behaviour to align with the goals” and to “assess and evidence their impact.”\(^{176}\) The Business Retail Consortium’s *Better Retail, Better World* uses five SDGs as a framework to “mobilise the retail industry to meet some of the biggest global challenges.”\(^{177}\) Some of the supermarkets we heard from had detailed plans showing how their business could impact on the SDGs. Sainsburys was able to map the SDGs onto their guiding principles, and to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the SDGs.

\(^{170}\) Bond ([SDF0012](#))
\(^{171}\) Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges ([SDF0010](#))
\(^{172}\) Ibid.
\(^{173}\) Ibid.
\(^{174}\) Ibid.
\(^{175}\) Bristol Green Capital Partnership, Bristol SDG Alliance, Cabot Institute (University of Bristol) ([SDF0007](#))
\(^{177}\) British Retail Consortium, *Better Retail, Better World*, accessed 5 December 2018
109. Lord Bates, Minister of State for International Development, emphasised that the Government had engaged with business through the UN Global Compact, and through a speech by the DFID Secretary of State on the importance of the private sector engaging in the SDGs. However, some businesses are less engaged. For example, Asda did not detail any ways that it was aware that it was supporting the SDGs, beyond pointing to the Better Retail, Better World initiative.

110. Corporate policies are also not always consistently applied. Evidence heard during our outreach events highlighted that while almost all supermarket central offices have policies to ensure that food surplus is donated or reallocated, this message is not always known or understood by the person managing waste “at the back door” of individual stores for any supermarket provider.

111. In the Government’s response to our predecessor Committee’s report, it recognised the importance of engaging businesses, suggesting that the Government would consider how best to promote the goals to businesses. However, it seems that more action is still needed. As WWF put it in their evidence, “There needs to be concerted action and targeted policy making that engages a broad range of stakeholders including businesses, civil society, academic institutions and government.” The Environmental Association for Universities and colleges also call for “clearer linkages between the SDGs and the financial benefits of incorporating them within an institution.”

178 Sainsbury’s (SDF0030)
179 Lord Bates, Q63
180 Asda Stores Ltd. (SDF0035)
181 Waitrose & Partners (SDF0037); Aldi UK (SDF0036); The Co-op (SDF0034); Ocado (SDF0033); Tesco PLC (SDF0032); Sainsbury’s (SDF0030); See Outreach events, Appendix 2
182 Government Response, p. 4.
183 Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (SDF0010)
The Voluntary National Review

112. Voluntary National Reviews are intended “to show what steps the country has taken to implement the 2030 Agenda… and provide an assessment of the results on the ground”. Dr Graham Long, from Newcastle University has provided a summary of the guidance on VNRs produced by the UN. He describes the four principles that should govern any VNR. They:

- Should be participatory and inclusive;
- Should treat the goals as universal and indivisible;
- Should be critical, rigorous, and solutions-oriented;
- Should reflect human rights and focus on vulnerable groups.

113. Countries wishing to conduct a VNR should follow a four-step process, as set out in the UN Handbook:

Initial preparation and organisation, during which the structure, scope and stakeholder approach are decided, and resources allocated;

Stakeholder engagement, during which the reviewing country should seek to hear from all levels of society;

Preparation of the Review, including data gathering, and reporting on ownership, integration and incorporation into national mechanisms, as well as providing analysis of progress.

Presentation of the Review to the High Level Political Forum.

114. In its evidence the Department for International Development, which is leading on the UK VNR, describes the principles that underpin their review:

We are clear that the VNR should set out how the work of the Government will support the delivery of all 17 SDGs. This year’s theme of ‘Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality’ covers priorities for the UK Government, including economic growth, inequality, and peace and justice. We expect to highlight these areas in our report;

There should be a good balance between the UK’s domestic and international work; and

The VNR should adopt a data-driven approach to ensure it is robust and credible. We believe this is consistent with the VNRs presented by other countries and reflects UN guidance.

