Food insecurity in Birmingham — a city-level response?

PROJECT REPORT & DISCUSSION DOCUMENT
Food insecurity in Birmingham — a city level response?

Food security is a concern of governments and global bodies. Their concern will become even more pressing with climate change, population pressures and resource depletion.

A few years ago, it was difficult to imagine that here in Birmingham as in other UK cities, food security would be a major local concern too. Yet the growing number of food banks in the city — and increasing numbers of people affected by food poverty in its many other guises — is a manifestation of food insecurity right here.

So, we asked ourselves, if external drivers on our food supply networks are here to stay in one form or another, what strategic measures can Birmingham take to mitigate against their effects? Is it possible to have an effective city-level response — and if so, what does it look like?

This report

In March 2015, we set up a project to explore possible answers to the important question we posed. This report describes the work we undertook and acts as starting point for suggestions as to what Birmingham can do.

What next . . .

We plan for this report to spark discussion and debate about city-level responses to food insecurity. Let us know your views!

Our thanks . . .

We’re grateful to the Barrow Cadbury Trust who co-funded this project, and to Ashrammoseley who also supported us. Our thanks, too, to all the people who kindly gave their time and expertise to join the conversation on how we might create a more equitable food supply network in Birmingham.

Chair, Birmingham Food Council

Birmingham Food Council 2014
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Introduction

Is it possible to have an effective city-level response [to the drivers of emergency food aid]— and if so, what does it look like?

The food production, distribution and exchange organisations comprising our food supply network are global in scope. While providing sustenance for billions of people, there are many millions who go hungry and a similar number who suffer illness and premature death linked to obesity and diabetes. And here in Birmingham, we have stark evidence of both hunger (though thankfully not at the scale in some places in the world) and malnutrition among our citizenry. The powerful drivers for their plight are summarised in Part II of this report.

In Part III, we put forward three thinking tools which have helped our thinking and, we hope, will help others think through the knotty, often conflicting challenges inherent in seeking a fair and equitable distribution of nutritious food to all.

We soon realised during this project that the challenges we’re facing have as much to do with the relationships we have with each other as they do with food. Progressive change won’t come from changing our relationship with food (or to sugar as in the quotation from Ben Richardson’s Sugar below), but from changing our relationships with each other.

And that is something we can do here in Birmingham.

We can set up infrastructures, systems and organisations that will change the relationships we have with each other in this city. So here in Part I, we list our thinking to date on what these changes could be . . .

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Progressive change will not come from changing our relationship to sugar but only from changing our relationships with each other. That is both the challenge and potential of the politics of sugar, and, indeed, of capitalism itself.

Ben Richardson, Warwick University & New Optimist political scientist, in Sugar (2015)
PART 1 A city level response

1.1 Strategic aim
The strategic aim we’re proposing is this slightly amended version of the Birmingham Food Council strapline (reproduced on page 1 of this report):

We aim for all our citizens to enjoy safe, tasty, healthy meals . . .
& eat them in good company

1.2 Four core principles
We also propose that all actions at all levels follow four core principles:

#1 Food security is a public good as well as a human right.
#2 Reciprocity, fairness and equality in all food exchanges, whether monetized or not.
#3 Hospitality: Eating in company is social glue.
#4 Encourage food sector profit to derive from local entrepreneurship, not rent (e.g. as in franchises).

1.3 Levels of responses within Birmingham
Information networks and ever lower labour costs are transforming our lives — and ever more rapidly, as outlined later on in this report. The consequences of this massive social change is that we are already creating and managing local institutions and infrastructures differently, and at different levels of organisation and within varying timeframes.

How to ensure that all of us eat well in the midst of this flux requires lots of changes at lots of levels, as our categorisation of the options for changes indicate:

1.3.1 The city infrastructure
1.3.2 Regional infrastructure
1.3.3 Institutions
1.3.4 “Smart” opportunities
1.3.5 Neighbourhoods
1.3.6 Birmingham City Council: Procurement & other commercial relationships

1.3.1 At a city infrastructure level

❖ Encourage the development of alternative food sector businesses: Investment (including social investment), plus fast-track spatial and planning permissions for entrepreneurs keen to supply affordable, healthy food products including meals (with #4 core principle high on the agenda, so not franchises).
❖ Investment in public transport and safe walking and cycling routes between wards with high levels of deprivation and schools, community spaces and healthy food outlets.

Accepting that resources are finite: where do we balance the trade-off between short-term and long-term objectives?
At what point does strategy become swallowed up by tactics?
Workshop, May 2015
❖ Free public transport for all under-11s (as in London).
❖ Free high-speed broadband access in all public and community spaces without the requirement to give personal information before access (as at the mac).
❖ Investment in sustainable efficient energy through the decentralisation of the consumer side of the energy market out from the city centre (where there is an efficient combined heat and power system) into hyper-local generation grids near high population densities.

1.3.2 At a regional infrastructure level
❖ Incentive systems/trading options for fresh foodstuffs from the rural shires around the conurbation to community-scale meal providers as well as other markets.

1.3.3 At an institutional level
❖ True public provision of community-scale meals, beginning with provision within existing infrastructures; e.g. healthy food outlets in schools, colleges, universities, leisure centres, community halls, social housing and faith centres.

