



House of Commons
Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs Committee

Covid-19 and the issues of security in food supply

Seventh Report of Session 2019–21

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

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The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and associated public bodies.

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Summary

To control the spread of covid-19, the Government introduced a first national lockdown in England in March 2020. This had a significant impact on the supply of food. In response, the Committee launched an inquiry in April 2020 on “covid-19 and food supply” and subsequently published a report in July 2020. From September 2020, the Government gradually reintroduced measures to suppress the virus, which culminated in 2 further national lockdowns. The supply of food was once again affected. As a result, the Committee launched a follow-up inquiry in January 2021, focused on food insecurity for individuals and the food supply chain, and found that:

- In the third national lockdown beginning in January 2021, the Government took a ‘food parcel first’ approach to distributing free school meals to pupils not attending school. However, it reintroduced a national voucher scheme, after serious concerns were raised about the suitability of some parcels. Schools should have multiple options for providing free school meals and be able to choose the best one to meet their pupils’ needs. It is therefore unfortunate that the failings of some suppliers, in terms of quality and value for money, led to a fall in public confidence in England given that parcels are the best option in some circumstances. It is important that the sector and Government learns from these failings and ensures that any future offering is consistently up to standard and delivers value for money. We know that during lockdown food insecurity is particularly likely amongst those eligible for free school meals. Therefore, in the event of another lockdown, Government should ensure that families of children who would normally receive free school meals continue to be able to feed their children.
- The Government encouraged people who were asked to shield to rely on supermarket online delivery services or friends or family, in place of the national food parcels provided in the first lockdown. Concerns were raised that this excluded people who could not afford supermarkets minimum spends or delivery charges. As supermarkets have seen increased spending during the pandemic, the Government should publicly ask them to lower minimum spends and remove delivery charges for customers who are at an increased risk of severe disease from covid-19. In addition, all retailers must ensure that reasonable adjustments are made so that disabled people are not disproportionately hampered by additional in-store covid-19 measures; where adjustments are not made, the law should be properly enforced.
- It is estimated that 5.9 million adults in the UK experienced food poverty in the 6 months prior to the 9th February 2021; 1.7 million children live in households that are food insecure. Without proper data, the Government cannot effectively tackle the causes and consequences of food insecurity. Although action is being taken to improve this the Government should go further and produce annual reports on food security under the Agriculture Act, at least in the short to medium term. Ministers have mobilised their departments to support vulnerable people to access food during the pandemic, but this impetus needs to be sustained. A Minister for Food Security should

be appointed and supported by robust cross-Government structures to ensure that all interested departments prioritise the issue of food insecurity, and the Government should consult on how a “Right to Food” could be introduced in England. We appreciate that the right to daily nutritious food as part of a national food strategy will need to consider the need for people to have food security along with other essential needs.

- The hospitality industry and its suppliers have been hit hard by the pandemic; the sector has seen revenues decline by over £72 billion and some suppliers have lost up to 100% of their trade. Those who supply the hospitality sector have not received the same level of support as those they supply. If its supply chain collapses the support the Government has provided to the hospitality sector will have been wasted. Therefore, it should urgently assess the impact of the closures to the hospitality sector on its suppliers and provide additional financial support to them during the period of reopening.

Introduction

1. On 23 March 2020, the Government announced the first national lockdown in England to tackle the spread of covid-19.¹ This had a significant impact on the supply of food. In response, we launched an inquiry into covid-19 and food supply on 4 April 2020.² Our report was published on 30 July 2020 and addressed: shops and supermarkets; food insecurity; the food services sector; key workers; and, food reliance and security.³ The Government responded to our report on 10 October 2020.⁴

2. As we concluded our first covid-19 and food supply inquiry, national lockdown restrictions in England were being eased. For example, some children returned to schools from the 1 June 2020, hospitality venues (such as pubs, restaurants and cafes) were permitted to trade from 4 July 2020 and the clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) were advised they could stop shielding from 6 July 2020.⁵

3. Since then, the Government has sought to suppress covid-19 by imposing further local and national restrictions on social interaction and business activity. The first new national restrictions came on 22 September 2020, setting a 10pm curfew on hospitality venues.⁶ A three-tiered system of ‘local covid alert levels’ was announced on 12 October 2020.⁷ On 5 November 2020, England entered its second national lockdown (with schools, as well as food and drink takeaway services remaining open).⁸ On 8 November 2020, the Government announced a £170 million Covid-19 Winter Grant Scheme for councils in England to ensure “vulnerable households do not go hungry” over winter.⁹ The second lockdown ended on 2 December 2020 with an enhanced tiered system taking effect.¹⁰ After rising levels of infection, England entered its third lockdown on 5 January 2021; schools and hospitality venues were ordered to closed, and the CEV were advised to shield.¹¹ The Prime Minister announced on 22 February 2021 that schools would reopen from 8 March 2021 with hospitality resuming, at the earliest, from 12 April 2021 in outdoor settings and 17 May 2021 in indoor settings.¹²

1 GOV.UK, “[Prime Minister’s statement on coronavirus \(Covid-19\): 23 March 2020](#)”, accessed 24 February 2021

2 “[Inquiry on food supply during the coronavirus pandemic launched](#)”, Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee news story, 3rd April 2020,

3 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, First Report of Session 2019–21, “[COVID-19 and food supply](#)”, HC 263

4 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Sixth Special Report of Session 2019–21, “[COVID-19 and food supply: Government Response to the Committee’s First Report](#)”, HC 841

5 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Sixth Special Report of Session 2019–21, “[COVID-19 and food supply: Government Response to the Committee’s First Report](#)”, HC 841; GOV.UK, “[PM announces easing of lockdown restrictions: 23 June 2020](#)”, accessed 24 February 2021; “[Coronavirus shielding scheme to be eased in England from 6 July](#)”, The Guardian, 22 June 2020

6 Cabinet Office, “[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): What has changed – 22 September](#)”, accessed 24 February 2021

7 “[Prime Minister announces new local covid alert levels](#)”, Prime Minister’s Office press release, 12 October 2020

8 “[Prime Minister announces new national restrictions](#)”, Prime Minister’s Office press release, 30 October 2020

9 “[New winter package to provide further support for children and families](#)”, Department for Work and Pensions press release, 8 November 2020

10 HM Government, “[Coronavirus Tier 3](#)”, accessed 24 February 2021

11 Prime Minister’s Office, “[Prime Minister’s statement on coronavirus \(COVID-19\): 5 January 2021](#)”, accessed 25 February 2021; Cabinet Office, “[Guidance: National lockdown: Stay at Home](#)”, accessed 25 February 2021; “[Government will not provide food boxes for shielding people this lockdown](#)”, The Grocer, 8 January 2021

12 Cabinet Office, “[COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021 \(Summary\)](#)”, accessed 25 February 2021

4. Given the continuing disruption caused by covid-19 since our first report in July 2020, we decided to hold a follow-up inquiry. It has sought to assess whether the issues identified in our first report have been resolved. We held two evidence sessions with business and charitable organisations, as well as the Minister for Farming, Fisheries and Food, Victoria Prentis MP, and the Minister for Welfare Delivery, Will Quince MP. In addition, we held a limited call for evidence, with 42 responses, which asked:

- a) How the pandemic and the Government's response to it have affected food supply since July 2020;
- b) What impact the current lockdown is having on food supply; and
- c) What further actions the Government, public bodies and industry need to take.

We would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this inquiry.