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184 UN Handbook, p.15.
185 Dr Graham Long (SDF0019)
187 Department for International Development (SDF0029)
115. In preparing the report, government should include a rigorous assessment of
governance for, and implementation of the Goals; focus on those furthest behind in the
UK context; and should report on awareness-building efforts, participation in the review
and the presence of stakeholder perspectives.188

116. The UK VNR is due to be presented to the UN High Level Political Forum in July
2019, and the review itself will have to be submitted in May, leaving only five months for
the process to be completed.

**Conducting the VNR**

117. Under UN guidelines, all levels and sectors of Government are expected to take part
in the review,189 and there is also a requirement for Parliamentarians to be consulted. It
should “track progress in implementing the universal Goals and targets, including the
means of implementation, in all countries in a manner which respects their universal,
integrated and interrelated nature and the three dimensions of sustainable development”.190
This means that VNRs cannot cherry-pick—they must examine progress against all
the targets which make up the SDGs, identifying challenges and difficulties as well as
successes.191 The review should also evaluate the effectiveness of governance arrangements,
in a “rigorous, self-critical way”192

118. In terms of gathering data, Governments should consider existing reports and
information which may contribute to the process.193 These need not be restricted only
to Government or its agencies—the Handbook suggests that any providers of data can be
used to provide “Access to high quality, up-to-date, and disaggregated data [which] is vital
for the VNR”.194 Many of the submissions to the inquiry highlight the UKSSD Measuring
Up report as a good starting point for the Government’s analysis.195

119. However, the picture in the evidence submitted to the Committee raises questions
about the Government’s approach. DFID’s own submission notes that in September 2018
the Department was still in the process of identifying leads within other departments
to support the production of the Review.196 In October 2018 we asked Mr Rutley and
Mr Tomlinson whether DEFRA and DWP had already started working towards a
contribution to the VNR. Mr Rutley assured the Committee that DEFRA “will be making
submissions” and that “the process is underway,” with officials “gearing up their activity
and … liaising very closely with the Cabinet Office” to contribute to the VNR.197 Mr
Tomlinson reiterated his commitment to work with DFID and other Departments, but
told the Committee that he had not personally been aware of an approach by DFID for
DWP to contribute to the VNR.198

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188 Dr Graham Long (SDF0019)
189 Ibid.
191 Dr Graham Long (SDF0019)
192 Ibid.
193 UN Handbook, p. 15.
195 For example, Bond (SDF0012)
196 Department for International Development (SDF0029)
197 David Rutley, Qq101–102
198 Justin Tomlinson, Qq103–104
120. Several other stakeholders also express concerns. The Royal Town Planning Institute state that “there is no evidence that MHCLG, or other government departments, are currently preparing for the Voluntary National Review Process.”199 End Hunger UK “believes the UK Government’s preparations for the Voluntary National Review process are insufficient.”200

Stakeholder engagement

121. As mentioned above, stakeholder engagement is a key principle of a successful VNR. The UN guidelines describe the importance of engagement as follows:

One of the founding principles of the 2030 Agenda is the requirement for processes to be participatory and inclusive. In practice, this means ensuring that all stakeholders, including all levels and sectors of government, civil society and the private sector, members of parliament, and national human rights institutions, are involved in the review and implementation processes.201

122. The London Sustainable Development Commission emphasised the opportunity presented by the VNR for “increasing stakeholder engagement with the SDGs and for building a more formal partnership with the Government to support the realisation of them.”202 Evidence from DFID suggests that the Government intends to “[consult] with interested stakeholders to produce a strong report”, and there has been some initial work on engagement, with the first stakeholder panel taking place on 31 July 2018,203 and an online information gathering exercise launched during the summer.204 However, the evidence we have received suggests that engagement has so far been limited, and that time is running out to conduct an effective engagement exercise. Wildlife and Countryside Link state that:

To engage stakeholders in a meaningful way requires time and resources, given the deadline for submitting the VNR we are concerned that it is very late in the day to be reaching out to stakeholders. A timeline and process for engaging stakeholders needs to be communicated widely as soon as possible.205

123. UKSSD also highlight confusion around the stakeholder engagement process, noting that “It is still unclear what the scope and process for engaging stakeholders will be in detail.”206 EAUC report a similar lack of knowledge, saying that they are “not aware of preparations, mechanisms, or a reporting process.”207