1.3.4 “Smart” opportunities
❖ Points collection card scheme (e.g. as the Nectar scheme) for spend or discount at food banks, community-scale meals, food festivals, et al. Points could be awarded for healthy activities (via activity tracker), healthy food purchases (e.g. as in the Vitality-Sainsbury’s scheme), et al.
❖ With due regard for obligations under the Data Protection Act, Birmingham City Council and Birmingham Public Health release all their data into the public domain.
❖ The Birmingham Food Council, with Birmingham Public Health and NatCen coordinate national and local quantitative data on food insecurity matters, and seek to commission more qualitative and quantitative research in city wards to inform the national as well as local picture.

1.3.5 At a neighbourhood level
❖ Well-established food banks across the city to set themselves up as advice or community centres or shops, possibly in partnership with other organisations (e.g. Citizens Advice Bureau) with the aim that food exchanges are part of a socially equal relationship with opportunities for altruism and reciprocity for both provider and recipient.
❖ Expansion of community-scale meals and healthy hot food takeaways into estate precincts and High Streets, some with ‘pop-up’ or temporary status.
❖ Development of community shops, including those with complementary or local currency systems.

1.3.6 Birmingham City Council: Procurement and other commercial relationships
❖ Birmingham City Council continues its policy to pay a minimum Living Wage for all its employees and contracting the same for all employees of its suppliers.

Hannah Lambie-Mumford, SPERI Paper no 18, 2015

In emergency food systems individuals become receivers of food — stripped of their agency and choice, a key value in the contemporary food system in the UK.
If Birmingham City Council outsources functions to the private sector, it denies the latter the right to compete on differential wages and conditions of service.

Birmingham City Council reconsider existing and avoid future commercial relationships with all food and drinks companies whose products have low or zero nutritional content. (The Health and Social Care Act 2012 puts statutory duties on Birmingham City Council to improve the health of its residents. Their contracts with some large food and beverage companies may be in conflict with these duties. *A rule of thumb: If all or most of a company's products have standard-rate VAT, these are the companies to avoid doing business with.*)

1.4 Planning by doing . . . and on all fronts simultaneously

The rapidity of change in today’s society, in minds as well as technology, means the best of plans are like the weather. Changeable. Unpredictable.

Therefore planning by doing, not by writing or meeting or indeed, by attempting long-winded consensus will increase options — as will doing on all fronts simultaneously. And we all watch carefully what works, and replicate what succeeds. When we fail, as fail we must from time to time, we need fail fast.

iv.

The rastaman thinks, draw me a map of what you see
then I will draw a map of what you will never see
and guess me whose map will be bigger than whose?
Guess me whose map will tell the larger truth?

*from The cartographer tries to map a way to Zion* by Kei Miller

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Access to food is in fact a key indicator of broader socio-economic inequalities. Food insecurity hotspots generally correlate not only with poverty, but also with a series of factors that marginalize people and particular population groups.

Olivier de Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food
PART II  Emergency food aid . . . the wider context

We made two clear decisions at the beginning of this project. The first was to take a human rights perspective, summarised succinctly by the UN-FAO World Food Summit, 1996, 2012.

The second was to concentrate attention on emergency food aid, manifested here as in other UK towns and cities by the growing number and growing use of food banks. We were well aware that we’d have wider conversations during the project as food aid is a part of much wider issues concerning food insecurity and food poverty, as indicated in this definition of food aid from the Food Ethics Council:

*an umbrella term encompassing a range of large-scale and small local activities aiming to help people meet food needs, often on a short-term basis during crisis or immediate difficulty; more broadly they contribute to relieving symptoms of household or individual-level food insecurity and poverty.*

2.1  The global context

We also recognised that what we’re experiencing in Birmingham has powerful economic drivers far beyond our capacity and capability to affect.

2.1.1  Income inequality

Arguably the most important of these drivers is the existence of very few winners and many losers in the dramatic increase of inequality within developed countries over the last century, as shown in this graph (right).

The red line shows the US income of the 99% since World War I. It doubled during World War II then doubled again before the oil shock in 1973. But since 1989, it has grown only slowly.

Contrast that with the blue line, the income of the 1%. The recent down swing has proved immensely lucrative to this group and even more so to a small percentage of this 1% Within this wealthy group of people there is, as Danny Dorling’s analyses indicate, one percent of the one percent, the ultra wealthy, aka Wealth-X for whom London, a mere hundred or so miles away, is the global real estate hub.

Within the 99%, the middle income group are becoming poorer, and the absolute numbers of the very poor is growing. And it shows. Food banks, long a feature in the United States and Canada, are becoming more common across Europe, even in Germany, the eurozone’s most successful economy.

2.1.2  Demographics and their fiscal & political pressures

The UN World Population Prospects 2015 Revision gives detail to the familiar prospect of a big global population increase. Although fertility rates are dropping steadily, it still looks likely there will be 9.7bn of us by 2050 and 11.2bn by 2100. In only the last 12 years, the global population has grown by one billion — there are now 7.3bn of us.
That’s the global picture. It’s different in Europe where we’re facing a declining population owing to very low fertility rates. Deaths in Europe are expected to exceed births by 63M by 2050. We are, however, are living longer. Net migration levels, according to the UN Prospects 2015, don’t look likely to compensate with current projections of only 31M arriving in Europe between now and then. The current ratio in Europe is for three people aged 20-64 for every person over 65 years old; this is expected to drop to 2:1 by 2050.