1 Food insecurity

Free School meals

5. During 2020, the Government continued to fund the provision of free school meals to eligible children throughout the first national lockdown, and over some school holidays. In order to do this, Government guidance suggested that schools should “continue [...] to supply meals for collection or delivery” or “provide every eligible child with a weekly shopping voucher worth £15 to spend at supermarkets”.¹³ To facilitate the distribution of vouchers, the Department of Education announced a centralised “national voucher scheme” which was used by “more than 80 per cent of all schools”.¹⁴ The Government provided vouchers for free school meals during lockdowns; the 2020 Easter holiday; May half term; and, after some controversy, summer holidays.¹⁵

6. Our report in July noted that “children in poverty are particularly vulnerable to experiencing insufficient nutritious food during the school holidays”.¹⁶ We were critical of the national voucher scheme set up to provide free school meals during the first lockdown, particularly the exclusion of discount retailers and convenience stores from the scheme and financial penalties for some schools providing vouchers outside of the national scheme.¹⁷ Noting that further school closures might occur, we concluded that:

The Government should now be more flexible and recognise the importance and success of most community-led responses to the provision of free school meal substitutes. Schools should be allowed to provide vouchers for whichever retailers serve their community best, without financial penalty. In addition, schools should be encouraged to continue catering directly for their pupils without being put in a financially worse situation than those using the national voucher scheme.¹⁸

7. The Government’s response stated that they have taken “unprecedented and substantial action to ensure that no child should go hungry” and that “schools were free to consider the best solution for providing” free school meals.¹⁹ Furthermore, they explained that “we recognised that providing meals and food parcels was not a practical option for all schools” and subsequently the Government introduced the national voucher scheme; the vouchers “could be spent in stores who already had eGift card arrangements in place

13 [“Voucher scheme launches for schools providing free school meals”](#), Department of Education press release, 31 March 2020

14 [“Voucher scheme launches for schools providing free school meals”](#), Department of Education press release, 31 March 2020; Edenred, written evidence to the COVID-19 and food supply inquiry, HC 263, ([COV00161](#))

15 [“Johnson makes U-turn on free school meals after Rashford campaign”](#), The Guardian, 16 June 2020; Department for Education, [“Providing school meals during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak”](#) accessed 3 March 2021

16 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, First Report of Session 2019–21, [“COVID-19 and food supply”](#), HC 263, para 57

17 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, First Report of Session 2019–21, [“COVID-19 and food supply”](#), HC 263, para 57

18 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, First Report of Session 2019–21, [“COVID-19 and food supply”](#), HC 263

19 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Sixth Special Report of Session 2019–21, [“COVID-19 and food supply: Government Response to the Committee’s First Report”](#), HC 841, p9

with our supplier”.²⁰ Continuing, they explained that “as the scheme progressed, we were able to add Aldi, McColl’s, Iceland and the Company Shop Group” to the scheme, and that “£384m worth of voucher codes” had been redeemed in supermarkets.²¹

8. Since our report, the Government has announced a £170 million Covid Winter Grant Scheme with “at least 80% earmarked to support with food and bills” between December 2020 and March 2021.²² The Government explained that the scheme will “provide food for children who need it over the holidays”, though local councils will “distribute the funds, rather than schools”.²³ Councillor James Jamieson, Chairman of the Local Government Association, told us that the scheme was “given to us [councils] at very short notice, and has been used very successfully”.²⁴ In addition, the Government, following recommendations made in Part One of the National Food Strategy, has expanded the Holiday Activities and Food Programme.²⁵ The scheme, which has, “provided healthy food and enriching activities to disadvantaged children since 2018” will now also cover Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays in 2021, costing up to £220 million.²⁶ However, despite these schemes, Anna Taylor, Executive Director of the Food Foundation, explained to us that the Government had failed to extend “free school meals to all children in poverty”.²⁷ The Food Foundation said that “current estimates suggest that 2 in 5 UK children living below the poverty line miss out on Free School Meals”.²⁸

9. During the third national lockdown at the start of 2021, which was announced the day before it took effect, schools were again closed to all pupils except for vulnerable children and children of key workers.²⁹ The Government continued to fund free school meals throughout to eligible children both in school and those required to stay at home.³⁰ Schools were advised that they should “adopt a food parcel first approach” when providing free school meals to children required to stay at home.³¹ However, serious concerns about the suitability of the parcels were raised after pictures of the purported contents of some parcels provided by one company circulated on social media.³² Anna Taylor described them as “really shocking”, although she also stated that “we have seen a lot of great images of food parcels that have been going out, so we must not taint everybody with the same brush”.³³ Victoria Prentis, Minister for Farming, Fisheries and Food at the Department

20 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Sixth Special Report of Session 2019–21, [“COVID-19 and food supply: Government Response to the Committee’s First Report”](#), HC 841, p9

21 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Sixth Special Report of Session 2019–21, [“COVID-19 and food supply: Government Response to the Committee’s First Report”](#), HC 841, p 9–10

22 [“New winter package to provide further support for children and families”](#), Department for Work and Pensions press release, 8 November 2020

23 [“New winter package to provide further support for children and families”](#), Department for Work and Pensions press release, 8 November 2020. Also, see City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council ([CFSF0021](#)).

24 [Q10](#)

25 The National Food Strategy, [“National Food Strategy: Part One”](#), July 2020

26 Department for Education, [“Holiday activities and food programme 2021”](#) accessed 3 March 2021

27 [Q7](#)

28 The Food Foundation ([CFSF0034](#))

29 Cabinet Office, [“Guidance: National lockdown: Stay at Home”](#), accessed 25 February 2021;

30 Department of Education, [“Providing school meals during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak”](#), accessed 12 March 2021

31 Department of Education, [“Providing school meals during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak”](#), accessed 12 March 2021

32 [“Food parcels fiasco: How the pandemic exposed free school meals failures...again”](#), Schools Week, 14 January 2021

33 [Q24](#)

for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, stated that “we saw some dreadful examples of items that had been delivered to replace lunch” and “the Department for Education has set up a special hotline to deal with the very real issues that we saw”.³⁴

10. Subsequently, Government guidance was amended so that schools were expected to provide lunch parcels through the school catering team or food provider; provide vouchers for a local shop or supermarket; or use the Department for Education’s national voucher scheme.³⁵ The national voucher scheme launched once again on 18 January 2021, and was valid at a wide array of retailers including: Aldi, Iceland, McColl’s, Morrisons, Tesco, Sainsbury’s, Asda, Waitrose, M&S, Company Shop Group and Farm Foods.³⁶ Anna Taylor told us that

Some families have really appreciated it when caterers have gone the extra mile and come up with food parcels and support [...] [and] there has been an opportunity for teachers to keep in touch [...]. [...] There are some benefits to a mixed-model approach, but I fully appreciate that for many people a voucher is simply the easiest thing.³⁷

Victoria Prentis explained that “in terms of the general debate on parcel versus voucher versus money for food, there are different needs at different times. This has been an extraordinary year. Government have had to react very quickly”.³⁸ More specifically, she stated that:

“Schools have set up a system where there is freedom to choose at a local level from lunch parcels, where that is appropriate, local vouchers and the Department for Education’s national voucher scheme, which has been restarted and set up again. It is right that those decisions are made on a local level. There may well be reasons, to do with the wholesale supply chain, for example, as to why a food parcel is appropriate.”³⁹

11. James Bielby, Chief Executive of the Federation of Wholesale Distributors (FWD), explained that those who supply food to schools have been affected by the short notice announcement which “created a huge amount of excess stock that is very difficult to shift”.⁴⁰ In addition, he told the Committee that “the members we represent were providing high-quality items” and the change in guidance away from food parcels “was a kneejerk U-turn” as “schools prefer food parcels and the guidance was explicitly clear that food parcels are better for all sorts of reasons, not least [the] safeguarding of children”.⁴¹ The FWD was concerned about the financial impact of the U-turn on wholesalers, who had already accrued excess stock valuing £12.2 million through the short-notice announcement of school closures and cancelled orders.⁴²

34 [Q103](#)

35 Department of Education, “[Providing school meals during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#)”, accessed 12 March 2021

36 Department of Education, “[Providing school meals during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#)”, accessed 12 March 2021

37 [Q24](#)

38 [Q102](#)

39 [Q102](#)

40 [Q35](#)

41 [Qq45–46](#)

42 Federation of Wholesale Distributors ([CFSF0020](#))

12. We support the principle that schools and local authorities should have multiple options, such as food parcels and vouchers, for providing free school meals to their pupils. They are best placed to know what works best for their communities. It is important that families have the flexibility to meet their specific needs and preferences.

