Food & Beveridge *Report*

The future of food aid in the UK



Community Shop

OPEN for *more*

COMPANY SHOP GROUP
Part of the Biffa group











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"I recently visited Community Shop and found something pretty rare; a place that brings the community together through food. A physical space where people can connect and communities can thrive, and where people can access quality food in a dignified way."

Ainsley Harriott MBE

Foreword.

Ainsley Harriott MBE



Food is about so much more than just eating: it has the power to change lives.

Working as a chef, for many decades now, I've seen first hand how food can bring people together. There is nothing simpler, or more rewarding, than inviting people round, putting food in the middle of the table to share, and creating new experiences – eating, talking and laughing together.

But, sadly, not everyone is in a position to create this simplest of pictures. There are still too many people who do not have access to affordable food to feed themselves and their families.

We call it food insecurity or food poverty, but for many communities across the country it is simply known as hunger. And the problem is getting worse.

For many people life is changing radically. More people are talking about the cost of food and wondering how they will make ends meet, unable to cut back any further.

I recently visited Community Shop and found something pretty rare; a place that brings the community together through food. A physical space where people can connect and communities can thrive, and where people can access quality food in a dignified way.

These stores are a beacon of hope and, far from being downbeat, the first thing I saw were smiles. The positive energy from both the people working there and the people shopping was infectious.

> "There are still too many people who do not have access to affordable food to feed themselves and their families."

People were having a hot drink and a chat with friends, old and new, and they were doing their shopping, safe in the knowledge that here they could afford to feed their families. And, most importantly, the in-store community wellbeing teams were taking time to understand each person's situation, providing advice and guidance on the support they can access and training and development opportunities that are available.

I was privileged to attend Community Shop's 10 year anniversary celebrations where I met a lady who told me her story – a story of coping with the challenge of being a single mum in a new town and of not having the money she needed to put a proper, healthy meal on the table. Thanks to the support of Community Shop and its commitment to breaking the cycle of dependency that hand-outs create, she was able to start a new chapter, one with personal and employment support, access to the training she needed to get into work, and ultimately returning to work and supporting her new family.

There are thousands of stories like this, where the solution isn't just to give out food. We must create the right recipe with a blend of ingredients – food, friendship, community togetherness, personal support – that are tailored to meet the specific needs of people and communities. By doing so, we can continue to use food to change people's lives for the better – and put more smiles on more faces.

Preface.

Just over 80 years ago, Sir William Beveridge produced a report which transformed British society as we know it today. The landmark 'Beveridge Report' led to the establishment of the welfare state, including the NHS, social housing, and other schemes which have since provided a lifeline to people, including those most in need.

In the last 30 years, however, continued socio-economic disparities have created a crisis for food access for the most vulnerable in our society, which cannot be ignored. This has been exacerbated in recent years by the COVID-19 pandemic and the soaring cost of living, which has squeezed family budgets beyond recognition.

To address the looming food security crisis, long-standing surplus redistributor, Company Shop Group, made a brave and bold decision ten years ago, to take its pioneering work in addressing the challenge of food loss and waste one step further.



Sir William Beveridge



First Community Shop, Goldthorpe, 2013

In 2013, the UK's first social supermarket chain was born, offering a longer-lasting solution to food security; completely different to what others had done before.

The launch of Community Shop marked the start of a seismic shift which has followed over the last decade. Today, the food aid landscape is beginning to comprise of more sustainable, dignified solutions, as opposed to short-term, dependant arrangements. However, there is so much more to do.

Just as the Beveridge Report transformed the UK welfare state, with the food poverty crisis where it is today, we must take this as a 'once in a generation' chance to transform the narrative and impact of food access and security for the better.

To do this, Community Shop is sharing its unmatched experience, learnings and insights, garnered through ten years of working at the heart of some of the UK's most deserving communities, with Government, policy institutions, businesses, fellow redistributors, and consumers alike. This is with the aim of establishing a food security landscape which aligns with a fairer food system for all, genuinely puts people at the centre and creates a positive financial, social, and environmental legacy.

COMPANY SHOP GROUP
Part of the Biffa group

Introduction from Company Shop Group.

The issue of food insecurity within the UK does not seem to be diminishing. In 2024, it was reported that nearly 10 million people in the UK are classed as as being 'food insecure'†. As the cost of living has soared within the past decade, parents are skipping meals to allow their children to eat, families are choosing between heating and eating, and many are going without basic essentials.

And whilst this is happening, 11 million tonnes of food in the UK is wasted each year††. We know from our years of working with industry the reasons why this happens are complex, numerous and not specifically intended. Our core purpose at Company Shop Group is to address the issue of food loss and waste in partnership with industry by reducing barriers and providing pragmatic solutions to complex issues felt across the global supply chain. Using our fifty years of experience, we have built the infrastructure and intervention methods necessary to handle hundreds of millions of 'surplus' items per year; perfectly good products that for one reason or another were originally destined for waste.

Tackling food waste and solving food insecurity are two very distinct problems. However, a decade ago we recognised the unique position we were in; to both provide an expert and scalable solution to tackle food waste, whilst having the ability to use the surplus products to create a new response to food aid.

We used a highly valuable asset available to us – surplus - to address the increasing issue of food insecurity in the UK and, after extensive research, the UK's first social supermarket was established.