And what is the relevance of these figures to food insecurity? This demographic picture adds significantly to fiscal and political pressures to delay pensions and to cut benefits to the over 65s; i.e. it is highly probable an increasing number of elderly people will be living here, and will be living in very straightened circumstances.

2.1.3 The price of labour

Labour costs are plummeting worldwide. Skilled labour is often free, as the existence of Wikipedia testifies. Moreover, the jobs of many employees are under threat; they are part of a rapidly growing “precariat”; a recent Oxford Martin School working paper assessed 47% of US jobs were at risk owing to computerisation.

2.1.4 Local to global: The choice context

In May 2015, we hosted a workshop in which we asked participants to categorise their thoughts about food systems make into different geographic levels and over different timescales. We were seeking to tease out aspects of the complex interactions within global, national, neighbourhood and household food systems.

To aid their thinking on this difficult exercise, we developed an info-graphic which we’ve reproduced below as it might be useful to others:

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The interactions which generate non-normalities in children’s games repeat themselves in real world systems — natural, social, economic, financial. But risks in real-world systems are no game. They can wreak havoc.

Andy Haldane, Bank of England speech Tails of the unexpected. 8 June 2012
2.1.5 The global food sector: The Big Ten and their impact

The global food sector is huge and multi-faceted. In terms of agriculture and food production alone, it employs a billion people, a third of the global workforce. Worth $7 trillion/year, it is 10% of the global economy, collectively generating $1.1bn a day, according to Oxfam’s 2013 report *Behind the brands: Food justice and the ‘Big 10’ food and beverage companies*.

Corporate size can be measured in several ways. Whether according to profitability, number of employees, advertising spend, et al, the top ten in any list contain most of the names Oxfam compiled as their Big Ten (see right).

Half of the Big Ten sell products of low or zero nutritional value

It’s worth reiterating the power and influence of these big food corporates and their advertising budgets. The products of five companies on this Big Ten list (Coca-Cola, Mars, Mondelez, Nestle and Pepsico) have little no nutritional value and high sugar or sweetener content. Of the other five, Associated British Foods owns British Sugar and they all have many brand products with high sugar and/or high fat content. Reducing consumer spend on these products benefits families and society alike.

As for social costs, it is a growing global concern about public health and medical costs, usually locally borne, of the activities of corporations selling high calorie food stuffs with little or no nutritional value. *Public Health England* (PHE) and the UN publish updates on these costs.

Global to local: The choice context

Yet Pepsico and Mars are both *PHE Change for Life* partners (as are Danone, Kellogg and Unilever). Indeed, these five companies have huge global marketing budgets used very skillfully, skewing the choices people make about the food they eat — and here in Birmingham too.

Of these five Big Ten companies, two are sponsoring food or health-related programmes here: Birmingham City Council has a contract with Coca-Cola to deliver their *ParkLives* activity programme; the Mondelez Foundation, whose parent now owns the Bournville factory so has a special relationship with us here, sponsors the Birmingham Health Education Services *Health for Life* programme, a healthy eating project for 60K primary schoolchildren in south Birmingham.

Household choices

People on low budgets are inevitably drawn to buy high calorie food stuffs as sourcing energy is a necessary part of everyone’s life. But calorie intake is not enough; we need nutrients too.

We get them through eating fresh fruit and vegetables — hence PHE’s five-a-day campaigns.

One of Nicole Damon’s slides in her presentation to the *Warwick Food GRP* last April (left) shows the cost of calories from different food groups. In summary, a healthy diet is more expensive than an unhealthy one, and is less convenient for the consumer. And it is less ‘convenient’ for the producer too. Fresh, perishable goods are more difficult, hence more expensive to get to market.
2.1.6 One Government’s response to food insecurity: Brazil’s ‘Zero Hunger’ national strategy

As our situation here is part of a global issue, it’s appropriate to consider the responses other states have made. Both Canada and the US have a long history of food bank provision. Many with experience of the situation in North America believe that we’re are embarking along a similar path and that this is not the best route to ensure food security for everyone.

In contrast, Brazil is the only developed country that’s made significant progress against domestic hunger, so provides a useful case study, as outlined below.

The Brazilian Government were clear that, for them, food security is a public good as well as a human right enshrined in their 2010 Constitution. They implemented a Right To Food (RTF) policy. Charitable food banks are thus seen as an abdication of governmental responsibility. That’s not to say they don’t have food banks, they do. But they are a single component of a ‘set of built structures which include subsidized popular restaurants and community kitchens put in place to combat hunger and food insecurity’. (Rocha, 2014)

Food banks here are of three kinds: those run and supported by the public sector, those by business associations as part of their social responsibility agenda and those by NGOs. All are governed by the same legislation concerning food safety and consumer protection.