199 Royal Town Planning Institute (SDF0011)
200 End Hunger UK (SDF0021)
202 London Sustainable Development Commission (SDF0023), see also UKSSD (SDF0027)
203 WWF (SDF0009)
204 Available at https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/DFIDSDGs, accessed 17 October 18.
205 Wildlife and Countryside Link (SDF0015)
206 UKSSD (SDF0027)
207 Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (SDF0010)
124. Many of the submissions raise concerns about the lack of time remaining to complete the review. WWF suggest that “The UK Government has been very slow to develop a process and timeline for its Voluntary National Review (VNR) and we are concerned that there is now very little time to incorporate the contributions of stakeholders.”

125. Given that the stakeholder engagement is intended to take place at an early stage in the process, it raises questions about whether the Government has sufficient time to deliver a full and effective review in line with the UN guidelines. Perhaps most worrying, Government’s timeframe for conducting the VNR is unclear over when it will work with stakeholders and leaves no time for Parliamentary scrutiny.

**Figure 11: Timeframe of key activities and deadlines for the UK’s Voluntary National Review**

- Ongoing engagement to inform initial drafting between October and December
- Case studies of how people and organisations are contributing to delivering the Sustainable Development Goals through the Voluntary National Review website (see information below on how to do this), if possible by 11 January 2019
- Roundtable events with different groups of stakeholders on emerging messages and key findings in the new year (precise timing to be confirmed)
- Submission of a main messages document to the UN by 17 May 2019
- Submission of the full report to the UN by 14 June 2019.
- Presentation of the Voluntary National Review at the ministerial meeting of the UN High Level Political Forum from 16–18 July 2019
- The first Head of Government-level review of the Sustainable Development Goals at the UN General Assembly in September 2019

Source: Gov.uk website

126. We raised this issue with Ministers as part of our oral evidence session. Lord Bates told the Committee:

> We would be open to your advice on this as to how we engage with Parliament. There will be engagement with Parliament. The exact format of that is something that we are open to and discussing.

127. He went on to make a commitment to the Committee on Parliamentary engagement:

> If I could make the commitment, therefore, on behalf of the team of Ministers present, there will be a mechanism for consulting parliamentary colleagues on our progress towards a voluntary national review. That will happen before May. The exact format and structure as to how that consultation takes place is something we are discussing in Government, as you would expect, but we are also open to other colleagues in Parliament making suggestions to us.

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208 WWF (SDF0009)
209 Gov.uk, About the Voluntary National Review, accessed 5 December 2018
210 Lord Bates, Q93
Raising Awareness

128. Beyond the need to hear the voices of those involved with and affected by work to deliver the SDGs, a VNR also offers opportunities to raise awareness of the Goals within the reviewing country. Awareness-raising is part and parcel of the VNR process, as set out in the UN Handbook.\(^{211}\)

129. The Department for International Development make only limited reference to awareness-raising in their evidence to the Committee, focusing mainly on raising awareness of UK good practice overseas:

> The Government welcomes the VNR process as an invaluable opportunity to review progress, including learning more about what people, communities and businesses are doing across the country on this agenda, and share experience and lessons with the wider international community.\(^{212}\)

130. From the evidence received by the Committee, there seems to have been little activity in this area, and limited enthusiasm from Government to take advantage of the VNR process to raise awareness of the Goals in a domestic context. WWF comment that:

> The VNR is an excellent opportunity to have a broader public discussion about the SDGs, for example in schools, with communities, and increase awareness of the Goals. However, we have not seen any indication that the Government will use the VNR to increase visibility of the Goals.\(^{213}\)

131. Many contributors, like the Fairtrade Foundation, express a desire to engage with Government as part of the review and view it is an opportunity to raise awareness.\(^{214}\) But the risk is that the opportunity will be missed. Wildlife and Countryside Link summarise the situation:

> The UK’s Voluntary National Review (VNR) is an excellent opportunity to raise public awareness of the goals, and build momentum for their implementation, including across the public, private and non-profit sectors. However, so far we have not seen any indication that the UK Government will use the opportunity of the VNR to engage the public and increase communication on the goals.\(^{215}\)

Conclusions and Recommendations

132. In their present format, Single Departmental Plans are wholly inadequate as a means of delivering the SDGs in the UK. The omission of the SDG targets relating to hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition is just one example of where SDG targets have been overlooked in Government planning in the domestic context. Government’s failure to ensure that all SDG targets are covered in the new SDPs has left significant gaps in plans and accountability. Further work is needed to enable Government to fulfil its commitment to work “tirelessly for the full implementation of [the UN] Agenda by 2030.”