13. We heard evidence that many wholesalers who were providing pupils with food parcels, provided them in line with Government guidance. However, a minority of parcels were clearly unacceptable. It is therefore unfortunate that the failings of some suppliers, in terms of quality and value for money, led to a fall in public confidence in England given that parcels are the best option in some circumstances. It is important that the sector and Government learns from these failings and ensures that any future offering is consistently up to standard and delivers value for money. The problems with food parcels exacerbated the difficulties for wholesalers caused by short-notice school closures and led to significant losses for a sector that was already struggling. We look at the need for greater support for wholesalers in Chapter 2.

14. We know that during lockdown food insecurity is particularly likely amongst those eligible for free school meals. *Therefore, in the event of another lockdown, Government should ensure that families of children who would normally receive free school meals continue to be able to feed their children.*

Clinically Extremely Vulnerable people

15. During the first lockdown, those considered to be Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) were advised to shield from 22 March 2020.⁴³ To support people asked to shield, who would otherwise struggle to access food, the Government centrally procured food parcels from two wholesalers, Bidfood and Brakes, at a cost of £208 million.⁴⁴ The companies delivered in excess of 5 million parcels, before the shielding scheme ended on 6 July 2020.⁴⁵

16. Food boxes were initially criticised for having inadequate and non-nutritious contents.⁴⁶ The British Dietetic Association stated that the boxes were “near identical for the many weeks” and “locally delivered packs created either by the charitable sector or local authorities were better in their content”.⁴⁷ However, we concluded in our first report that they were “a valuable way of ensuring [...] access to basic foodstuffs” and “many of the complaints about the contents of parcels were likely to relate to the early food parcels made from the emergency bulk food offer from Government to local authorities” but “once the centralised system was in place, it appeared to operate very well”.⁴⁸

17. In subsequent lockdowns, the Government has not reintroduced the food parcel scheme for the CEV; instead, it has encouraged them to register for supermarket online

43 Prime Ministers Office, [“Prime Minister’s statement on coronavirus \(COVID-19\): 22 March 2020”](#), accessed 4 March 2021

44 BfS Group Limited (Bidfood), [“Bidfood and Brakes join forces to support the vulnerable in isolation”](#), accessed 4 March 2021; Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, First Report of Session 2019–21, [“COVID-19 and food supply”](#), HC 263

45 [“Coronavirus shielding scheme to be eased in England from 6 July”](#), The Guardian, 22 June 2020

46 [“Two firms handed £200m government contract to deliver food parcels to the vulnerable during lockdown sent boxes containing inedible items at a cost of £44 each - nearly DOUBLE the retail value, analysis reveals”](#), Mail Online, 20 October 2020

47 British Dietetic Association ([CFSF0018](#)) para 1.1.3 and 1.1.6

48 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, First Report of Session 2019–21, [“COVID-19 and food supply”](#), HC 263, p27

priority delivery slots or to use family members and in some cases local authorities.⁴⁹ Victoria Prentis told the Women and Equalities Committee in September 2020 that “things have moved on [from food parcels] and we now have a system whereby people are able to access supermarket slots for their food in the normal way”.⁵⁰ However Fazilet Hadi, Head of Policy at Disability Rights UK, pointed out to us the issue of “online delivery charges, which for people on fixed incomes are very, very high”, whilst the organisation, National Disabled People Against Cuts, highlighted problems with accessing delivery slots and receiving food substitutions that didn’t meet dietary and/or medical needs.⁵¹ Independent Age recommended the suspension of “delivery charges and reduce[ed] minimum spends for those with online priority delivery slots”.⁵² Fazilet Hadi also noted to us that “disabled people are disproportionately digitally excluded”.⁵³

18. The Government’s policy of directing the CEV to supermarkets as opposed to reinstating food parcels was criticised by wholesalers. James Bielby from the FWD stated that there have been “a number of different things across the year that benefited the supermarkets [...] [and] all [...] trade was directly given to supermarkets”.⁵⁴ In relation to the termination of the food parcel scheme, James Bielby told the Grocer, in January 2021, that “one of the only things Defra did to help wholesalers in March [2020] has now been handed to the supermarkets”.⁵⁵

People with disabilities

19. We concluded in our report that since the pandemic began, there had been “significantly increased demand for online shopping, combined with in-store measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and limit excessive buying, [which] have had a negative impact on people who are not shielding but struggling to access food” for other reasons.⁵⁶ We recommended that the Government should “consult with retailers and charities to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made for this group of people as the pandemic continues”.⁵⁷

20. In a May 2020 open letter to the British Retail Consortium, the Equality and Human Rights Commission called for support in “meet[ing] the needs of disabled people” who “face additional barriers to shopping and require reasonable adjustments”.⁵⁸ In September, Victoria Prentis told the Women and Equalities Committee that she had “got together a group of 24 disability charities who met with me and who helped me and my officials make some tailor made guidance that we then passed on to the retailers”.⁵⁹ The Minister told us that:

49 [“Government will not provide food boxes for shielding people this lockdown”](#), The Grocer, 8 January 2021; Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [“Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Accessing food and essential supplies”](#), accessed 4 March 2021

50 Oral evidence taken before Women and Equalities Committee on 22 September 2020, HC 386, [Q11](#)

51 [Q8](#); National Disabled people Against Cuts ([CF5F0011](#)). See also, for example, Coeliac UK ([CF5F0028](#))

52 Independent Age ([CF5F0007](#))

53 [Q4](#)

54 [Q41](#)

55 [“Government will not provide food boxes for shielding people this lockdown”](#), The Grocer, 8 January 2021

56 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, First Report of Session 2019–21, [“COVID-19 and food supply”](#), HC 263, para 35

57 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, First Report of Session 2019–21, [“COVID-19 and food supply”](#), HC 263, para 35

58 Equality and Human Rights Commission, [“Equality body calls on retailers to do more for disabled customers during corona crisis”](#), accessed 4 March 2021

59 Oral evidence taken before Women and Equalities Committee on 22 September 2020, HC 386, [Q108](#)

“we assume, rightly—there is a legal requirement—that supermarkets will make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities. That should happen at all times, in the pandemic and out of the pandemic. We expect them to anticipate those needs, not wait to be asked. It is right that we continue to make sure that everybody can access the food that they need in the way that suits them”.⁶⁰

21. Despite this, Fazilet Hadi from Disability Rights UK explained to us that the “evidence from disabled customers and older people with disabilities is that they are being treated quite shockingly by some retailers”.⁶¹ For example, the Royal National Institute of Blind People stated that “there are still issues around in-store accessibility and changing communications from supermarkets that need to be addressed”; in particular, the Institute referenced the introduction of ‘traffic-light’ supermarket entry systems and changes to store lay-outs.⁶²

22. Although the intention of the food parcels scheme during the first lockdown was to provide food to the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable, it also had the effect of supporting wholesalers. However, it is right that in designing its support for the vulnerable, the Government has focussed on the needs of recipients and not suppliers. We explore the wider case for greater support for wholesalers and suppliers in the next chapter.

23. During the 2021 lockdown, the Government has relied more heavily on supermarkets to provide food to vulnerable groups. We support the principle that where possible people should be supported to shop for themselves. However, if the Government is directing custom towards supermarkets, it should be publicly asking them to accommodate the needs of the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV), elderly and disabled people. For example, by lowering minimum spends and removing delivery charges for CEV customers. However, a disproportionate number of people with disabilities are digitally excluded through not having access to the necessary equipment or skills. *Therefore, whilst recognising the good work of the charitable sector, the Government must ensure that local authorities are properly resourced, and that retailers recognise their responsibility, to assist those who are digitally excluded in making food orders for delivery.*

24. It is imperative that food retailers ensure that their stores are accessible to disabled people. We recognise the challenges faced in adapting stores to social distancing in the early months of the pandemic, but there is no excuse for ongoing barriers. All food retailers must ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to ensure that disabled people are not disproportionately hampered by additional in-store covid-19 measures. Where reasonable adjustments are not made the law should be properly enforced.