2.2 The national context

2.2.1 Minimum Income Standard (MIS)

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) publish regular reports on changes in “the adequacy of incomes, as measured by households’ ability to reach the Minimum Income Standard (MIS), a measure based on what the public think is needed for a minimum acceptable standard of living” using data collected from 2008 onwards. Three of the main points in their latest report are:

- Among households covered by MIS (around two-thirds of all households), the risk of being below the MIS grew by nearly a third, from 21% to 27% over the four years from 2008/09 to 2012/13.
- For households without children, it grew by nearly half — from 16% to 23%.
- For households with children, the risk started off higher and grew from 32% to 39%.

It seems likely that the proportion of Birmingham households at risk is higher than these national statistics indicate. The Birmingham Child Poverty Commission reported this May that 49% of children in the city, nearly 137,000 youngsters, live in the top 10% of England’s most deprived areas. In July 2014, Cllr John Cotton wrote in the Guardian that some 84,000 of Birmingham children now live in poverty, more than one in three of our youngsters, a situation these new figures suggest is an under-estimate of child poverty here.
2.2.2 Food banks in the UK

The use of food banks is on the rise in the UK, although there is debate about some of the statistics not least due to the varied nature by which emergency food aid is delivered and measured. The Trussell Trust, the most well-known food aid provider in the UK, says it gave three days’ food to over one million people in 2014-2015 from 445 food banks, although it emphasises that this doesn’t mean a million unique users. Whether so or not, this figure compares to just over 60,000 people in their statistics for 2010-11, indicating a significant recent rise in food bank use in the UK.

Concern over these rising numbers of people seeking emergency food aid has resulted in several organisations researching the situation and seeking ways to reduce the need for emergency food aid.

The findings of an All Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger, the Fabian Commission on Food and Poverty A recipe for inequality: Why our food system is leaving low-income households behind and the most recent joint paper by Oxfam GB, Church Action on Poverty and the Trussell Trust Walking the breadline have all been recently published.

All in their own way offer maps, often forcefully expressed, for the Government to change tack in their response to these global and national forces, in particular in relation to recent benefit cuts.

Our workshop participants highlighted concerns that the prevailing UK attitudes to policy interventions are increasingly being framed within economic rather than social terms. This, coupled with a sense that much of the public debate is focused on short-term ‘solutions’, means that there are real challenges to effectively addressing issues around food insecurity.

The workshop conversations suggest six main structural variables at a national level that impede responses to food security in the UK:

- **LOGISTICAL**: Access to healthy food, and to food aid, is difficult to coordinate in big cities.
- **POLITICAL**: Changes to the benefit system are widely seen to be a contributing factor in the rise of food bank use. Currently there is no national government support for a Right To Food (RTF) approach.
- **ECONOMIC**: Persistent poverty is consistently identified as the primary source of food poverty.
- **CHARITY**: The rise of food banks run by charitable bodies is normalising emergency food aid.
- **MEDIA**: Charitable food aid in the form of food banks is lauded by the media, allowing the state to neglect its responsibilities.
- **TRADE**: Food trade & purchase patterns (which depend on high volume) mean buying fresh foodstuffs in some urban areas is impossible.

It can also be argued that policies that do exist sometimes reflect a gentrification effect in food matters, with some of the public energy and discourse directed towards solutions, such as grow-your-own and cookery classes that are irrelevant to the short-term urgencies and, for most, the long term situation faced by people living on low budgets.

Drivers of food poverty can be different over different time horizons. Short-term shocks drive crisis events, but poverty remains the root cause.

*Workshop, May 2015*
2.3 The Birmingham context

The workshop highlighted a number of challenges specific to Birmingham in addressing or mitigating against the drivers of food insecurity, summarised in the chart below:

- **DIVERSITY**: The diverse nature of city communities means there are differing perceptions of food poverty, charitable food banks and healthy eating, as well as different social support structures for emergency food aid. All this leads to complex issues of choice across communities.
- **CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP**: Campaigns, such as Coca-Cola’s sponsorship of a public health initiative (ParkLives) confuses that of ActiveParks and potentially shifts the authoritative voice and assumption of power away from healthy eating. The sponsorship by the Mondelez Foundation of the work of Birmingham South Health Education Service with 60,000 primary school-children, plays a similar role.
- **THE POSITION OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY**: Birmingham City Council is going through a significant period of restructure while dealing with the fallout from the Kerslake Review. It also has acute pressures on its financial resources, limiting its flexibility and ability to respond to food insecurity issues in the short or long-term.
- **LIMITED INFLUENCE**: Although Birmingham can learn from others’ experience, such as the Brazilian’s Government’s ‘Zero Hunger’ strategy, the city’s influence on the UK’s national economic, legislative and social policy is limited.
- **POVERTY**: Birmingham has a higher than average level of poverty which, in turn, exacerbates the scale of food insecurity across the city.
- **THE UK FOOD SUPPLY NETWORK**: Being in the middle of a conurbation means that some 99.9% of our food supply comes in by truck, train or plane. This undermines our ability to act solely at a city level.

Our local food businesses rather than individuals have the trading relationships with food producers within the food supply network of growers, brokers, processors, distributors, wholesalers et al as well as local retailers. Our relationships with growers and others even within the rural West Midlands let alone further afield, are very limited.

