

**All Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger and Food Poverty:  
Salisbury, Friday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2014.**

**A submission by the Bishop of Salisbury**

The Rt Revd Nicholas Holtam has been Bishop of Salisbury from 2011. Before that he was the Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields for 16 years (1995-2011). He has also worked as a parish priest in East London (1979-83 as a Curate in Stepney and 1988-95 as Vicar of the Isle of Dogs) and taught Ethics and Mission at Lincoln Theological College (1983-87).

**The Diocese of Salisbury**

What you see depends on where you stand and the Church has a unique position in being rooted in every community and of being independent of public money.

The Anglican Diocese of Salisbury includes 95% of Dorset, 75% of the unitary authority of Wiltshire, the unitary authority of Poole, 40% of the unitary authority of Bournemouth, a small part of west Hampshire and one parish in Devon. Much of the Diocese is deeply rural. It extends over 2000 square miles, with a population of over 900,000. The largest urban area is Poole and Bournemouth, followed by Weymouth & Portland, Salisbury and Trowbridge (the county town of Wiltshire), with many smaller towns including Dorchester (the county town of Dorset). In Wiltshire especially, the rural areas are grouped round a number of market towns to which the rural population looks for shopping and most services. This is among the more affluent parts of the country yet there is poverty and low pay and this is an area in which it is relatively expensive to live.

**Foodbanks**

There are 21 foodbanks in the Diocese. A further 5 outside the Diocese serve communities within it. See Appendix 3. Four of these are run by the Trussell Trust, which started a foodbank in Salisbury that was assisted by a grant of £400 from our Diocesan Social Welfare Fund. The large number of people supported by Trussell Trust foodbanks is therefore only part of the whole story. Most of the others are organised by local groups of churches working together. There is strong support for foodbanks from the churches. For example, Gillingham Foodbank has 37 registered collection points in churches in their area. Downton parish has collected over four tonnes of food for Salisbury Foodbank since 2006. Foodbanks are an impressive expression of concern for people in need, of loving our neighbour. Increasingly questions are also being raised about justice in our society in which the number of foodbanks and dependence on their provision has grown so quickly. I therefore welcome this inquiry.

**Benefits**

Our foodbanks tell similar stories about the people they are supporting. They are often people who do not have enough to tide them over while benefits are processed, people who have experienced sudden changes in their lives, people who have mental health issues,

people who cannot make ends meet even though they are in employment – for low paid work is a particular issue in an area where the cost of living is high.

Time and again we are told that the key presenting issue at the foodbanks is that of delays in the processing of benefits. A change of circumstances in a family home can result in weeks without the necessary support provided through the benefits system. It may be argued that most benefits are processed within the DWP's target timescales, but for people who have nothing, on time is not the same as in time. Eight weeks seems extraordinarily long to deal with changes that are known to a wide range of agencies.

### **Listening to experience**

In March this year we hosted a Poverty Hearing in partnership with the Gillingham Foodbank. It provided the opportunity for fifty local church leaders and politicians to hear the stories of three people who had used the foodbank recently. Each in their own way described a breakdown in the way we care for people at those times when they are in greatest need. We were reminded of the importance of listening to people tell their own stories.

Lauren has two children of her own and took on the care of two other children from her husband's previous relationship. Although he works they still rely on child benefit and housing benefit, but when their family suddenly increased in size these benefits were stopped for eight weeks while the changes were processed. As the children had been placed with their father by social services one might have hoped for a speedier process. [Gillingham Foodbank – one of the speakers at the hearing]

Gillingham foodbank also reported about a woman with an aggressive cancer who needed vital treatment at a hospital some 30 miles distant. Her husband, on a low income, could take no more paid time off work to look after their children whilst she received her treatment. Unable to afford both travel costs and feed her family she made the decision to miss her treatments. The foodbank was able to provide emergency food, thus 'releasing' funds from the family budget so that she could use public transport to attend hospital. [Gillingham Foodbank]

Bournemouth r foodbank supported a young man with mental health issues through the five long months when he had just £5 a week available for food while an error in his housing benefit was being sorted out.