60 [Q68](#)

61 [Q27](#)

62 Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) ([CFSF0031](#))

Government strategy

25. Anna Taylor of the Food Foundation told us that in the six months prior to 9 February 2021, 9% of all households had experienced food poverty and 12% of these were households with children.⁶³ This translated to 5.9 million adults and a further 1.7 million children.⁶⁴ Emma Revie, Chief Executive at the Trussell Trust, explained that throughout the pandemic, its food banks had “distributed more than 1.2 million emergency food parcels [...], which was a 47% increase on the previous year. This was building on year-on-year increases in the previous five years. We saw a 74% increase in demand over those five years”.⁶⁵ Cllr James Jamieson suggested that the rise in food bank usage “is not about a shortage of food per se; it is about financial poverty limiting access to food”.⁶⁶

26. A 2020 Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment House of Lords Committee report, ‘Hungry for change: fixing the failures in food’, found that the Government failed to “routinely collect data on levels of food insecurity”.⁶⁷ The Government response stated that “there are no existing sources which give us complete, comprehensive information on an annual basis for the UK as a whole”.⁶⁸ The Secretary of State told us last year that the Government had chosen to address this issue, through the Agriculture Bill, by enshrining in law a requirement to conduct food security assessments every five years.⁶⁹ We recommended that “food security assessments should take place yearly”.⁷⁰ In response, the Government introduced an amendment that requires the report to be “produced every three years”.⁷¹ The first report is due before the last sitting day of 2021.⁷² Victoria Prentis, explained that “it is a maximum of three-yearly [...] [and] it may well be appropriate to do it more often”.⁷³ She also explained that “we are anticipating that the food security report will include statistics from the living costs and food survey, the family resources survey [...] and the FSA’s “Food and You” survey, which comes out every six months”.⁷⁴ The first annual Department for Work and Pensions’ Family Resources Survey to include a question on food insecurity was published on 25 March 2021. However, it covered financial year 2019/20, i.e. mostly prior to the pandemic.⁷⁵

27. In our report, we also recommended that “the Government consults on whether a “right to food” should be given a legislative footing” and that “this should happen as a matter of great urgency”.⁷⁶ We also recommended that the Government appoint “a

63 [Q2](#)

64 Food Foundation ([CFSF0043](#))

65 [Q3](#); see also, The Trussell Trust ([CFSF0037](#))

66 [Q5](#)

67 House of Lords, Select Committee on Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment, “*Hungry for change: fixing the failures in food*”, [HL Paper 85](#), para 74

68 House of Lords, Select Committee on Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment, “*Hungry for change: fixing the failures in food*”, [HL Paper 85](#), para 74

69 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, First Report of Session 2019–21, [COVID-19 and food supply](#), HC 263, para 69–70. The Bill became the [Agriculture Act 2020](#)

70 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, First Report of Session 2019–21, [COVID-19 and food supply](#), HC 263, para 73

71 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Sixth Special Report of Session 2019–21, [COVID-19 and food supply: Government Response to the Committee’s First Report](#), HC 841, p12

72 Agriculture Act 2020, [Section 19 \(1\)](#)

73 [Q82](#)

74 [Q83](#)

75 Department for Work and Pensions, “[Family Resources Survey: financial year 2019 to 2020](#)”, accessed 29 March 2021

76 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, First Report of Session 2019–21, [COVID-19 and food supply](#), HC 263, para 72

Minister for Food Security, empowered to collect robust data on food insecurity and draw together policy across departments on food supply and welfare”.⁷⁷ The Government response did not commit to either of our recommendations, instead, it stated that a White Paper would be published within 6 months of the National Food Strategy’s final report.⁷⁸

28. In relation to our recommendation for a ‘Minister for Food Security’ the Government response also stated that “Lord Gardiner Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity) is the Minister responsible for Food Security and Defra officials continue to work with other relevant Departments on food policy, including school meals (DfE), local authority provision (MHCLG) and the welfare system (Department for Work and Pensions) (DWP)”.⁷⁹ Victoria Prentis said to us that “in the food supply sense [meaning the flow of food into and within the UK] of food security, we have a Minister. It is Lord Gardiner, and he sits within Defra”, although the Minister continued to say that “we monitor food security, in the wider sense of the word, very closely within Defra”.⁸⁰ Will Quince, Minister for Welfare Delivery at Department for Work and Pensions, stated to us that “my gut instinct is it is not a particularly good idea” to have a Minister for Food Security because “looking at the root causes of poverty and food insecurity, the levers do not sit within one Government Department”. He explained further that “we should really be looking at a cross-Government effort to address the causes, which we are doing across Government and the committees”. He stated that Ministers “came together and worked up the plan for the local welfare assistance scheme, the £63 million scheme over the summer, and came together again to work on the Covid winter grant scheme, the £170 million scheme over this winter”.⁸¹ He further highlighted that “working cross-Government now, as we are doing, is working” but “if we were to have a Minister with such a niche policy area, [...] it would be key that it did not sit in any Government Department [...] [and] it is really important that they sit within Cabinet Office, so they are able to reach across Government”.⁸²

29. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations states that the “right to food” is realised “when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement”.⁸³ The Fans Supporting Foodbanks National Network: Right to Food campaign has set out a series of recommendations on how such a right could be implemented in the UK.⁸⁴ However, part one of the NFS did not contain recommendations on the “right to food”, part two is due to be published “in April or May” 2021.⁸⁵ Henry Dumbleby, who is leading the NFS, told us in June that he was not “convinced that the right to food is the right thing” because:

77 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, First Report of Session 2019–21, [COVID-19 and food supply](#), HC 263

78 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Sixth Special Report of Session 2019–21, [COVID-19 and food supply: Government Response to the Committee’s First Report](#), HC 841

79 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Sixth Special Report of Session 2019–21, [COVID-19 and food supply: Government Response to the Committee’s First Report](#), HC 841, p11

80 [Q78](#)

81 [Q76](#)

82 [Q76](#)

83 The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, ‘[Right to Food](#)’ accessed 9 March 2021

84 Fans Supporting Foodbanks National Network: Right to Food, ‘[Delivering a Right to Food for the UK](#)’ accessed 22 March 2021

85 The National Food Strategy, [National Food Strategy: Part One](#), July 2020; [Q74](#)

If you are going to extend rights, it has to be the case that every reasonable person needs to be able to agree on what those rights are. [...] When you get into the nitty-gritty of what you mean by “right to food”, in a society with a developed welfare system, unlike, for example, India, where right to food has been very successful, it would be very difficult to define exactly what the right to food is.⁸⁶

30. However, Anna Taylor, explained to us in July that “had the right to food been in legislation before the pandemic, “we wouldn’t be in the situation [...] with such high levels of unmet need”.⁸⁷ The British Dietetic Association explained that “the adoption of a legally enshrined “Right to Food” will be a key means of ensuring all parts of government [...] address the causes of food insecurity and hunger”.⁸⁸ However, asked about a right to food, Cllr James Jamieson stated that:

it is a more complex problem than just providing somebody with food. It is about providing them with resources. [...] we would rather there were no food banks, because we would rather that nobody needed a food bank. That would be the optimum solution. [...] We do need to think about the preventive agenda [...]. Everybody deserves to have a decent job that provides them with enough money in order to support themselves.⁸⁹

He further suggested that “everyone should have the right to the key essentials. Whether that is paying for your utilities so you are in a warm place with a roof over your head, or having enough money for clothes and food, everyone deserves that”.⁹⁰ Emma Revie of the Trussell Trust explained that “one in seven local authorities do not have a local welfare assistance scheme. A critical part of supporting people going forward, supporting people not to have to arrive at a food bank and not to have to experience food insecurity, is about long-term investment in rebuilding local welfare assistance in those regions”.⁹¹

