

The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
Secretary of State for Housing,
Communities & Local Government
House of Commons
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Dear Rt Hon Jenrick

Guildford Borough Council published their Overview & Scrutiny report on Food Poverty in March 2019 (attached). Following a motion to Full Council in July 2019. As Council Leader, I have been asked to write to you to make the following points:

Guildford is perceived as a wealthy area but, as the report shows Food Poverty is prevalent in all parts of the borough, both urban and rural. Local organisations such as the CABs, local charities and this Council are seeing an increase in the number of people turning to Food Banks because they cannot afford to eat after paying rent and bills. Some of these residents have been transferred to Universal Credit whilst others are classed as 'working poor' where both partners are in work but have insufficient income to pay rent and other household bills plus buy food. The prevalence of zero-hour contracts and other unstable patterns of employment when aligned with the current Universal Credit systems mean a family can at very short notice find themselves unable to manage.

There are clear indications that elements of the social security system designed to provide a social security safety net are actively contributing to poverty rather than tackling it. The Benefits Cap is having a serious impact on a number of our residents who are claimants. We also have a number of Syrian refugees who are struggling to survive at a basic level because of the high costs of rent and the fact that Guildford is generally an expensive place to live. The cap doesn't have the same impact in other parts of the country.

The All Party Parliamentary Task Group on Hunger advocated a '*One Stop Shop/Food Bank Plus*' approach to poverty, whereby expert advisors are placed into emergency food projects to help people. This was supported by **The Trussell Trust**' own submission, and we know from local experience that by making a food bank part of a wider community support project the perceived stigmatisation of visiting a food bank is reduced. Local Authorities urgently need financial support to enable such facilities to be provided locally and enable our communities to engage with such provision. Whilst the government has acted to introduce measurement of food insecurity by adding questions to its Family Resources Survey, the overwhelming feeling of the task group members was that this was insufficient. The government must aim to reduce the number of people in our society who need to rely on Food Banks which in turn will reduce the health impacts of long-term food poverty and insecurity. We know through our report that food poverty can have serious implications on mental health for people of all ages. Holiday Hunger is a serious issue for school children, and as we are in the middle of the school summer holidays, we are seeing a rise in numbers who are unable to feed their families.

There is a perception of 'poor food for poor people.' This can be overcome through wider government support for health and wellbeing projects to encourage better access to healthy food. Supermarkets must be engaged in the project to avoid discounted bulk buying of unhealthy but filling food, which in turn would help tackle the growing obesity issues. We should follow the lead of other countries to stop our supermarkets dumping food, especially fresh goods, and support a system to insist all supermarkets reduce their waste and donate their unwanted food.

The Right to Buy (RTB) scheme has and continues to have a serious impact on our ability to provide truly affordable homes for those in most need. In an area like ours the land values are so high that we are unable to buy land to build homes, and the land we own is not always in the best place for new housing. Many of the properties that are now privately owned through RTB are now leased at high rents beyond the reach of those in need of housing or have such high rents that once the rent is paid little is left even for basics such as food. The current 1 – 4 – 1 replacement scheme is insufficient and fails to recognise the challenges we face regarding development in our borough.

The unknown outcomes of the Brexit situation may well exacerbate the situation and create more households with an insecure supply of both money and food.

If we are to address these serious issues across all of our borough, we need support from central government to avoid a situation where lack of food is having an even greater impact on the health and wellbeing of our residents. Surely in a country where food is regularly thrown away, this is an urgent matter which if addressed now, could save money in many areas of administration all over the country.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter, I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Caroline Reeves
Leader of Guildford Borough Council

Cc – Guildford Borough Councillors
James Whiteman, Managing Director

Enc – Food Poverty Report