\(^{211}\) UN Handbook, p. 54.

\(^{212}\) Department for International Development (SDF0029)

\(^{213}\) WWF (SDF0009)

\(^{214}\) Fairtrade Foundation (SDF0026)

\(^{215}\) Wildlife and Countryside Link (SDF0015)
133. Awareness of the SDGs has grown in some parts of business and civil society, for example the work of the Better Retail, Better World project and supermarket awareness at a central office level. However, understanding of the role of the goals does not always filter down to the people who can influence performance, and Government could be doing more to increase awareness and illustrate its commitment to the SDGs, particularly among government agencies, the civil service, business and the public.

134. ONS has made some significant progress in developing metrics for the SDGs, reporting on 64% of indicators in its online portal. However, gaps still exist both among the indicators which they are yet to publish and among the existing indicators in terms of geography, demographic data and frequency of data updates. There is also currently a lack of outcome focused metrics, and a lack of set actions to respond to poor outcome performance.

135. The VNR offers an opportunity for Government to audit its own performance so far against the SDGs, and to raise the profile of the SDGs. As promised by DFID, there needs to be a mechanism for consulting Parliament on the Voluntary National Review, allowing for Parliamentary scrutiny of the full VNR before it is submitted.

136. We welcome Government’s commitment to put the SDGs “at the heart of the Single Departmental Plans”. However, the SDPs need to be explicitly linked to each SDG target, and mapped against underlying indicators. The Cabinet Office should be responsible for ensuring that no target is left out from the SDPs and should allocate accountability where required. It should facilitate cross-departmental working on targets where more than one department may influence the UK’s progress. Progress towards the SDGs should be aggregated into a single annual report by Government, as previously recommended by our predecessor Committee.

137. We reiterate the recommendation made in our initial 2017 inquiry that Government should do everything it can to support partners (government agencies, local government, civil society, business and the public) to contribute towards delivering the Goals.

138. ONS should continue to develop its metrics to cover all SDG indicators. Government and civil society must work with ONS to ensure that Government is able to work from timely, UK-wide metrics to measure its performance, with sufficient disaggregation to identify areas of need. It should consider the existing data to determine whether it is fit for current purpose, and to ensure that it covers the outcomes of actions, rather than just outputs. Government should also ensure that it establishes specific mechanisms for action if performance is poor. The Government should show leadership by introducing an SDG impact assessment as part of the cost-benefit analysis undertaken by Government, or for politically strategic events such as the Queen’s Speech and Budget.

139. Government must ensure that it engages with stakeholders, MPs and civil society groups in the Voluntary National Review Process. It must also fulfil its commitment to bring the VNR before Parliament for scrutiny before it is submitted. Senior Ministers, civil society and Parliamentarians should be present when the VNR is presented at the High Level Political Forum in July 2019.
Conclusions and recommendations

Hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in the UK

1. Despite the need for joined-up cross-government action, hunger and food insecurity has fallen between the cracks in Government plans. Government continues to see hunger and food insecurity as overseas issues, with DFID the only Department to include them in its Single Departmental Plan. Government has failed to ensure that the key SDG targets relating to hunger, and food insecurity are included in planning and performance frameworks, and there is no clear ministerial accountability for combating hunger in the UK. We are concerned at the Government’s turning a blind eye to UK hunger and its lack of progress in measuring and acting on hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in the UK. Performance is unlikely to improve in the UK and reach the SDG targets for SDG2 unless significant and co-ordinated action is taken. (Paragraph 53)

2. The Government does not fully understand the relationship between food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition. By addressing obesity in isolation, it is missing the opportunity to effect widespread change. (Paragraph 54)