31. Will Quince stressed that, “food insecurity and food poverty is one of the issues that I know keeps me up at night sometimes. I know Victoria [Prentis] is the same.”⁹² Victoria Prentis told us that “Speaking personally, I am not sure that this [the Right to Food] would assist at the moment [...] [because] I am never sure that putting things in primary legislation is a silver bullet and that just saying there is a right to food magically makes it happen”.⁹³ However, she noted that if the National Food Strategy wishes to address the issue then “I am sure that we will address that in our response”.⁹⁴

32. Without proper data, we cannot take action on the scale required and targeted at those in greatest need to tackle the causes and consequences of food insecurity. Data from charities indicate that many more people are food insecure as a result of the pandemic. *The food security report under the Agriculture Act due by the end of this year must contain up-to-date data on the scale of food insecurity, as well as the make-up of households that have food insecurity (for example, data that is broken down into age*

86 Oral evidence taken before Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee on 30 June 2020 HC 263, [Q230](#)

87 National Food Strategy, [Meet the Team](#), accessed 5 March 2021; see also, [Q230](#)

88 British Dietetic Association ([CFSF0018](#)), para 1.3.2

89 [Q15](#)

90 [Q15](#)

91 [Q17](#)

92 [Q72](#)

93 [Q89](#)

94 [Q89](#)

groups to assess the prevalence of food insecurity in households that contain children). We welcome the Government's decision to reduce the maximum gap between these reports to three years from five. However, as the Minister said, there is nothing stopping it producing more regular reports. It should use that flexibility to produce annual reports, at least for the next few years while we understand the impact of the pandemic and also the impact of Brexit and other changes to the UK's trading relationships.

33. Ensuring everyone, and especially the vulnerable, have access to enough food is a fundamental duty of society and Government. We recognise that this is a goal the Government shares, even if there are differences over how best to achieve it. Although there have been failings, Ministers have mobilised their departments to support vulnerable people's access to food during the pandemic, giving a sense of what would be possible if the issue was prioritised in normal times. *Therefore, we reiterate our previous recommendations that a Minister for Food Security is created to maintain this momentum after the pandemic. This Minister needs to be supported by robust cross-Government structures to ensure that all interested departments prioritise the issue of food insecurity.*

34. We agree that enshrining principles in law is not a "silver bullet", however, giving the "right to food" a legislative footing would drive action on food insecurity across Whitehall and Government. *We therefore recommend that the Government should consult on how a "right to food" could be implemented in England as part of its White Paper following the publication of the National Food Strategy. We appreciate that the right to daily nutritious food as part of a national food strategy will need to consider the need for people to have food security along with other essential needs.*

Food redistribution

35. Food aid providers are supported by organisations, such as FareShare, that redistribute "good quality surplus food [...] to almost 11,000 frontline charities and community groups".⁹⁵ This food largely derives from "surplus food that would otherwise be going to waste".⁹⁶ FareShare has seen a tripling in "the average number of charities apply[ing] to receive food" from them, whilst the short-notice of lockdowns can create food surpluses.⁹⁷ Lyndsey Boswell, FareShare, CEO told us in May that FareShare had "completed with DEFRA a £1.9 million trial, which concluded on 31 March, on neutralising the cost for British farmers and growers to redistribute surplus food".⁹⁸ The Committee recommended that Defra provided £5 million annually to enable the continuation of the programme, which would provide "53 million meals to those who are struggling, two thirds of which would go to families with children".⁹⁹ The Government response, stated that the FareShare trial "will inform our future programme of work, including into the next spending review period".¹⁰⁰ It added that "the food surplus redistributed through this grant scheme represents approximately 0.2% of all supply chain food waste and <0.1% of all food waste

95 FareShare, 'Who We Are', accessed 9 March 2021

96 FareShare, 'Representation to the Spring Budget 2021', accessed 9 March 2021

97 Fareshare (CFSF0019); 'What's happened to food waste in a covid-19 world', The Grocer, 20 October 2020; Federation of Wholesale Distributors (CFSF0020)

98 Oral evidence taken before Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee on 15 May 2020 HC 263, Q62

99 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, First Report of Session 2019–21, [COVID-19 and food supply](#), HC 263, para 48; Fareshare (CFSF0019)

100 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Sixth Special Report of Session 2019–21, [COVID-19 and food supply: Government Response to the Committee's First Report](#), HC 841, p8

(post-farm gate)".¹⁰¹ However, Victoria Prentis, told us "that the Government take[s] food waste very seriously" and that she expects "this to be an area in which we continue to work as Government".¹⁰² Fareshare reiterated its call for the Government to provide £5 million per year to fund its "surplus with Purpose scheme".¹⁰³

36. Food redistribution helps to provide nutritious food to those who might not otherwise have access to it, as well as minimising waste. We reiterate our recommendation that the Government should provide ongoing funding to FareShare and other charities, so they can continue to redistribute surplus food from the farmgate and across the supply chain to frontline food aid providers.

101 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Sixth Special Report of Session 2019–21, [COVID-19 and food supply: Government Response to the Committee's First Report](#), HC 841, p8

102 [Q107](#)

103 Fareshare ([CFSF0019](#))

2 The Food supply chain

Hospitality businesses and suppliers

37. The hospitality sector, which includes hotels and accommodation, food and drink outlets as well as attractions and leisure, accounts for 10% of UK employment, 6% of businesses and 5% of gross domestic product.¹⁰⁴

38. The Committee's first report into covid-19 and food supply was published not long after hospitality venues reopened in England on 4 July 2020.¹⁰⁵ On 8 July 2020, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a suite of financial measures with a strong focus on protecting both businesses and jobs in the hospitality sector.¹⁰⁶ This support included the Eat-out to Help-out scheme which ran from 3 to 31 August 2020, as well as longer term 'business rate relief' for the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors.¹⁰⁷ In addition, the Chancellor announced a temporary reduction in Value Added Tax (VAT) for hospitality, holiday accommodation and attractions businesses.¹⁰⁸

39. However, since September 2020, the Government has taken action to suppress the prevalence of covid-19 by once again restricting social and business activity. Notably, the hospitality industry has been forced to close during a further two national lockdowns.¹⁰⁹ Outside of national lockdowns, the sector has seen additional restrictions imposed, such as a 10pm curfew. In October 2020, the Government announced a localised tiered 'covid alert level system'. In those areas placed within the "very high" category, food and drink venues were restricted to operating as a restaurant only with alcohol only being served with a substantial meal.¹¹⁰ This system was replaced in December 2020, with food and drink venues in the "high" category being required to operate as restaurants (as outlined above) and those in the "very high" category forced to close.¹¹¹

40. England's third national lockdown began on 5 January 2021, with the announcement made the day before.¹¹² Food and drink businesses were ordered to close, although they were permitted to provide food and non-alcoholic drinks for takeaway, click and collect and drive through; all food and drink, including alcohol, was able to be provided by delivery.¹¹³ Hospitality businesses are expected to be permitted to re-open outdoors from 12 April 2021 and indoors from 17 May 2021.¹¹⁴

104 UK Hospitality, '[Industry Focus](#)', accessed 12 March 2021

105 "[PM announces easing of lockdown restrictions: 23 June 2020](#)", Prime Minister's Office press release, 23 June 2020

106 HM Treasury, '[A plan for jobs speech](#)', accessed 25 February 2021

107 HM Revenue and Customs, '[Get a discount with the Eat Out to Help Out Scheme](#)', accessed 25 February 2021; Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, '[Check if your retail, hospitality or leisure business is eligible for business rates relief due to coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)', accessed 25 February 2021

108 HM Revenue and Customs, '[VAT: reduced rate for hospitality, holiday accommodation and attractions](#)', accessed 25 February 2021

109 "[Prime Minister announces new national restrictions](#)", Prime Minister's Office press release, 31 October 2020; Prime Minister's Office, '[Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus \(COVID-19\): 5 January 2021](#)', accessed 25 February 2021

110 HM Government, '[Coronavirus Tier 2](#)', accessed 24 February 2021

111 HM Government, '[Coronavirus Tier 2](#)', accessed 24 February 2021; HM Government, '[Coronavirus Tier 3](#)', accessed 24 February 2021