The Community Shop model does not just help people by providing the food required for that day or week; it delivers a sustained model that serves as a longer lasting solution to food insecurity.

Food insecurity can only truly be solved by improving people's economic position, ensuring they have the financial means to obtain the food they require. Short term hand outs and food banks are not the solution; the future of food support is through working with individuals and communities holistically and tackling deeper rooted problems to empower people to develop themselves and their situations.

Commercial redistribution plays a crucial role in the food waste hierarchy and the mission to stopping waste by creating a truly circular economy where resources are maximised. Meanwhile, Community Shop provides a sustained, impactful food aid model for those in need. We are therefore uniquely positioned to leverage our experience and expertise to share our recommendations on creating a truly sustainable food aid system for the future.

Nearly
3m
children live in households that have experienced food insecurity in the past month'

1.5m
low-income families experience a poor diet†††

Nearly
10m
people in the UK experienced food insecurity in the past month'

6.5m
people are going without essentials like showers, transportation and toiletries†††

† The Food Foundation 2024 †† WRAP 2023 ††† Joseph Rowntree Foundation



"The issue of *food insecurity* remains alarmingly high in the UK."




Nestlé
Nestlé
Nestlé

Welcome.

Just over 10 years ago a small group of us met in the cafe at Company Shop Group in Barnsley. We talked about how a company with a 40-year history of action on food waste could do more. We felt we needed to do more. We were driven by one question, one very uncomfortable juxtaposition. Each year millions of tonnes of food is produced and does not get to be eaten. Millions of people in the UK do not have enough food to feed their families. That was the cruel juxtaposition. The question was why, and what could we do. Not what should be done, but what could we do.

We understood quickly that the challenge of food waste and food poverty were not connected. They were two systemic failures which needed intelligent and complex solutions. We could not set out to fix one with the other, but we did ask what we could uniquely offer to the landscape that would be part of the solution. We have, for these ten years, used an asset-based model of development, focussing on what is strong in people and communities, not what is wrong. We used the same mindset when we wrestled with our contribution. Put simply, we knew we could only do what we could, with what we had.



We spent a year listening to as many people as we could who were passionate activists in the field. We heard from practitioners around the world, to leading academics in their field and, most importantly of all, we listened to people who experienced food insecurity about what they wanted. We are proud of the things our communities have taught us, and have reflected the voices of those who have journeyed with us over the last decade within this report.

We have learned two things. People long for agency and dignity. Without this, the very act of helping can, inadvertently, be the very thing that disempowers people. We also learned that food plays a vital role in animating people's lives, communities and stories. Food was more than calories, it was comfort, collaboration and community.

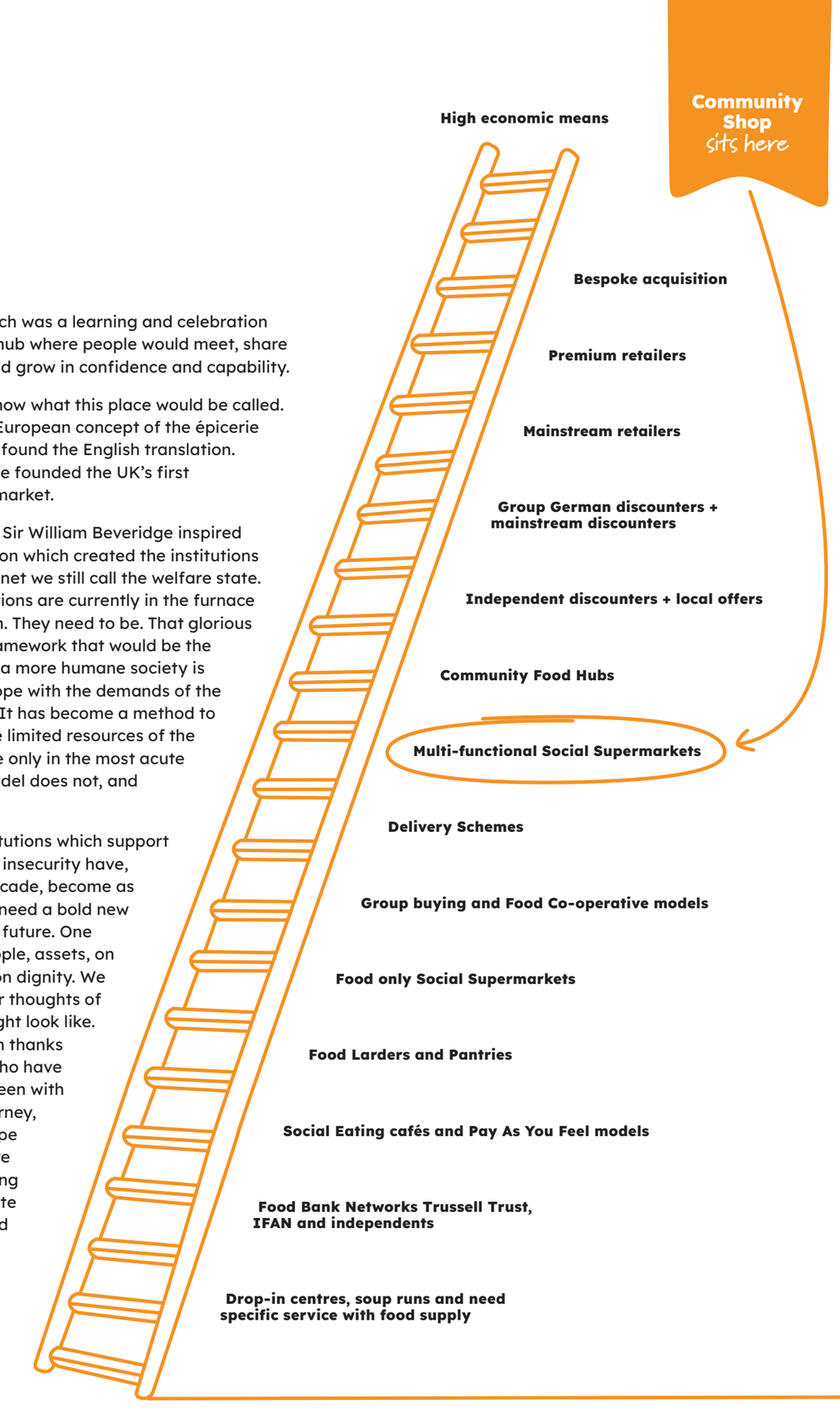
We perceived one more truth. That if we created spaces where people interact with food in a way which valued their human dignity and fostered an innate sense of community; the very thing which was the problem, food, would be the solution.