3. We welcome the many excellent local initiatives providing food and support to tackle the causes of hunger and related issues. However, these services are not available in all areas, and even where they are users can be vulnerable to a “hokey-cokey” effect of funding being introduced and later removed. (Paragraph 55)

4. We recommend that the Government appoint a minister with responsibility and accountability for combatting hunger and food insecurity within the UK. They should work with civil society to explore the scale, causes and impact of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition; implement strategies for improvement, and monitor progress. (Paragraph 56)

5. We recommend that targets for ending hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms are included in Single Departmental Plans. To be effective, targets in the SDPs must include UK-wide metrics, for hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition, and set out specific mechanisms for action if performance is poor. Individual targets should make explicit links to Departments with responsibility for policies which contribute to the delivery of the primary goal, for example, reducing food waste (SDG12) and monitoring the living wage, in respect of goals 2.1 and 2.2. (Paragraph 57)

6. We recommend that the Government update its obesity strategy to take account of the close relationship between obesity, hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in the UK. We support the call from the Patients Association for Government to create a definition of under-nutrition which includes both underweight and overweight individuals, and a tool for identifying it. (Paragraph 58)

7. We recommend that the Government work with the Office for National Statistics to measure the potential impact that Universal Credit may have on rates of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms in pilot Universal Credit areas. To
be effective this measure should account for the rates of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition before and after the implementation of Universal Credit and compare these rates with areas where Universal Credit has not been applied.” (Paragraph 59)

8. In the event that the UK leaves the EU, the Government must deliver on its promises that British food standards will be maintained. We welcome the Government’s intention to review food labelling to enable consumers to make more informed choices and believe that the final system should be accompanied by an awareness campaign. (Paragraph 60)

The Sustainable Development Goals in the UK

9. In their present format, Single Departmental Plans are wholly inadequate as a means of delivering the SDGs in the UK. (Paragraph 132)

10. ONS has made some significant progress in developing metrics for the SDGs, reporting on 64% of indicators in its online portal. However, gaps still exist both among the indicators which they are yet to publish and among the existing indicators in terms of geography, demographic data and frequency of data updates. (Paragraph 134)

11. The VNR offers an opportunity for Government to audit its own performance so far against the SDGs, and to raise the profile of the SDGs. As promised by DFID, there needs to be a mechanism for consulting Parliament on the Voluntary National Review, allowing for Parliamentary scrutiny of the full VNR before it is submitted. (Paragraph 135)

12. We welcome Government’s commitment to put the SDGs “at the heart of the Single Departmental Plans”. However, the SDPs need to be explicitly linked to each SDG target, and mapped against underlying indicators. The Cabinet Office should be responsible for ensuring that no target is left out from the SDPs and should allocate accountability where required. It should facilitate cross-departmental working on targets where more than one department may influence the UK’s progress. Progress towards the SDGs should be aggregated into a single annual report by Government, as previously recommended by our predecessor Committee. (Paragraph 136)

13. We reiterate the recommendation made in our initial 2017 inquiry that Government should do everything it can to support partners (government agencies, local government, civil society, business and the public) to contribute towards delivering the Goals. (Paragraph 137)

14. ONS should continue to develop its metrics to cover all SDG indicators. Government and civil society must work with ONS to ensure that Government is able to work from timely, UK-wide metrics to measure its performance, with sufficient disaggregation to identify areas of need. It should consider the existing data to determine whether it is fit for current purpose, and to ensure that it covers the outcomes of actions, rather than just outputs. Government should also ensure that it establishes specific mechanisms for action if performance is poor. The Government should show leadership by
introducing an SDG impact assessment as part of the cost-benefit analysis undertaken by Government, or for politically strategic events such as the Queen’s Speech and Budget. (Paragraph 138)

15. Government must ensure that it engages with stakeholders, MPs and civil society groups in the Voluntary National Review Process. It must also fulfil its commitment to bring the VNR before Parliament for scrutiny before it is submitted. Senior Ministers, civil society and Parliamentarians should be present when the VNR is presented at the High Level Political Forum in July 2019. (Paragraph 139)
Appendices

Appendix 1: List of the Sustainable Development Goals

Goal 1. No Poverty - End poverty in all its forms everywhere.