People who have very little to start with will always struggle if the support that they need, and to which they are entitled, takes such a long time to be processed.

Sherborne foodbank in the area delivers their food parcels either to people's homes or to the referring agencies, thereby dealing with the difficulty that many people have with accessing support in a deeply rural area.

Access to Jobcentre Plus offices is difficult for many people in rural areas, especially for young people. For example, one young person in North Dorset was told that they would

need to make two trips to Poole to have their benefits dealt with, two trips that would cost some £32 in total, which is money that they don't have in the first place.

Our parish clergy remind us that the foodbank is not the only source of emergency food aid in their areas. Many clergy are used to providing food at the door for those who call. For example, one priest with a new housing development in her parish regularly brings parcels of food to young families where the costs of the mortgage may be crippling when one partner is off work to care for young children.

Another church in an area of low incomes and multiple issues of deprivation provides food directly to people who need support for longer than can be offered by their local foodbank.

Another parish, where in winter months they often have up to four people sleeping in the church overnight, has supported people, often single men, as they try to sort out their lives and make a fresh start. The priest there shares the story of one man in recovery from alcoholism who had been placed in a flat in the town and was struggling for his first few weeks there. The Foodbank helped him get by as he made the adjustment and looked for work but he also needed the additional support, including food, that the parish was able to provide. Just because you have a front door doesn't mean you have a home.

It seems clear from what we have been told that a great deal of distress for people arises from the length of time it takes to process benefits but it is also clear that sanctions place people in great difficulty. Those who have nothing will inevitably need to turn elsewhere for support when benefits are stopped even where those benefits are restored on appeal, a process in itself which could helpfully be speeded up to alleviate distress.

Warminster Foodbank reported that the high cost of food, utilities and transport especially in rural areas makes it difficult for those on minimum pay or benefits - they just live from day to day and when a crisis occurs they often need the support of the foodbank not only with food but with a listening ear.

The coordinator of one foodbank concluded: "It seems to me that everything works well until something in someone's life changes then there are nearly always problems and we at the foodbank, church and other third sector organisations are left to pick up the pieces and support and care for them as individuals and not a statistics on a computer screen."

### **Food production and food waste**

An Inquiry into Hunger and Food Poverty cannot avoid issues to do with food production and food waste. In counties with a significant farming community we recognise the pressure on farmers to produce cheap food. There are issues of low pay in the agricultural and of many farmers who find it hard to make a living.

There is also the shocking paradox of food wasted in a society in which people are hungry. Tristram Stuart has done a great deal to draw attention to the problems and opportunities of food waste at each stage from production to distribution and consumption. Among the facts he draws to our attention he says:

The UK, US and Europe have nearly twice as much food as is required by the nutritional needs of their populations. Up to half the entire food supply is wasted between the farm and the fork. If crops wastefully fed to livestock are included, European countries have more than three times more food than they need, while the US has around four times more food than is needed, and up to three-quarters of the nutritional value is lost before it reaches people's mouths.

UK Households waste around 20% of all the food they buy – but the good news is that this suggests a 17% reduction since 2007. We're improving!

It would be helpful if you encouraged serious policy effort in this area.

For example, the implications and impact of sell-by dates would be worth considering as so much good food is wasted. It would be helpful if you encouraged the responsible use of food unsold by supermarkets to feed the poor rather than for it to be thrown away. The distribution of food near the sell-by date through the likes of Fairshare is excellent, though it is relatively small-scale and requires the receiving organisation to use food quickly before it goes past its use by date. Perhaps this could be expanded to include foodbanks. Some supermarkets have also engaged with 'freecycling' food not just for those on benefits but also for those excluded from benefits. Again, it would be worth testing if this can be expanded to individuals as well as lunch clubs and day centres .