In 2013, we collaborated with Dr Megan Blake to create the concept of a Food Ladder to articulate the interconnection between the different activities around food and sought to build a model which would be close, in every regard, to the normal experience of food acquisition. A store where people have choice and the dignity of a normal transaction, a kitchen which was a learning and celebration space and a hub where people would meet, share their story and grow in confidence and capability.

We did not know what this place would be called. We took the European concept of the épicerie solidaire and found the English translation. The result? We founded the UK's first Social Supermarket.

The report of Sir William Beveridge inspired practical action which created the institutions of the safety net we still call the welfare state. These institutions are currently in the furnace of reinvention. They need to be. That glorious vision of a framework that would be the safety net of a more humane society is not able to cope with the demands of the 21st century. It has become a method to apportion the limited resources of the state to those only in the most acute need. Our model does not, and never has.

The new institutions which support those in food insecurity have, in just one decade, become as strained. We need a bold new vision for the future. One based on people, assets, on agency and on dignity. We offer here our thoughts of what that might look like. We do so with thanks to all those who have taught and been with us on this journey, and in the hope this will inspire careful thinking and passionate action to build a sustainable future.



Gary Stott
Executive Chairman,
Community Shop CIC

"**Since joining Community Shop, my life has changed in so many ways...** I feel like life is a lot easier now, it's not a struggle getting out of bed on a morning anymore."

Stuart, Community Shop member

Food that changes lives

The UK's first social supermarket.

As the UK's first social supermarket, Community Shop now runs 13 sustainable food aid and support hubs across the UK.

From Scarborough, Grimsby, and Barnsley, to Runcorn, Leicester and Lambeth, Community Shop's unique model helps to build stronger individuals and more confident communities, all powered through surplus food.

Located in the most deprived areas of the UK and open to people receiving means tested benefits, Community Shop provides families with high-quality, low-cost food and household products. Not only does this enable members to shop with dignity and choice, but it helps to stretch family budgets.



All revenue raised from the store is re-invested into two further interconnected spaces, the Community Kitchen, and Hub. Each Community Shop has a thriving café which provides a warm and welcoming space for people to meet and enjoy delicious home-cooked meals, with children always eating free.



Within the Hubs, members engage with life-changing personal development programmes, giving people the tools they need for lasting, positive change in their lives and within their communities. The holistic programmes cover everything from health & wellbeing and financial management, to interview skills and business courses.

Each Community Shop is a pillar of its community, providing bespoke and person-centred support which helps to break long-term dependency on food aid and improves social mobility. Community Shop's team of colleagues and mentors focus on inspiring and empowering some of the UK's most passionate, yet overlooked communities, working with members on the ground every day to be the best versions of themselves.



We are proud to be part of something bigger.

As part of Company Shop Group, we have the scale, capabilities and expertise for handling surplus which makes a positive impact on people and the planet. We are also proud to be part of the Biffa group, enabling a complete circular model.