Goal 2. Zero Hunger - End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

Goal 3. Good Health and Well-being - Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Goal 4. Quality Education - Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Goal 5. Gender Equality - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Goal 6. Clean Water and Sanitation - Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Goal 7. Affordable and Clean Energy - Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.

Goal 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth - Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

Goal 9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure - Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.

Goal 10. Reduced Inequalities - Reduce income inequality within and among countries.

Goal 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Goal 12. Responsible Consumption and Production - Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Goal 13. Climate Action - Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts by regulating emissions and promoting developments in renewable energy.

Goal 14. Life Below Water - Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

Goal 15. Life on Land - Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

Goal 16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions - Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Goal 17. Partnerships for the Goals - Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.
Appendix 2: Outreach events

Between 26 November and 14 December 2018, the Environmental Audit Committee held four “Go-to democracy” outreach events. We visited:

- The Ace of Clubs, Clapham: A community shelter providing food and other support to “those who are homeless, vulnerable and otherwise marginalised in our area”

- City Harvest, London: A food redistribution charity that helps “put surplus food to good use in a sustainable way, by distributing to organisations that feed the hungry”

- Community Shop, West Norwood: A social enterprise initiative from Community Shop based around “empowering individuals and building stronger communities, by realising the potential of surplus food”

- The Real Junk Food Project, Wakefield: A “Pay as You Feel” Sharehouse “with the aim to abolish surplus food”

The events took the format of an introduction to the work of the organisation, and then semi-structured interviews with service users, staff and volunteers. Participants were able to take part in group or individual interview formats. The aim was to hear directly from those affected by hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity, to learn about civil society’s infrastructure for tackling these issues, and to explore possible causes and solutions in the UK context.

Ace of Clubs

Ace of Clubs in Clapham, London, describes itself as a “family-like community providing transformative support for those who are homeless, vulnerable and otherwise marginalized in our area.” It provides a range of support services, including food, to individuals who are either referred to them for support, or hear about them through word of mouth. In 2017, provided 20,000 meals, helped 92 people off the streets and into accommodation and 36 people into rehabilitation from addiction.

One volunteer told us, “The clients rely a lot on the support, the advice, and the main thing that lots of clients come here for is the food, because that’s the only time they will have a meal for the day.” Ace of Clubs currently provides meals for 80–100 people per day, offering a variety of meals and choice. They rely on donated food, chiefly food from supermarkets that its past its sell-by date, and unsold food from restaurants such as Nando’s and KFC.

Ace of Clubs provides a range of additional support services. These include meeting other immediate requirements, such as showers and clothing, serving as an address from which the homeless service users can apply for jobs. However, they also act as a hub for training.

\[216\text{ Ace of Clubs, What is Ace of Clubs, accessed 6 December 2018}\]
\[217\text{ City Harvest, City Harvest: Giving food another life, accessed 6 December 2018}\]
\[218\text{ Company Shop, What is Community Shop?, accessed 6 December 2018}\]
\[219\text{ The Real Junk Food Project, What do we do?, accessed 6 December 2018}\]
\[220\text{ Ace of Clubs, What is Ace of Clubs, accessed 19 December 2018}\]
\[221\text{ Ibid.}\]
and advice with weekly visits from a counsellor, a DWP advisor, a district nurse, mobile
dentist and a street vet. One volunteer emphasised that, compared to a food bank, Ace of
Clubs “is much more comprehensive … they are providing a potential solution for those
individuals.”

Ace of Clubs told us that “the number of people coming to us for help increases year on year
due to the recession, benefits changes and a severe increase in homelessness. Government
cuts to public services is meaning more people now depend on Ace of Clubs for support.”