112 Prime Minister's Office, '[Prime Minister's address to the nation: 4 January 2021](#)', accessed 1 March 2021

113 Cabinet Office, '[Guidance: National lockdown: Stay at Home](#)', accessed 25 February 2021

114 Cabinet Office, '[COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021 \(Summary\)](#)', accessed 25 February 2021

41. Kate Nicholls, Chief Executive of UK Hospitality, told the Committee on 9 February 2021 that “the sector got to breakeven for only one week in 2020” and “£72 billion [was] wiped off the revenues of hospitality” businesses.¹¹⁵ Looking ahead, she stated that “one in five [...] [hospitality] businesses have sufficient cash reserves to get through to March [2021]”.¹¹⁶ In addition, the sector has seen significant job losses, with the BBC reporting that between February and November 2020 the sector saw a reduction in payroll of 297,000.¹¹⁷

42. Those who supply the hospitality sector have also been affected by its closure. The Food and Drink Federation (FDF), who represent the food and drink manufacturing sector, explained that “those who supply the hospitality and food service sectors, [...] now face extremely difficult times” because they “have seen their customers disappear”.¹¹⁸ The Provision Trade Federation, noted “that food processing businesses that supply into [hospitality] [...] are experiencing up to a third of their orders being reduced”.¹¹⁹ Equally, the FWD said that its members have “lost almost 80–95% and in some cases 100% of their trade”.¹²⁰

43. Wholesalers’ that supply the hospitality sector, also typically supply the public sector. The FWD stated that “the commercial revenue from the 70% of turnover distributed to the private hospitality sector underwrites the 30% of business supplied to public sector contracts” and “without the income from the commercial sector, the supply of food to institutions such as care homes, prisons, schools, and hospitals is at immediate risk”.¹²¹ However, the FWD explained that their members “continue to supply these institutions at a financial loss to ensure the most vulnerable in our society are able to access food”.¹²² Such problems have been exacerbated by the short notice of closures. As a result of school closures in January 2021, which was announced the day before, the wholesale sector sustained “£12.2 [million of] excess stock which will be wasted”.¹²³

44. In our first report, we recommended that “the Government should include [in its response] a plan for how it intends to support food and drink suppliers to the hospitality and foodservice sector during this turbulent time”.¹²⁴ The Government responded by stating that general support measures included:

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme [...]; the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Schemes for small and large businesses (CBILS/CLBILS); the Bounce Back Loan Scheme for SMEs [...]; the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS)[...]; the £2bn Kickstart Scheme [...] [and] the Trade Credit Reinsurance Scheme, which provides £10bn of guarantees on business-to-business transactions.¹²⁵

115 [Q30](#)

116 [Q30](#)

117 *“Hospitality worst-hit as unemployment rises again”*, BBC News, 15 December 2020

118 Food and Drink Federation ([CFSF0035](#))

119 Provision Trade Federation ([CFSF0016](#))

120 Federation of Wholesale Distributors ([CFSF0020](#))

121 Federation of Wholesale Distributors ([CFSF0020](#))

122 Federation of Wholesale Distributors ([CFSF0020](#))

123 Federation of Wholesale Distributors ([CFSF0020](#))

124 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, First Report of Session 2019–21, [COVID-19 and food supply](#), HC 263, para 90

125 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Sixth Special Report of Session 2019–21, [COVID-19 and food supply: Government Response to the Committee’s First Report](#), HC 84, p15

In addition, the Government outlined that it had “also taken measures specifically aimed at supporting the food and drink sector”, including: the Bounce Back Package (supporting agri-food businesses to grow their exports); VAT reductions for hospitality, holiday accommodation and attractions; and the Eat-out to Help-out Scheme (EOTHO).¹²⁶ Victoria Prentis also told the Committee that the Chancellor “also gave an additional one-off grant of £9,000 to hospitality businesses that have been forced to close”.¹²⁷ The announcement of the EOTHO scheme and a sector-specific VAT reduction was ‘warmly welcomed’ by UK Hospitality in the summer, who stated that “the measures [...] are extremely positive [...] and they should give many businesses in our sector much-needed help”.¹²⁸

45. Nevertheless, when discussing Government support, Kate Nicholls stated that the majority of hospitality businesses are SMEs, “so they do not have [...] cash” and “for an average pub, [...] [lockdown] is costing them £10,000 a month. For an average restaurant and hotel, [...] [it] is costing them £20,000 a month. The Government support to cover fixed costs is capped at £3,000 a month”.¹²⁹ She further stated that the sector is “rapidly running into a situation where we do not have the cash to get through”.¹³⁰ In relation to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (colloquially known as the ‘furlough’ scheme), Kate Nicholls told us that it “rightly [...] supports the employee” but “it is actually costing [...] businesses to operate it”.¹³¹

46. Those who manufacture for and supply the hospitality industry, of which 95% are small and medium sized businesses, have contended that they have continued to receive less Government support than the hospitality businesses they supply.¹³² The FDF commented that “despite the significant impact felt by these suppliers, hospitality businesses have been compensated, but their suppliers have not”.¹³³ James Bielby of the FWD, noted that suppliers “have had no business rates relief [...], no access to the retail, leisure and hospitality grants [...] [and] no support for the millions of pounds of excess stock” that is very difficult to shift.¹³⁴ In addition, a Fresh Produce Consortium member noted that the industry was “not able to access any relief or grants—all while the supermarkets received rates relief and access to furlough schemes - whilst they absorbed all of the independent trade”.¹³⁵ Supermarkets also benefitted from a relaxation in elements of competition law at the start of the pandemic, which the Provision Trade Federation supported.¹³⁶ Though, Victoria Prentis stated to us that “those specific laws come to an end on 31 March”.¹³⁷

126 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Sixth Special Report of Session 2019–21, *COVID-19 and food supply: Government Response to the Committee’s First Report*, HC 841; “‘Bounce back’ plan for agriculture, food and drink industry launched”, Department for International Trade press release, 22 June 2020; HM Revenue and Customs, ‘VAT: reduced rate for hospitality, holiday accommodation and attractions’, accessed 25 February 2021; HM Revenue and Customs, ‘Get a discount with the Eat Out to Help Out Scheme’, accessed 25 February 2021

127 [Q51](#)

128 UK Hospitality, ‘UK Hospitality warmly welcomes jobs and hospitality package’, accessed 26 February 2021

129 [Q31–32](#)

130 [Q31](#)

131 [Q32](#)

132 Food and Drink Industry Roundtable, *UK Food and Drink: Maintaining Post-Covid-19 Capacity in Hospitality and Food Service Supply Chain Businesses: ‘The Squeezed Middle’* (June 2020); See also, for example, Provision Trade Federation ([CFSF0016](#)) and Federation of Wholesale Distributors ([CFSF0020](#))

133 Food and Drink Federation ([CFSF0035](#))

134 [Q35](#), [Q44](#)

135 Fresh Produce Consortium ([CFSF0013](#))

136 The Competition Act 1998 (Groceries) (Coronavirus) (Public Policy Exclusion) Order 2020, [SI 2020/369](#); Provision Trade Federation ([CFSF0016](#)) para 28

137 [Q66](#)

When pressed on whether these laws would be extended, she said that “none of us can predict what this dreadful virus is going to do but, assuming we are still planning for the reopening, our energies will be focused there, I am sure”.¹³⁸ In our previous report we concluded that:

While the relaxation [of competition law] has helped retailers manage a period of unprecedented demand, the longer the exclusion orders are in place, the greater the risk of detriment to consumers [...]. The Government and Competition and Markets Authority should review whether the relaxation of competition law has been detrimental to consumers and suppliers to large retailers during the pandemic.¹³⁹

47. Our witnesses from the hospitality industry and their suppliers called for continued and enhanced support as the industry reopened. Kate Nicholls, stated that “we need to make sure that those support measures are extended in order to protect [...] businesses” and furthermore “if the support mechanisms are extended [...], we anticipate [...] that [the] recovery will be brought forward by nine months” from the forecasted return to “pre-Covid levels of revenue by the end of 2022 or early 2023”.¹⁴⁰ Ian Wright, Chief Executive of the FDF noted in relation to the reopening of the hospitality sector that:

there is no point in supporting all these businesses through the last year, and then, at the last minute, walking away, so that they all fall flat on their face. Everybody who has ever run a business knows that it is the gearing up, the scaling up, that gets you.¹⁴¹