Biffa

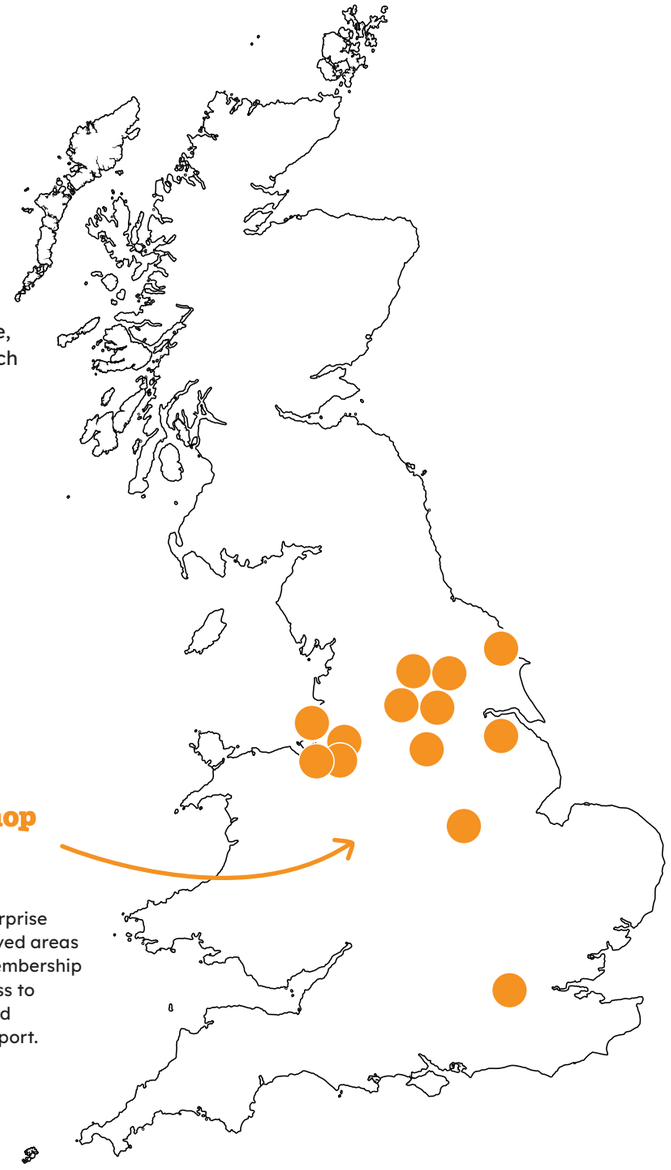
COMPANY SHOP GROUP

COMPANY SHOP
Value never felt so good

Membership-based surplus supermarkets and staff shops at partner sites.

Community Shop
OPEN for more

A not-for-profit social enterprise supporting the most deprived areas of the UK. A network of membership -only stores, offering access to deeply discounted food and personal development support.



One shop, three connected spaces.



Community Store



Community Hub



Community Kitchen



"Our mission is to build stronger individuals and more confident communities. We do this by creating something better than simply giving out food. *We provide a hand up, not a hand out.*"

Gary Stott, Executive Chairman, Community Shop CIC

"**Community Shop involves me in things other than just food,** *it looks after me.*"

Victoria, Community Shop member

Transforming **food aid for the** future

Community Shop is a space at the nexus of two systems. It stands at the intersection between two of the most challenging systemic problems of the last three decades – Food loss and waste, and food poverty and insecurity.

A consequence of the second challenge is the social impact food insecurity creates not only in the immediate term, but the long-lasting impact it has on future development for people and whole communities. By addressing these challenges in a separate yet interconnected way, we can transform food aid for the future, from a hand out to a hand up.

The challenges.

1 Wasted *food.*

25-30%
of total food production globally **is lost or wasted**†

In the UK, food waste currently stands at
10.7m
tonnes, including **6.4 million tonnes post-farm gate**†

In 2023, only
12%
of businesses that were signed up to **WRAP's Food Waste Reduction Roadmap to meet SDG Target 12.3** were achieving reductions in their food waste†

2 Hungry *people.*

Nearly
10m
people are classed as food insecure in the UK **(7.2m adults and 2.7m children)**††

5.7m
million low-income households are having to **cut down or skip meals because they do not have enough money for food**†††

26%
of households in which a food sector worker (including supermarket workers) lives experienced food insecurity in January 2023†††

3 Missed *potential.*

On average, **children eligible for free school meals** achieve a
lower
GCSE attainment than other pupils††††

People experiencing food insecurity are more than
twice
as likely **to have experienced adverse events**, such as bereavement, than people who are food secure†††††

36%
of people referred to a food bank, in the Trussell Trust network, said they received no advice from other services beforehand.†††††

How do we *tackle these?*

† WRAP †† The Food Foundation ††† Joseph Rowntree Foundation †††† House of Commons Library ††††† The Trussell Trust



Just as Sir William Beveridge set out his vision, through Community Shop's decade of learning and impact, we know there are three core solutions to delivering long-term and sustainable food security to those most in need.

The solutions.

1 Commercial *redistribution.*

With over 200,000 tonnes of perfectly edible food going to waste each year†, **the UK requires a scalable, circular, commercial solution that is capable of identifying, capturing and redistributing surplus stock throughout the supply chain** – from farm-to-factory-to-fork.

2 Sustained *impact.* +

To genuinely improve food security in the UK, food aid must be delivered in a sustained way, creating partnership between **businesses, enterprises, social enterprises and charities** to become real levers for delivering social change with positive long-term outcomes.

3 People *first.* +

It is imperative that for any food aid provision, the people being supported come first. If we do not change our "sticking plaster" approach to food aid as a nation, we risk doing more harm than good. **Only by championing truly person-centred approaches, which incorporate food citizenship into the support delivered, will we tackle the root causes which will help end the UK food insecurity endemic and reliance on food banks and emergency parcels.**

See what *actions we can take...*

† Food Standards Agency

Proposed actions.

challenge 1 challenge
Wasted food & redistribution.

Food waste reporting to be made mandatory, adhering to the food waste hierarchy and promoting the full range of services available to deal with surplus.

Government and industry to acknowledge that charitable and not-for-profit redistribution will not be enough to respond to the challenge of food surplus and waste.

challenge 2 challenge
Hungry people & a sustainable solution.

Food security policy should focus on outcomes, not processes, and should not favour charities and grassroots bodies over businesses and social enterprises.

Government to acknowledge that emergency food parcels and other short term fixes cannot be a solution to food insecurity.