City Harvest London

City Harvest, in East Acton, London, collects surplus food from the food industry, including
restaurants, grocers, manufacturers, wholesalers, hotels and caterers, and redistributes it
to organisations that feed the hungry. City Harvest operates across 27 London boroughs, providing
support to 240 organisations such as homeless shelters, soup kitchens, after school
programmes, centres for veterans, and organisations that assist people with drug and
alcohol addictions. They distribute more than 30 tonnes of food per week, which would
otherwise have gone to landfill. City Harvest London has redistributed 3 million meals
since it started in 2014, but an employee told us that they are expecting to redistribute a
further 3 million meals in the next year alone.

City Harvest focuses on “the last mile” of food redistribution, working directly with
individual stores to rescue food that is near the end of its shelf life. City Harvest told
us that this requires flexible working to redistribute food quickly using refrigerated
vans. One member of staff emphasised the importance of relationships with people “at
the back door” of the food industry, explaining that while supermarket and restaurant
headquarters might have a policy for food redistribution or donation, this message is not
always known or understood by the people managing waste at the back of the individual
stores. Several people we spoke to said that to maximise food rescue it is important to
educate key contacts who are responsible for waste management to understand which
foods can be redistributed, how they should be packed (for example, not thrown into
black bin bags), and how they can benefit local communities. This can be challenging given
high staff turnover in some parts of the food industry.

Community Shop

Community Shop describes itself as a “social enterprise that is empowering individuals
and building stronger communities, by realising the social potential of surplus food.”
It provides food through a discounted supermarket and daily hot meal, which is free
to children. One service user told us that “if it wasn’t for this place I don’t know how
we would eat.” Another described bringing friends that they knew were experiencing
difficulties to the reduced lunches “so that you know that someone is getting a good meal,
and that might be the only meal.” Others pointed out that the social supermarket meant
that they could afford a healthier and more varied diet, as “all fruit and veg are 20p” and
Community Supermarket provides cooking courses and encourages sharing food and
recipes between the diverse range of cultures that use their services.

222 City Harvest London, City Harvest: Giving food another life, accessed 19 December 2018
223 Community Shop, What is Community Shop?, accessed 2 January 2019
However, staff and service users that we spoke to emphasised that Community Shop is “more than just food”. Community Shop provides a range of support services to empower and educate service users to tackle the problems which they experience alongside hunger. This includes courses on budgeting and employability, support accessing new jobs, and courses designed to strengthen communities, families, parents and leadership. One staff member described how they were able to cater to the needs that they discovered in the community, for example, providing computer courses when the realised that some service users were experiencing sanctions as they were unable to complete their online benefits forms correctly. One user said that Community Shop’s support “helped build me up.”

The people we spoke to emphasised that anyone could find themselves needing food support. We spoke to people who had accessed Community Shop after redundancy, early retirement, family ill health, limited benefits and low income. Some service users described how delays in administering the move to Universal Credit, benefit sanctions and changes in the distribution of benefits under the new system, had pushed people they knew into arrears with rent and other bills, which they were not able to repay. They told us that this put those people at higher risk of stress and homelessness; and placed greater strain on their food budgets and families. They highlighted that some parents could not afford to give additional support to their adult children, and that some young people were getting targeted by gangs because of the young person’s desire to help support a parent that was struggling financially. The service users that we spoke to expressed concern about those who were unable to access similar support through lack of awareness or lack of provision in their local areas.

The Real Junk Food Project, Wakefield

The Real Junk Food Project works “to intercept food destined for landfill and redistribute it through a network of Pay As You Feel Sharehouses, cafes and school partnerships.”224 We visited its #Kindness Sharehouse in Wakefield. It is primarily an environmental initiative, which is open to all, regardless of what the individual can afford to pay, based on the idea articulated by one service user that “it’s better on people’s tables and in people’s stomachs than it is in landfill.”

Service users and volunteers described a wide range of people who use their Sharehouse and receive their boxes of food. Some people emphasised environmental reasons, such as reducing waste and reallocating edible food. Most service users, however, said that they were also, or primarily, using the facilities to access food that they couldn’t otherwise afford. Service users described being made redundant, being unable to access Universal Credit, and struggling to pay bills. Several said that they did not use food banks because of the “stigma” attached, or because they could not access one. One volunteer also noted being “struck by the number of women who come through who have had expectations of a pension and then not got it when they were expecting it.”