2.3.1 The drivers of emergency food aid in the city

Throughout the workshop discussions, a range of ideas and experiences were put forward as potential drivers of food poverty and insecurity in the UK, many well-rehearsed in other publications (see Annex C).

It’s difficult to tease out those drivers that stem from, or are influenced by Birmingham factors alone. That said, the following are the drivers that workshop participants and other informants felt were particularly relevant in this city.

2.3.2 Current drivers

At the core of food insecurity is poverty.

Our participants were well aware that it is the ‘working poor’ who can be particularly vulnerable (as are authors of national reports and confirmed by the IFS this July). Low-paid work and erratic hours lead to financial fragility where the slightest of jolts let alone a crisis of some kind can tip a household into having to make cuts to their meals, or even go without.
Rent or mortgage payments and energy bills are less compressible than food costs — so for some, sufficient and adequate meals become difficult to provide at the best of times, impossible at others. Research confirms the view here that mothers are often the most vulnerable as they serve themselves short or skip meals so their family can eat.

Some are also vulnerable due to changes in the benefit system, including delays in payments. Add in social exclusion and not only do some people have no-one else to turn to, the habit and pleasure of eating in social settings is missing from their lives.

Many are made more vulnerable by living in some of our many energy-inefficient homes, some of which don’t have any cooking facilities.

Food comprises a far higher percentage of a low income. Moreover, the price of healthy foodstuffs is expensive. ‘Food deserts’ exist in too many wards, neighbourhoods where it’s impossible to find nutritious food of any kind without using a car or taxi, a situation exacerbated if the individual or carer has mobility problems. Poor transport infrastructure was also mentioned as a contributory factor to food insecurity.

Homelessness itself is inevitably associated with food insecurity. Homelessness in Birmingham is one of the highest in the UK, especially among the young.

A lack of digital connectivity was a concern, leading to a lack of access to informed choices, as too were local food pricing variations through seemingly cynical manoeuvres by retailers.

Food waste was also mentioned, along with disquiet at the notion that those living on the edge should be eating what the rest of us throw away.

2.3.3 Possible future drivers

Workshop participants were asked to imagine Birmingham in 2025 to explore how the drivers for emergency food aid may evolve over time, as well as envisage how new contributory factors may emerge.

The local

Demographic changes we can already foresee indicate an increasing population in the city.

And, although we currently have the youngest population in Europe, we will still have to respond adequately to increasing numbers of elderly people, some with chronic health issues and frailties.

We already know that many elderly people don’t have an adequate diet, and many too feel socially excluded, issues that look set to increase without wide-scale social intervention.

Reduced affordability of housing and associated living costs, including utility bill increases. As housing costs rise with increased economic prosperity for the city, so developments such as HS2 are a mixed blessing.

Food security is universally applicable . . . is more than food production . . . stability over time for food utilisation, food access and food availability.

Dr John Ingram, Oxford Martin School, 2015
We are already witnessing **changes to local government** with the advent of the West Midlands Combined Authority (at the time of the workshop, local politicians were deep in negotiations, with very little news seeping out). The WMCA and the slimming down of local government generally, will have a big impact on the city’s civic priorities. In summary, **regional devolution** will affect the city’s autonomy.

The increasing **influence of the role advertising in the formal education of children** affecting their decision-making in childhood and later, and influencing their parents.

The growing **culture of individualism** at the expense of community, although not as influential here as in other cities and other countries, is likely to grow. **Social exclusion** will also grow as, too, a **widening gap between those digitally connected** and those who aren’t.

**The national**

It was felt that the current Government’s **austerity** programme looks set to continue in one form or another throughout this Parliament.

Hence the economic fallout from the 2007-8 crash on middle and low income families will continue. Allied with this will be a continuing rollback of state provision; i.e. it looks likely there will be **more benefit system cutbacks** at least in the mid-term.

There is a continuing shift to **low-paid, temporary employment** with people dependent upon **only part-time work** or holding down several **part-time jobs** concurrently.

**The global**

**Climate change** will have a big impact — not just on energy prices, but on food prices too — and on the nutritional mix of food stuffs. As harvests become vulnerable in some locations, food matters will go up the political agenda locally as well as globally. There may well be increasing conflict between local, national and global demands on food supply networks.

### 2.4 City-level social & ‘connector’ infrastructures

Workshop participants consistently emphasised the importance of collaboration and partnership. It was vital to educate influential decision-makers about the challenges in tackling food insecurity — and that the educators had to include those who had been or are affected by the challenge. In summary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEOPLE &amp; INFORMATION</th>
<th>INFRASTRUCTURE</th>
<th>PARTNERSHIPS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every citizen with access to healthy food within a short walk or bus ride; food to people as well as people to food</td>
<td>Ubiquitous digital connectivity</td>
<td>City Council, key researchers, third sector &amp; SMEs (including start-up businesses), food bank users to work on new infrastructures but . . . exclude partnerships with companies selling unhealthy products</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEOPLE &amp; RISK REDUCTION</th>
<th>EXISTING ASSETS</th>
<th>SOCIALITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify &amp; use community spaces + reduce or mitigate against barriers to entry to communal meals (e.g. faith or school spaces)</td>
<td>Identify food poverty hot-spots ill-served by existing city assets</td>
<td>Role of school, hospital and works canteens, social housing cafes, et al</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage users to design new social systems to deliver great meals to communities</td>
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*October 2015*
PART III  Thinking tools . . .