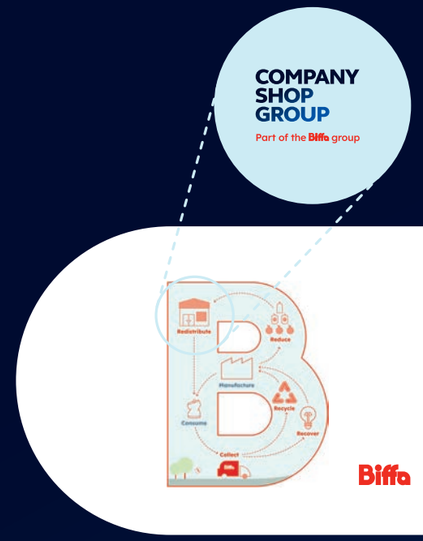
challenge 3 challenge
Missed potential & a lasting legacy.

Tackling food insecurity should go hand-in-hand with the delivery of longer-term financial, educational, training and wellbeing support.

Food aid provision to be provided through a physical infrastructure such as shops.



We are proud to be part of something bigger.



Company Shop Group is the UK's leading and longest standing redistributor of surplus food and products. For over fifty years, it has leveraged its national infrastructure, logistics and expertise, and worked at the heart of the supply chain, to support retailers, manufacturers and brands to think differently about their surplus stock.

In the last 5 years, the Group has paid the industry over £158 million for otherwise wasted stock, and redistributed over 45,000 tonnes of food and drink last year alone. Company Shop Group transforms imperfect surplus products into perfect, be it through repackaging, re-labelling, x-rays or bottle washing. The Group offers a sustainable solution for virtually any surplus that can be eaten, used or worn.

Demonstrating a true circular economy in motion, Company Shop Group redistributes this surplus stock across its network of membership-only surplus supermarkets.

The stores are open to those working in FMCG, emergency services and other front-line roles, giving members access to high-quality, low-cost food and products which collectively saves shoppers £121 million a year.





Biffa

COMPANY SHOP GROUP

COMPANY SHOP
Value never felt so good

Community Shop
OPEN for more

The support and infrastructure that the Group provides Community Shop means the social enterprise can run sustainably and self-sufficiently, without needing hand-outs from Government or other entities. Instead, the two separate but interlinked organisations work alongside one another to offer the best redistribution, retail and support proposition to businesses, customers and those most in need.

The Group is also unique in that it offers a first-of-its-kind, end-to-end solution for all surplus and waste across the industry. Company Shop and Community Shop ensure good food is redistributed to people first, and as part of the Biffa Group, the team also delivers expert support for businesses looking for reuse, recycle, and other services lower down the food waste hierarchy.

This unique offer enables businesses to consider the whole life cycle of products, maximising financial, social and environmental value at every touch point of their supply chains.

"**I think if food did go to waste,** *well how could a community like us afford to live?*"

David, Community Shop member

challenge 1 challenge

Wasted food &

redistribution

Humans are thought to have started farming cereal grains like barley as early as 11,000 years ago. In more recent history, post-agrarian societies have increasingly industrialised the supply of food. This has enabled the radical transformation of food retail supported by the development of fast-moving consumer goods and a globalised food supply chain. All of these developments have led to a system which has viewed food increasingly as a commodity and people as food consumers rather than food citizens.

Consumers can now acquire food 24/7 and online, benefitting from a range of products and prices which are unparalleled in human history. The downside of this is that this new world of globalised food supply finds it almost impossible to eradicate food loss and waste.

However, it is common consensus that good food should not be wasted. Especially given the efforts that go into producing it (global food-system emissions are estimated to equate to 30% of the world's GHG emissions[†]) and the numbers of families going without it.

> **"Global food-system emissions are estimated to equate to 30% of the world's GHG emissions."**

50 years ago, Company Shop Group was founded to offer a solution to the challenge of food waste which would provide commercial and environmental returns for the UK food industry.

10 years ago, Community Shop was founded as a not-for-profit social enterprise to confront a very different challenge of rising food poverty and insecurity. The challenge of food insecurity is one which does not sit exclusively within the food system, and is instead the consequence of complex and interrelated issues driven by socio-economic factors.





Power of redistribution

Company Shop Group was once the industry's "best kept secret" with food waste being a taboo subject. However, great strides have been made in recent years by both industry and Government to accept and embrace the role of surplus redistribution for reducing food waste and the positive environmental factors this creates.

Since UK data was first reported by WRAP in 2015, overall levels of redistribution have increased more than three-fold. During the eight-year reporting period for the industry, over 782,000 tonnes have been saved from waste – equivalent to more than 1.9 billion meals and worth over £3 billion.

As early pioneers, Company Shop Group and Community Shop have been at the forefront of this positive behavioural shift. By educating and supporting businesses to think differently, more retailers, manufacturers and producers have fundamentally changed the way they separate surplus from waste, and are now unlocking the potential it has as usable, highly valuable stock.

However, there is still so much untapped surplus in the supply chain and so much left to do to reduce waste. 25-30% of the total food produced is lost or becomes waste, with 10.7 million tonnes wasted annually in the UK. Of that, WRAP estimates that 130,000 tonnes of surplus is wasted in the supply chain every year – perfectly good food which could create millions more meals.