One volunteer told us “people who come here, by and large they are grafters that can’t make ends meet.” One service user told us “it brought down our shopping bill” and “just help[s] out with that week when you’re on a short week, because we all have them with families.” Another described “needing to put food on the table,” and said that “it’s not a

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224 The Real Junk Food Project, What do we do?, accessed 2 February 2019
case of ‘we can’t have food this week because the heating has got to be on,’ it’s the other way around.” One volunteer said, “this is Britain in the 21st century—it’s a moral outrage that supermarkets are throwing away food, and children don’t have enough to eat.”

Some staff and service users also described the role of education in empowering people to access food. One volunteer said, “it’s meeting those basic needs, but then also doing it in a way whereby we raise awareness about how they can access it themselves, so that they are more independent.” Several volunteers and service users said that they had learned not to rely on best before dates: “it’s all about your sense of touch, smell and taste.” Two also described the challenges of educating people working in the food industry to identify and pass on food for redistribution. One volunteer also noted that people who get help from the #Kindness Sharehouse are then also able to go on and give help elsewhere.
Formal minutes

Tuesday 8 January 2019

Members present:

Mary Creagh, in the Chair
Geraint Davies  Caroline Lucas
Philip Dunne  Kerry McCarthy
Zac Goldsmith  John McNally
Robert Goodwill  Alex Sobel
James Gray

Draft Report (Sustainable Development Goals in the UK follow up: Hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity in the UK), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Paragraphs 1 to 139 read and agreed to.

Annex agreed to

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Thirteenth Report of the Committee to the House

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[The Committee adjourned]
Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the inquiry publications page of the Committee’s website.

Tuesday 23 October 2018

Kath Dalmeny, Chief Executive, Sustain, on behalf of End Hunger UK, Lindsay Boswell, Chief Executive, FareShare, Anna Taylor, Executive Director, The Food Foundation, Adam Smith, The Real Junk Food Project, Iain Bell, Deputy National Statistician, ONS

Oliver Dowden CBE MP, Minister for Implementation, Cabinet Office, David Rutley MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Food and Animal Welfare, DEFRA, The Rt Hon Lord Bates, DFID, Justin Tomlinson MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Family Support, Housing and Child Maintenance, DWP
Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the inquiry publications page of the Committee’s website.

SDF numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

1. Aldi UK (SDF0036)
2. Asda Stores Ltd. (SDF0035)
3. Bond (SDF0012)
4. Bristol Green Capital Partnership, Bristol SDG Alliance, Cabot Institute (University of Bristol) (SDF0007)
5. Calimport, Dr Stuart (SDF0028)
6. Campaign to Protect Rural England (SDF0014)
7. Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management (SDF0003)
8. City Harvest London (SDF0039)
9. The Co-op (SDF0034)
10. Compassion in World Farming (SDF0005)
11. Cruelty Free International (SDF0002)
12. Department for International Development (SDF0029)
13. End Hunger UK (SDF0021)
14. Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (SDF0010)
15. Fairtrade Foundation (SDF0026)
16. The Food Foundation (SDF0017)
17. Health Poverty Action (SDF0013)
18. Institute and Faculty of Actuaries (SDF0001)
19. London Sustainable Development Commission (SDF0023)
20. Long, Dr Graham (SDF0019)
21. McGhie, Mr Henry (SDF0004)
22. Newcastle University (SDF0022)
23. Ocado (SDF0033)
24. Office for National Statistics (SDF0024)
25. Office for National Statistics (ONS) (SDF0031)
26. Royal Town Planning Institute (SDF0011)
27. Sainsbury’s (SDF0030)
28. Sustain: The Alliance for Better Food and Farming (SDF0018)
29. Tesco PLC (SDF0032)
30. UKSSD (SDF0027)
31. The Urban Institute, University of Sheffield and Mistra Urban Futures (SDF0008)
32. Waitrose & Partners (SDF0037)
33. Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (SDF0006)
34 Wildlife and Countryside Link (SDF0015)
35 Wm Morrison Supermarkets PLC (SDF0038)
36 WWF (SDF0009)
# List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee’s website. The reference number of the Government’s response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

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