In this third part of the report, we put forward three sets of thinking tools which we found useful in compiling this report, and think others might too.

3.1 Experimental economics: ‘Games’ to measure reciprocity, altruism and fairness

In essence, the nature of food emergency systems means that the usual social norms of reciprocity are usually aborted. Hence the feelings and perceptions of the various players are likely to be very different from those they feel and perceive in a more equal exchange.

Yet it’s socially acceptable for patients in hospitals to be given meals. Social rites of passage, as some religious services, often involve free meals too.

In contrast, although few would disagree with the notion of free school dinners, children and parents often feel social stigma in accepting them. Perhaps there’s something similar going on with the reluctance to use food-banks; some 70% of people who need food aid are loathe to go to one.

Yet in strictly economic terms, this just doesn’t make sense. You’re given food at a food bank or free school dinner. Why the reluctance to accept free food in some social situations, not in others? What’s the nature of these exchanges? What’s going on in our heads? Is there such a thing as a ‘free lunch’?

Building on work in game theory, experimental economists have devised a series of ‘games’ to measure reciprocity, altruism and fairness. Here we concentrate on the two of them.

In the Ultimatum Game, a person, the ‘proposer’, is given an amount of money or any other good arbitrarily, and then asked to offer some of it to another person. The second person, the ‘responder’ chooses whether or not to accept the offer. If they reject it, they receive nothing.

Under a variant of this game, the Dictator Game devised by psychologist Daniel Kahneman (who won the 2002 Nobel Prize in economics), the responder cannot reject the offer being made; i.e. the proposer dictates.

Observations arising from studies using these two Games are:

✦ People do not act selfishly. No society yet studied demonstrates the traditional economic ‘wisdom’ that people always act in their own interests. All studies show we have a bias towards fairness, reciprocity, equality and a concern for relative wealth — as well as a taste for social punishment of those people who operate against these social norms.

⇒ This provides insight into the altruistic motivations of food bank organisers, and suggests a means for altruism by food bank users is as psychologically important, if not more important as the gift of food, particularly if the ‘gift’ is mediated by a selection process.

⇒ It perhaps also hints at potential responses to social norms being broken by society.

Prisoner’s Dilemma
Public Goods Game
Ultimatum Game
Dictator Game
Trust Game
Five ‘games’ that parse our social world

A basic rule of fairness, we found, is that the exploitation of market power to impose losses on others is unacceptable.

Daniel Kahneman (2011) Thinking, fast and slow
**Cultural differences are key.** Experiments indicated that there are differences between cultures and social structures.

- One size won’t fit all. The mechanisms and context for a sense of fairness, reciprocity, equality and a concern for relative wealth may well be culture-specific.
- Hence the social context within the food bank premises and within the community is likely to matter greatly.

**Complex societies have more complex ‘rules’:** The research suggests that in complex societies, selfish motives don’t necessarily provide any evolutionary advantage — there are other things going on. In this regard, the following points may be relevant:

- In complex societies such as ours, social reputation is very important. Stigma, therefore, carries high social cost.
- Creating contexts where a food gift has at least an equal value as the market exchange of food products as happens in hospitals, infant schools and in some faith settings, is likely to be desirable.
- It may well be, too, that in large impersonal urban settings, the ‘rules’ are both varied and difficult to read. Thus people will value sensitivity and flexibility in their exchanges with others, and what is given ‘equal value’ may vary according to context.

**Social co-operation and markets are key.**

- Integrating everyone into the food system and encouraging co-operation at all stages of exchange will lead to more pro-social behaviours.

### 3.2 Balancing trade-offs: The CHESS matrix

For our recently published second report on *Food & the City Economy*, we devised two new thinking tools. Although neither was available for the May workshop, we suggest they may be useful when considering city-level responses to the drivers of emergency food aid.

The first, the **CHESS matrix**, is a means to explore and discuss the qualitative as well as quantitative factors socio-political decision-makers inevitably balance when considering food issues. We chose five factors which together formed the mnemonic **CHESS**:

- **CONVIVIALITY & SOCIALITY:** We’re social animals and eating good food in good company is a deep pleasure for all but the hermit or misanthrope. Food also plays a profound part in social rituals, bonding us to each other and our communities.
- **HEALTH & WELLBEING:** The food we eat has a profound effect on our physical and mental wellbeing, as documented in a wealth of medical and public health literature. A nutritionally poor diet and/or over-consumption of some foodstuffs leads to morbidities and health problems that have huge economic as well as social costs. In particular, a poor diet in childhood has a lifetime effect.
- **ECONOMIC PROSPERITY:** This factor takes account of private companies and the Government, LEP and local authority fiscal incentives and infrastructure investment.
[FOOD] SAFETY, INTEGRITY & ASSURANCE: The UK has one of the safest food supplies in the world. To keep it this way requires constant vigilance.