Policies and practices for change

Food waste hierarchy as a means for reporting

In 2019, the Group fought to transform the food waste hierarchy for the better, ensuring redistribution rightly held its place near the top of the ladder. The hierarchy provides a clear route for businesses to ensure every effort is made, at every stage of production, to ensure food fulfils its intended purpose. This is essential for creating a future where waste is reduced and resources are used efficiently and productively.

However, we know that whilst a business might advocate for it the boardroom, there are not always the processes or resource in place within the supply chain to see these well-intended ambitions through to fruition. By carrying out waste-walks and diagnostic interventions on factory sites and at farm-gate, the Group sees first-hand the scale of wasted surplus which could have been saved through simple changes to processes such as having separate containers for surplus and waste, rather than just waste, at the end of a production line.

As a result, we are urging businesses to implement clearer processes within their factories and supply chains to ensure the hierarchy is followed stringently, and we are already supporting countless businesses to do this through our *Surplus Unlocked* programme. We are also asking the Government to use the hierarchy as a key mechanism to assist processes for waste reporting, to not only ensure that both surplus and waste are separately recorded, but so that the proactive efforts of businesses are recognised and rewarded. The hierarchy should go hand-in-hand with mandatory reporting.

The impact of our work with Pilgrim's UK...

Over 98T
of surplus was saved in six months

100,000
packs of fresh meat, marking a 25% surge in redistributed stock for Pilgrim's UK

The intervention resulted in the creation of six new 'own label' products, meeting legal standards for labelling and selling through Company Shop and Community Shop stores as well as generating a brand new revenue stream for the business, from product that previously was going to waste.

[†] WRAP

> "To ensure that this land-mark policy is successfully implemented and adhered to, it will be essential that the Government sets clear and feasible timescales for businesses to implement reporting."

We are happy to admit that we have not been at the front of the queue to call for mandatory food waste reporting. That is because we have been at the forefront of organic waste reduction efforts for many years, and we know the supply chain and our partners well enough to understand that reporting will create opportunities but could also present significant drawbacks for sustainable, ethical waste reduction. It is essential that future food waste policy does not undo the good work done.

However, it is clear that when businesses have greater sight and visibility of their surplus and waste, that is where the strongest improvements in waste reduction are made. Mandatory reporting will super-charge this and, despite our efforts to support businesses to voluntarily report through our *Surplus Impact* initiative, we recognise that progress without mandated action will be too slow.

To ensure that this land-mark policy is successfully implemented and adhered to, it will be essential that the Government sets clear and feasible timescales for businesses to implement reporting, truly working "hand in glove", as Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has suggested, with the sector. In turn, this will increase business confidence in an otherwise unstable policy landscape, further incentivising the investment required.

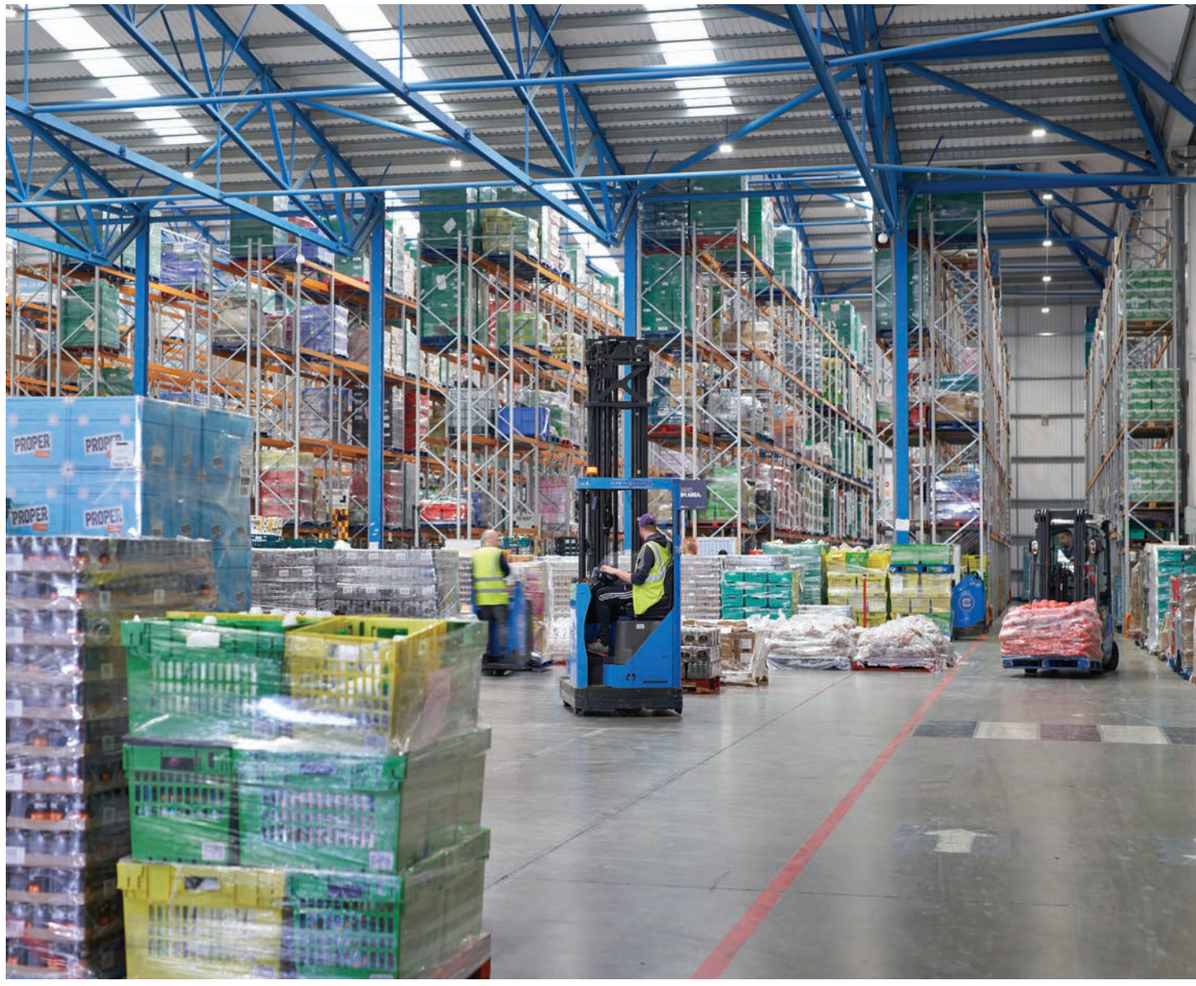
Championing the role of commercial redistribution