48. James Beilby explained that the supply sector “is at perilous risk” and that “as we begin to think about the restart, it is going to be extremely difficult” without further support.¹⁴² The FDF therefore “called on the Government to extend the [...] Business Rates exemption to businesses supplying into the hospitality and food service market”.¹⁴³ There have also been various other calls for sector specific support.¹⁴⁴ For example, the FWD called for an excess stock grant to “to cover the £12.2 million of fresh food [intended for schools that closed] that wholesalers will not be paid for” and a wholesale fund to support foodservice, public sector and hospitality wholesalers (as has been introduced by the Scottish Government).¹⁴⁵ Victoria Prentis stated that the Government is “very aware that some of the measures [...] helping the hospitality sector have not been available to the wholesale sector” and that they are “conscious that, in anticipation of reopening, we need to support this sector to enable them to do their best for the whole supply chain”.¹⁴⁶ She continued that “we are looking at what is required to help them to get through this next stage”.¹⁴⁷

138 [Q67](#)

139 Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, First Report of Session 2019–21, [COVID-19 and food supply](#), HC 263, para18

140 [Q32](#), [Q29](#)

141 [Q43](#)

142 [Q44](#)

143 Food and Drink Federation ([CFSF0035](#)), para 31

144 See, for example, Federation of Wholesale Distributors ([CFSF0020](#)), Food and Drink Federation ([CFSF0035](#)), Provision Trade Federation ([CFSF0016](#)) and Fresh Produce Consortium ([CFSF0013](#))

145 Federation of Wholesale Distributors ([CFSF0020](#))

146 [Q54](#)

147 [Q54](#)

49. The Government's 'roadmap out of lockdown' confirmed that hospitality venues will open outdoors from 12 April 2021, at the earliest, and indoors from 17 May 2021.¹⁴⁸ The Prime Minister told the House of Commons, on 22 February 2021, that "the Government will continue to do whatever it takes to protect jobs and livelihoods across the UK".¹⁴⁹ The Chancellor confirmed in the Budget on 3 March, a continuation of Government support for the hospitality sector. The Chancellor announced that he would be helping the "economy bounce back once restrictions are lifted" through:

"business rates reliefs; UK-wide VAT reductions for tourism and hospitality [...] a new UK-wide loan guarantee scheme supporting businesses' access to loans and overdrafts; and Restart Grants in England of up to [...] up to £18,000 per premises for hospitality [...]; and an additional £425 million of discretionary business grant funding for local authorities to distribute".¹⁵⁰

He also announced the continuation of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.¹⁵¹ Commenting on the chancellor's announcement, Kate Nicholls stated "the Chancellor has listened to the concerns of the hospitality sector. [...] it looks like crucial support will help businesses at a critical time".¹⁵² The FDF said "food and drink manufacturers will welcome today's Budget. The Chancellor's announcement struck the right balance" whilst, the FWD stated "food and drink wholesalers must be prioritised for the £425 million allocated for discretionary business grants after missing out on sector-specific financial support".¹⁵³

50. We support the Chancellor's announcement in the Budget that the hospitality sector will continue to receive at least the same level of financial support. However, we remain concerned that those who supply them have not received the same level of financial support. Many of these suppliers are small businesses, who will be particularly vulnerable as the economy starts to re-open. Both hospitality providers, and many public sector organisations, are reliant on them. The Government's support to hospitality businesses will be wasted if their supply chain collapses. *We therefore recommend that the Government urgently assesses the impact of the closures to the hospitality sector on its suppliers, especially small businesses, and provides additional financial support to them during the period of reopening.*

51. We welcome the Minister's assurances that there is no intention to extend the relaxation of competition law for retailers. *We repeat our recommendation that the Government and Competition and Markets Authority should review whether the relaxation of competition law has been detrimental to consumers and suppliers to large retailers during the pandemic. The Government should also proactively seek to reverse the loss of market share by small retailers and the hospitality sector; and to encourage greater market access for locally produced foods. It should also help facilitate digital support for local businesses.*

148 Cabinet Office, '[COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021 \(Summary\)](#)', accessed 1 March 2021

149 HC Deb, 22 February 2021, [Col 626](#)

150 Budget 2021, '[Protecting the jobs and livelihoods of the British people](#)', 3 March 2021, p18, para 1.31

151 Budget 2021, '[Protecting the jobs and livelihoods of the British people](#)', 3 March 2021, p45

152 UK Hospitality, '[UK Hospitality reaction the Chancellor's Budget statement](#)', accessed 5 March 2020

153 Food and Drink Federation '[The Food and Drink Federation responds to the Chancellor's Budget Announcement](#)', accessed 5 March 2020; Federation of Wholesale Distributors '["With no support for wholesale, there's no food for caterers" - Bielby](#)', accessed 5 March 2020

Conclusions and recommendations

Food insecurity

1. We support the principle that schools and local authorities should have multiple options, such as food parcels and vouchers, for providing free school meals to their pupils. They are best placed to know what works best for their communities. It is important that families have the flexibility to meet their specific needs and preferences. (Paragraph 12)
2. We heard evidence that many wholesalers who were providing pupils with food parcels, provided them in line with Government guidance. However, a minority of parcels were clearly unacceptable. It is therefore unfortunate that the failings of some suppliers, in terms of quality and value for money, led to a fall in public confidence in England given that parcels are the best option in some circumstances. It is important that the sector and Government learns from these failings and ensures that any future offering is consistently up to standard and delivers value for money. The problems with food parcels exacerbated the difficulties for wholesalers caused by short-notice school closures and led to significant losses for a sector that was already struggling. (Paragraph 13)
3. We know that during lockdown food insecurity is particularly likely amongst those eligible for free school meals. *Therefore, in the event of another lockdown, Government should ensure that families of children who would normally receive free school meals continue to be able to feed their children.* (Paragraph 14)
4. Although the intention of the food parcels scheme during the first lockdown was to provide food to the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable, it also had the effect of supporting wholesalers. However, it is right that in designing its support for the vulnerable, the Government has focussed on the needs of recipients and not suppliers. (Paragraph 22)
5. During the 2021 lockdown, the Government has relied more heavily on supermarkets to provide food to vulnerable groups. We support the principle that where possible people should be supported to shop for themselves. However, if the Government is directing custom towards supermarkets, it should be publicly asking them to accommodate the needs of the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV), elderly and disabled people. For example, by lowering minimum spends and removing delivery charges for CEV customers. However, a disproportionate number of people with disabilities are digitally excluded through not having access to the necessary equipment or skills. *However, if the Government is directing custom towards supermarkets, it should be publicly asking them to accommodate the needs of the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV), elderly and disabled people. For example, by lowering minimum spends and removing delivery charges for CEV customers. However, a disproportionate number of people with disabilities are digitally excluded through not having access to the necessary equipment or skills. Therefore, whilst recognising the good work of the charitable sector, the Government must ensure that local authorities are properly resourced, and that retailers recognise their responsibility, to assist those who are digitally excluded in making food orders for delivery.* (Paragraph 23)