### **The Good Samaritan**

The scriptures teach us that our neighbour includes the sick, foreigner and the outcast. The story of the Good Samaritan is one of the most popular in the Gospels. It is only told by Luke and he is making some very particular points. A lawyer asked Jesus what he must do to have eternal life. Jesus asked him what is written in the law and he replied with the well-known summary that we should love God and love our neighbour as ourselves. Jesus said he was right, 'Do this and you will live.' The lawyer, wanting to justify himself [that's a big mistake for anyone with Jesus], asked, 'And who is my neighbour?' (Luke 10: 25–30).

To answer the lawyer Jesus told the story of the good Samaritan, one of the best-known stories in the Gospels. A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was beaten by robbers and left half dead. Two men, a priest and a Levite, were going to Jerusalem. They saw what appeared to be a dead man and had they touched a corpse, they would not have been able to perform their religious duties in the Temple. So for good religious reasons they passed by on the other side. A Samaritan, whom Jews despised, saw the man and was moved to pity. He bandaged him, poured wine and oil on his wounds, put him on his animal and paid for him to stay at an inn.

'Which of these was neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?', asked Jesus. 'The one who showed mercy', replied the lawyer, unable even to say the name 'Samaritan', so much were they despised. Our neighbour is anyone in need, not just people like us, the scandal is that it was the despised Samaritan, an outsider, who showed good religious people the meaning of the law. This is non-tribal religion and it is the most explicit

of stories teaching us not just to 'love the stranger' but to recognise that the stranger is our teacher. It is, and is intended to be, a story that humbles us and opens us to the needs of others by recognising our own needs and inadequacies.

The Scriptures also teach us to be generous in response to the needs of others partly out of enlightened self-interest. We do not know when we ourselves will need help and almost anyone can become in need. In the 16 years that I was the Vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields I discovered time and again that homelessness and poverty are not single issues. They are usually the product of a combination of some mix of bad luck, family breakdown, unemployment, sickness, disability, mental health and addiction. With good support most of us can keep going with one or two these but few of us survive intact when three happen. In caring for others there is a recognition that there but for the grace of God go you or I.

Love is about the care of individuals but it is also about the care of society. Love distributed is about justice and inevitably takes us into the area of culture, politics and how our society is organised.

## **Appendix 1**

### **All Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger and Food Poverty: Terms of reference**

The Inquiry's terms of reference are:

1. To understand the extent and geographical spread of hunger and food poverty in this country
2. To investigate the underlying causes of hunger and food poverty in this country
3. To identify the circumstances behind the rising number of people requiring emergency food assistance in this country
4. To understand the extent, nature and organisation of emergency food assistance schemes in this country
5. To discover the food choices and other forms of support available to clients when using emergency food assistance
6. To investigate the source of emergency food assistance providers' supplies – how much is supplied by consumers and institutions?
7. To consider the effectiveness of emergency food assistance in meeting immediate and long-term needs, and the possibility of these schemes becoming permanent features of the welfare state
8. To examine the effectiveness and sustainability of our food model in providing universal access to healthy, affordable food in this country
9. To consider approaches to improving household food security in this country
10. To make recommendations

## Appendix 2

### Timetable for Salisbury – Friday 6 June 2014

11am – Visit to Alabare Christian Care and Support Drop-In Centre

11.45am – Visit to the Salisbury Trussell Trust Food Bank

1pm – Session with statutory agencies and third parties

2.30pm – Session with food aid providers, charities and their clients

## Appendix 3

### Foodbanks in or serving the Diocese of Salisbury

Brackets indicate outside Diocese but serving Dorset and Wiltshire	
Beaminster	
Blandford	Faithworks Wessex
Bournemouth	Trussell
Bridport	
(Christchurch)	Faithworks Wessex
Corfe Mullen	
Dorchester	
Gillingham	Trussell
Hamworthy	Hamworthy Money Advice Project
Lyme Regis	
Poole	Faithworks Wessex
Portland	
(Ringwood)	Trussell
Purbeck	
Weymouth	
Wimborne	Faithworks Wessex
Sherborne	
Bradford on Avon	
Calne	
Melksham	
Salisbury	Trussell
Warminster	
Trowbridge	
(Swindon)	
(Chippenham)	
(Yeovil)	