Similarly, there must be greater appreciation amongst smaller organisations within the redistribution sector, and campaign groups, for the scale of infrastructure required to ensure that soaring demand for services linked to reporting are met. If we do not get this right, it could lead to the opposite intention with more surplus going to waste.

To combat this, the Government must be forthcoming and proactive in sign-posting and championing the range of redistribution and resource management solutions available to them – including commercial redistribution options. Alongside both charitable and not-for-profit routes larger redistributors, including commercial organisations, will be critical for providing the infrastructure and capabilities to meet demand.

Finally, the primary goal behind food waste reporting is to reduce food waste and to then redistribute more surplus. To unlock as much new surplus as possible through new policies, it must first and foremost be treated as a food waste reduction intervention, with those most capable shouldering the load.





> "The Government must be forthcoming and proactive in sign-posting, and championing, the range of redistribution and resource management solutions available to them."



Recommendations

1

Food waste reporting to be made mandatory, adhering to the food waste hierarchy and promoting the full range of services available to deal with surplus.

Realistic timescales for implementation from the Government to incentivise businesses, and proactive signposting of all services available, will help ensure that no good surplus goes to waste.

2

Government and industry to acknowledge that charitable and not-for-profit redistribution will not be enough to respond to the challenge of food surplus and waste.

To accelerate progress towards a circular economy, and to fulfil mandatory reporting requirements, equal support must be given to commercial redistribution.

challenge 1 challenge

Wasted food & redistribution.

Comment from...

Dr Clive Black

Vice Chairman, Shore Capital Markets

Food poverty is complex, but for many households in genuine need, it is real. There are those that perhaps take advantage of 'the system' for their own personal benefit, but there are many decent, principled and hard-working individuals for whom life's deck of cards have not fallen kindly.

Too many communities in the UK have a human capital that is not fulfilling its potential for all sorts of reasons. In such places, 'the community' is even more important as a source of support when there is not much to go round.

In such locations, many isolated old council estates where few go in and even fewer come out, Community Shop comes to the fore in several powerful ways. Most significantly, it is home self-help, local people within their communities supporting themselves. The associated training, cafe management, store operations and much, much more are a mix of processes and skills that help bond familiarity, camaraderie, and support.

> **"In a UK food system grappling with food waste from ethical and environmental perspectives, Community Shop is a meaningful, focused and wholly worthwhile avenue to curtail this problem."**

The modest capital applied to open and operate a Community Shop pays back many times over.

But more importantly for a Community Shop member is the curtailment of loneliness, a friendly face to say hello to on the street, someone to get together with at Christmas time.

And then there is the access to lower priced food, which helps to feed people, especially young families, and so the release of the pressure of wondering 'where I am going to find the next meal for my kids?'. On top of that, in a UK food system grappling with food waste from ethical and environmental perspectives, Community Shop is a meaningful, focused and wholly worthwhile avenue to curtail this problem.

Community Shop is not the only solution for the problems of those in need and often overlooked. However, it is part of the solution, and there are thousands of real life testimonies to the success of its concept, helping good people with very little to help themselves so that they raise the esteem and capability of their communities. There remains so much more for Community Shop to do.

"**It's disgraceful that we live in a country** where there's so much food and so much food poverty."

Julia, Community Shop member

challenge 2 challenge

Hungry people & a sustainable solution

Meaningful and lasting impact within any food or social aid model requires it to be delivered in a sustainable way. With the new Government committing to kick-start economic growth whilst creating financial stability, Community Shop in the meantime provides a sustainable solution to the issue of food insecurity.

While Community Shop is much more than simply giving out food, its wide-reaching impact all starts with surplus and the circular way that it is redistributed.

Community Shop empowers people to be the best version of themselves. To be stronger individuals, and to help build confident communities who work as a unit to face life's challenges. Community Shop starts with food; but it unlocks its value to deliver long-term improvement for people and communities.



"With a Community Shop it's still like shopping, you come in and choose the food that you want, and is there at a price to choose whatever you want. So I think the Community Shop gives you more freedom. Freedom of choice."