6. It is imperative that food retailers ensure that their stores are accessible to disabled people. We recognise the challenges faced in adapting stores to social distancing in the early months of the pandemic, but there is no excuse for ongoing barriers. *All food retailers must ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to ensure that disabled people are not disproportionately hampered by additional in-store covid-19 measures. Where reasonable adjustments are not made the law should be properly enforced.* (Paragraph 24)
7. Without proper data, we cannot take action on the scale required and targeted at those in greatest need to tackle the causes and consequences of food insecurity. Data from charities indicate that many more people are food insecure as a result of the pandemic. The food security report under the Agriculture Act due by the end of this year must contain up-to-date data on the scale of food insecurity, as well as the make-up of households that have food insecurity (for example, data that is broken down into age groups to assess the prevalence of food insecurity in households that contain children). We welcome the Government's decision to reduce the maximum gap between these reports to three years from five. However, as the Minister said, there is nothing stopping it producing more regular reports. *The food security report under the Agriculture Act due by the end of this year must contain up-to-date data on the scale of food insecurity, as well as the make-up of households that have food insecurity (for example, data that is broken down into age groups to assess the prevalence of food insecurity in households that contain children). We welcome the Government's decision to reduce the maximum gap between these reports to three years from five. However, as the Minister said, there is nothing stopping it producing more regular reports. It should use that flexibility to produce annual reports, at least for the next few years while we understand the impact of the pandemic and also the impact of Brexit and other changes to the UK's trading relationships.* (Paragraph 32)
8. Ensuring everyone, and especially the vulnerable, have access to enough food is a fundamental duty of society and Government. We recognise that this is a goal the Government shares, even if there are differences over how best to achieve it. Although there have been failings, Ministers have mobilised their departments to support vulnerable people's access to food during the pandemic, giving a sense of what would be possible if the issue was prioritised in normal times. *Therefore, we reiterate our previous recommendations that a Minister for Food Security is created to maintain this momentum after the pandemic. This Minister needs to be supported by robust cross-Government structures to ensure that all interested departments prioritise the issue of food insecurity.* (Paragraph 33)
9. We agree that enshrining principles in law is not a "silver bullet", however, giving the "right to food" a legislative footing would drive action on food insecurity across Whitehall and Government. *We therefore recommend that the Government should consult on how a "right to food" could be implemented in England as part of its White Paper following the publication of the National Food Strategy. We appreciate that the right to daily nutritious food as part of a national food strategy will need to consider the need for people to have food security along with other essential needs.* (Paragraph 34)
10. Food redistribution helps to provide nutritious food to those who might not otherwise have access to it, as well as minimising waste. *We reiterate our recommendation that*

the Government should provide ongoing funding to FareShare and other charities, so they can continue to redistribute surplus food from the farmgate and across the supply chain to frontline food aid providers. (Paragraph 36)

The Food supply chain

11. We support the Chancellor's announcement in the Budget that the hospitality sector will continue to receive at least the same level of financial support. However, we remain concerned that those who supply them have not received the same level of financial support. Many of these suppliers are small businesses, who will be particularly vulnerable as the economy starts to re-open. Both hospitality providers, and many public sector organisations, are reliant on them. The Government's support to hospitality businesses will be wasted if their supply chain collapses. *We therefore recommend that the Government urgently assesses the impact of the closures to the hospitality sector on its suppliers, especially small businesses, and provides additional financial support to them during the period of reopening. (Paragraph 50)*
12. We welcome the Minister's assurances that there is no intention to extend the relaxation of competition law for retailers. *We repeat our recommendation that the Government and Competition and Markets Authority should review whether the relaxation of competition law has been detrimental to consumers and suppliers to large retailers during the pandemic. The Government should also proactively seek to reverse the loss of market share by small retailers and the hospitality sector; and to encourage greater market access for locally produced foods. It should also help facilitate digital support for local businesses. (Paragraph 51)*

Formal minutes

Monday 29 March 2021

Virtual meeting

Members present:

Neil Parish, in the Chair

Ian Byrne	Dr Neil Hudson
Geraint Davies	Robbie Moore
Rosie Duffield	Mrs Sheryll Murray
Barry Gardiner	

Covid-19 and food supply: follow up

Draft Report (*Covid-19 and the issues of security in food supply*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 51 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Seventh 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.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 20 April at 2.00 p.m.]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 9 February 2021

Emma Revie, Chief Executive, Trussell Trust; **Fazilet Hadi**, Policy Manager, Disability Rights UK; **Anna Taylor**, Executive Director, The Food Foundation; **CLlr James Jamieson**, Chairman, Local Government Association (LGA)

[Q1–27](#)

Kate Nicholls, Chief Executive, UK Hospitality; **Ian Wright**, Chief Executive, Food and Drink Federation; **James Bielby**, Chief Executive, Federation of Wholesale Distributors

[Q28–49](#)

Tuesday 23 February 2021

Victoria Prentis MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs; **Will Quince MP**, Minister for Welfare Delivery, Department for Work and Pensions

[Q50–109](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

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

- 1 Action on Salt and Action on Sugar ([CFSF0026](#))
- 2 Age Verification Providers Association ([CFSF0027](#))
- 3 Agricultural Industries Confederation ([CFSF0014](#))
- 4 Arla Foods ([CFSF0003](#))
- 5 Birmingham Food Council CIC ([CFSF0030](#))
- 6 British Poultry Council ([CFSF0039](#))
- 7 City Of Bradford Metropolitan District Council ([CFSF0021](#))
- 8 Coeliac UK ([CFSF0028](#))
- 9 Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Health Authority ([CFSF0033](#))
- 10 Cystic Fibrosis Trust ([CFSF0002](#))
- 11 Eats Rosyth ([CFSF0004](#))
- 12 FareShare ([CFSF0019](#))
- 13 Federation of Wholesale Distributors ([CFSF0042](#))
- 14 Federation of Wholesale Distributors ([CFSF0020](#))
- 15 Feedback global ([CFSF0012](#))
- 16 Food Standards Agency ([CFSF0036](#))
- 17 Food and Drink Federation ([CFSF0035](#))
- 18 Fresh Produce Consortium ([CFSF0013](#))
- 19 Hawkchurch Community Shop ([CFSF0005](#))
- 20 Hubbub ([CFSF0023](#))
- 21 Independent Age ([CFSF0007](#))
- 22 Landworkers Alliance ([CFSF0025](#))
- 23 Local Government Association ([CFSF0041](#))
- 24 National Disabled People Against Cuts ([CFSF0011](#))
- 25 National Farmers' Union (NFU) ([CFSF0032](#))
- 26 National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations ([CFSF0029](#))
- 27 National Pig Association ([CFSF0022](#))
- 28 Newcastle City Council ([CFSF0040](#))
- 29 Provision Trade Federation ([CFSF0016](#))
- 30 Rayman, Professor Margaret; and Philip Calder ([CFSF0001](#))
- 31 RNIB ([CFSF0031](#))
- 32 NFU Scotland ([CFSF0017](#))
- 33 The Association of UK Dietitians ([CFSF0018](#))

- 34 The Country Trust ([CFSF0024](#))
- 35 The Fairtrade Foundation ([CFSF0015](#))
- 36 The Food Foundation ([CFSF0043](#))
- 37 The Food Foundation ([CFSF0034](#))
- 38 The Foodhall Project ([CFSF0010](#))
- 39 Thornton, Mrs Catherine ([CFSF0008](#))
- 40 Trussell Trust ([CFSF0037](#))
- 41 WinVisible (women with visible & invisible disabilities) ([CFSF0006](#))
- 42 Wye Community Farm ([CFSF0009](#))

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.

Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st	COVID-19 and food supply	HC 263
2nd	Pre-appointment hearing for the Chair-Designate of the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP)	HC 1042
3rd	The UK's new immigration policy and the food supply chain	HC 231
4th	Flooding	HC 170
5th	Air Quality and coronavirus: a glimpse of a different future or business as usual	HC 468
6th	Public Sector Procurement of Food	HC 469
1st Special	Plastic food and drink packaging: Government Response to the Committee's Sixteenth Report of Session 2017–19	HC 207
2nd Special	Beyond the Common Fisheries Policy: Scrutiny of the Fisheries Bill: Government Response to the Committee's Eleventh Report of Session 2017–19	HC 208
3rd Special	An Update on Rural Connectivity: Government Response to the Committee's Seventeenth Report of Session 2017–19	HC 228
4th Special	Coastal flooding and erosion, and adaptation to climate change: Interim Report: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2019	HC 272
5th Special	Scrutiny of the Agriculture Bill: Government Response to the Committee's Tenth Report of Session 2017–19	HC 273
6th Special	COVID-19 and food supply: Government Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 841