[FOOD] SECURITY WITHIN THE CITY BOUNDARIES: Food security, or more accurately food insecurity among some of our city communities, is a matter of urgent and pressing concern.

Users decide on a rating (-5 to +5) for each factor, either positive and/or negative without any parity needed between factors.

Ideally, the generation of a specific case study comes after debate and discussion. As we didn’t have this thinking tool to hand for the workshop, the following analysis is ours, presented here as a stimulus for debate; your analysis may well be different.

In terms of conviviality and sociality, food banks scored poorly in this analysis. Food bank users are deprived of their rights to choose what they eat, a situation mitigated by the friendliness and welcoming atmosphere in many food banks, that they are important spaces of caring and social solidarity in local communities (Lambie-Mumford, 2015).

Other than a temporary blip, food banks make little impact on the health and well-being of users. Poverty is strongly associated with poor diet and consequent health issues.

Food banks contribute little to the economic prosperity of the city other than the marginal impact of food bank organisers’ salaries. Food banks may indeed have a negative impact over time as they play no part in commercial relationships.

In terms of safety, integrity and assurance, although most food banks pay attention to food hygiene and food provenance, theirs is only a ‘holding job’; users are likely to return to the world of cheap food where contamination and adulteration is more likely than in other food outlets. (Note: some food banks are exempt from the national Food Hygiene Rating Scheme as they only carry pre-packed non-perishable foodstuffs. It is a regulatory concern to some other providers, as it should be to all of them.)

Food banks contribute nothing to security supplies across the city, albeit they re-distribute tiny fraction of total supplies. It’s argued they normalise charitable food aid, allowing many, including socio-political decision-makers to ignore fundamental issues of food insecurity.

… the rise in the use of food banks does indicate a deeper problem in society; the ‘glue’ that used to be there is no longer there in many instances. It can be described as a commodification process with people seen as commodities, and the transactions between them regarded simply as the exchanging of products rather than relationships between two human beings.

from Tim Thornton’s introduction to the APP Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom
3.3 The PMCC framework: Food banks within the food sector landscape

The sheer scale, complexity and opacity of the food sector makes it impossible to understand. We therefore devised the PMCC framework to enable people to ‘see’ the value of the local food sector landscape through a ‘lens’ of four categories of organisation and, we hope, thereby provide them with a wider range of options for interventions. The categories are:

✦ **PRODUCERS** (including purveyors): ranging from growers in the wider region to those adding value between harvest and the point of sale here in the city

✦ **MULTIPLIERS**: organisations who ‘multiply’ the value of the food sector; e.g. researchers, planners, entrepreneurs, professional services, goods & information distribution networks

✦ **CONTROLLERS**: e.g. Parliament, the Food Standards Agency, local Councils, regulatory bodies, planners, trade associations, environmental health services

✦ **CONSUMERS**: both as individuals and collectively

As can be seen in the version below of this framework, there is a very wide range of organisations involved in the supply of food to Birmingham’s citizens:

The red ticks indicate those elements we’ve assessed as having particular significance to addressing food insecurity issues. In the following few paragraphs, we outline how organisations and agencies within each of these four categories contribute, or could contribute to addressing these issues.

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*The food we eat to survive and the social settings of when, where and with whom we eat have a profound impact on our physical and mental wellbeing individually and collectively. Thus the impact of businesses and organisations in the food sector permeate through our local economy and the individual lives of all Birmingham citizens in radically different, multi-connected, far-reaching, often immeasurable ways.*

_Birmingham Food Council Food & the city economy: Tensions, trade-offs and opportunities. 2015_
PRODUCERS: As in all conurbations, citizens from all walks of life are dependent on the retail food sector for nearly all of their dietary needs. In some of our wards, however, it is difficult if not impossible to access healthy foodstuffs from local shops.

For many people living on low budgets, eating out is often a cheaper option than eating at home and, even if junk food of dubious provenance, sometimes the only means to have a hot meal. There are healthy hot food takeaways, though, and opportunities for more.

SME food companies present entrepreneurial opportunities, some of which could begin to tackle the ‘food desert’ problem; i.e. they have a multiplier effect as well as producer impact (see next).

MULTIPLIERS: The City Council and the universities are the main ‘multipliers’ for food security in the city. The City Council’s role in spatial planning and transport infrastructure can help meet the needs of people whose access to food is either expensive or unhealthy or culturally inaccessible or located away from their social hubs. Universities generate research evidence and personal links to knowledge and expertise across the world.

Access to information is key at global, national and local levels. Much useful data in the food sector is the intellectual property of a few big players, an unsustainable situation over time; information seeps. Information is not finite either nor, unlike food itself, is it traded as a zero-sum game. Thus access to information has an as yet unimagined role in the creation of a smart cities with equitable food distribution. Ubiquitous digital connectivity really matters.

CONTROLLERS: People living on low budgets are far more likely to be victims of food crime and food-related illnesses than others. As well as their key role in spatial planning and planning permissions, the City Council through Trading Standards and Environmental Services also has a vital role in tackling food crime, and in ensuring food safety and hygiene in all our food outlets including food banks, not least as its the poor who bear the brunt if this isn’t done.

Food trade associations have an important place in our food supply network. The Kings Norton-based Nationwide Caterers Association (NCASS) is a fast-growing UK leader in food safety training to independent catering businesses, and provides information and systems to ensure they are safe, legal and profitable. On a perhaps more speculative note, the trade associations at nearby Stoneleigh, including the National Farmers Union (NFU) and the Agriculture & Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) would be valuable sources of information about alternative, local food supplies into the city.

CONSUMERS: This analysis highlights the importance of the medical and health sector, both in terms of monitoring aspects of food insecurity at a population level, and also being the instigators of timely interventions. Public sector organisations also have a role as a food provider; it’s important this role is taken on board with regard to the provision of safe, healthy, sufficient food. Schools also have a key role in providing education about food choices and food skills, in particular in the preparation of low-cost healthy meals.

This summary of possibilities begs another question. Given that food insecurity is going to be a continuing concern here, what would be the impact and social benefit if all these agencies responded to food insecurity issues?

The rise of information goods challenges marginalism at its very foundations because its basic assumption was scarcity, and information is abundant . . . it (today’s capitalism) cannot comprehend a world of zero-priced goods, shared economic space, non-market organisations and non-ownable products.

Paul Mason, Postcapitalism: A guide to our future. 2015
### ANNEX A: The three stages of this project

#### STAGE ONE

**Desk research and consultation with specialist experts to ‘frame’ the project**

Although our question was very much grounded in the local city-wide context of Birmingham, we felt it essential to have an understanding of the bigger picture. This would enable us to ‘see’ outside influences, both historical and current that could affect our thinking about how to respond within the confines of a single UK city. This understanding needed to take in a variety of theoretical and political viewpoints whilst, too, recognising the best — and the worst practice elsewhere.

To this end, a combination of desktop research with telephone and face-to-face conversations took place.

**Desk research:** The books, papers, articles, and presentations that informed this project are listed in Annex C.

**Consultation with specialist experts:**

We had conversations with many people, including those who attended our workshop in May and the de-brief in June.

**Warwick Food Global Research Priority (GRP):** The Birmingham Food Council is a partner on this Warwick GRP programme. Kate Cooper attended their April meeting on *Evidence-based decision support for food security*. Speaker presentations can be found [here](#).

The people we consulted and others involved on the project are listed in Annex B.

#### STAGE TWO

**A facilitated workshop with invitees from varied walks of life and experience**

We brought together some 20 people from across the city and beyond at a facilitated workshop at Birchfield Community School in mid-May.

In three groups carefully drawn up to reflect food poverty issues from diverse perspectives, their discussions covered these main questions:

- What are the current and possible future drivers of emergency food aid?
- What can we learn from other times & places about communities and food?
- What could it be like 10 years on? What city-level social & connector infrastructures might we have?
- What should we stop, start and continue doing?

There was live social media reporting of the three sets of conversations (blogposts on food poverty & food insecurity are listed [here](#)).

Each conversation was recorded and transcribed.

The slides used for this workshop are embedded in this [blogpost](#).

#### STAGE THREE

**Analyses of the workshop discussions & further consultation on possible next steps**

In this final stage, we undertook activities to bring together all we’ve learned to date to draw out emerging themes relevant to Birmingham.

The main activities in Stage Three were:

- **Analyses** of workshop outputs by Hannah Collison and Ellie Richards (information analysis) and Jai Mackenzie (computational linguistic analysis).
- **De-brief** mini-workshop in which the analysts presented their work for discussion with Kate Cooper, Nick Booth and Brian Gambles, facilitated by Norman Leet.
- **In-depth discussion** with Lee Gregory, School of Social Policy, University of Birmingham, & a workshop attendee in early June.
- **Meeting** by Food Council directors Kate Cooper & Prof Jim Parle with Caireen Roberts, Sally McManus & Joanna D’Ardenne of NatCen in mid-June.
- **Attendance** by Kate Cooper at the Oxford Food Governance Group workshop, also in mid-June.
- **Collation of evidence and insight** by Alex Clark, then a researcher for the Warwick Food GRP having recently graduated from Warwick (PPE First Class), currently on the Oxford Global Governance Masters programme.
- **Summary draft report** by Tom French.

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Macdonalds is the world’s #6 brand, with a market cap of $92.6bn (Forbes 2015). They serve 69M meals a day, i.e. to nearly 1% of the global population (Macdonalds 2015). They are the world’s largest toy distributor (Motley Fool, 2004).

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ANNEX B: Acknowledgements

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Rebecca Earle, Professor, School of Comparative American Studies, University of Warwick

Lee Gregory, School of Social Policy, University of Birmingham

Dale Guest, Cityserve

Lorna Hegenbarth, Food Chain Advisor, National Farmers Union

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Chris Mould, Executive Chair, the Trussell Trust

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Emma Schoolar, Regional Manager, the Trussell Trust

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Joy Warmington, CEO of brap

Patrick Willcocks, economist, former Birmingham City Council planner

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What’s past is prologue: what to come in your and my discharge
The Tempest, Act 2, Scene 1