David Leigh,
Community Shop member



Hungry people

Throughout history, hunger has been a problem for millions of people, including within the UK. As the price of food has gradually increased and wages have failed to match the trajectory of inflation on daily essentials, more and more people are going hungry. This social problem was first named in the British Medical Journal 2013 as a 'public health emergency', and today the issue has continued to increase; nearly 10 million adults and children experiencing food insecurity in the UK in recent months.†

To address the problem, countless charities, organisations and schemes have been created, all with the intention of fixing it by providing the hungry with what they need – food. But this is a sticking plaster over a wider problem; not having the economic means to buy the food and basic essentials they require. Whilst this requires long-term Government intervention and significant investment, there is a more sustained solution to this immediate issue. That solution provides a holistic person-centred approach, providing people with the long-term tools they need to better themselves and their lives. That solution is Community Shop.

† The Food Foundation June 2024 †† Social Enterprise UK

Be the change you wish to see in the world



Policies and practices for change

Equal footing to businesses and social enterprises that deliver positive impact

To genuinely tackle food insecurity, we must see the business and support network around food aid for what it is. A collection of businesses, social enterprises, charities and grass-roots organisations all doing their bit. We can achieve much more when working in harmony, but it does require us to rethink the value that each entity can bring.

That is why we are urging Government and businesses to reset the current mindset and narrative that only charities can do good things. If our collective goal is to deliver positive outcomes for people and communities, it should therefore follow that it is these outcomes that are recognised and rewarded, and not the type of organisation that achieved them.

With over 131,000†† CiCs and social enterprises operating within the UK, providing substantial benefits to local communities, they cannot be overlooked for any Government incentives or rewards. There are countless examples, such as with Government funding procurement processes, or current campaigns for the implementation of VAT relief for charities on donated goods, where this has been the case. We believe strongly that the incentive or reward should firmly be on the act of donation, rather than just the beneficiary, to ensure that all organisations who are collectively fighting to end food insecurity, can truly deliver the impact required to make a difference. Businesses and social enterprises must be given the opportunity to shape and deliver a sustained food aid system. To do this, the Government's food security policies should focus on outcomes, not processes. It should not favour charities and grass roots bodies over businesses and social enterprises. We believe that the biggest problems require the biggest solutions, and that these are always best delivered through partnership and collective collaboration.

End Food Banks: Sustainable and sustained impact model to deliver long-term food aid

Policy makers, elected politicians and activists in the food aid sector do not always agree, but there is one thing on which politicians of all parties and activists of all passions do agree.

With nearly 10 million people experiencing some form of food insecurity, it seems clear that there is no one-size-fits-all solution, and one model or paradigm cannot meet the growing need. For over a decade there has been a clear and valuable purpose for food banks within our communities. But, in the same way that there is a clear and valuable purpose for ambulance services and Accident and Emergency departments, our health system crumbles if these are our only line of defence.

> **"For communities to thrive they need a connected ecosystem of food initiatives. These should offer dignified, sustainable access to food and span the space between the commercial enterprise which mainstream shoppers enjoy, whilst supporting those in the most acute form of food insecurity."**

Community Shop believes charity does not have a monopoly on doing good, any more than enterprise does not have a monopoly on creating value. And this has been recognised by the new Government, who have pledged that its ambitious poverty strategy will work with all organisations and sectors – be it charitable or commercial - to bring about change.

The Food Ladder, which has been developed considerably by Dr Megan Blake at the University of Sheffield, was an early attempt to assert two things.

First, for communities to thrive they need a connected ecosystem of food initiatives. These should offer dignified, sustainable access to food and span the space between the commercial enterprise which mainstream shoppers enjoy, whilst supporting those in the most acute form of food insecurity. The social enterprise sector drives a culture of innovation for social value and brings new insights and opportunities to this space.

The second assertion is that, if we are going to support nearly 10 million people who are hardest hit to face the next decade with dignity, we need early interventions. It has always been true that allowing the most difficult social circumstances to perpetuate to the stage that people experience a catastrophic crisis is wrong. It is financially costly for the state and physically and psychologically costly for the individuals. The scars of trauma can last a lifetime. Investing in and developing early interventions which catch and hold people in a place closest to the life and retail experience most of us view as normal, best enables people to exit that experience with the fewest scars. We may not be able to end chronic food insecurity but we can make it rare, brief and non-recurring.

The Community Shop model is a holistic person-centred approach which places the priority on empowerment to build strong individuals and confident communities who are not dependant on any form of food aid.

It is essential that the relative "success" of future food aid provision is focused on those delivering long-term, tangible impacts. The existing food bank model, as an example, is only equipped to support those in acute food crisis. Whilst the work they do provides a genuine lifeline to those in desperate need, these models do not have the breadth of resource, time, and expertise to deliver longer-term, personalised and ongoing support for those who need it. This is not only important for ensuring people are supported over time, but also so we can truly tackle the root cause of their food insecurity rather than prolong the problem.

As such, we must move towards a food security landscape where food banks are only used as a last resort, to avoid unintended but wider negative consequences.



Holistic provision as default, ideally with physical presence

If there is to be a blueprint when expanding support and food aid provision, it must be focused towards more holistic, sustainable models such as Community Shop. This model works with members and communities every single day to provide the wrap-around support that is needed, and to break a long-term dependency on quick-fix, transactional arrangements such as emergency food parcels, which can cause more harm than good.

At Community Shop, our model focuses on the fundamentals of the human experience. We provide the physical and emotional infrastructure, support and opportunities for people to explore how they can develop their own capabilities and motivation. Our membership model purposely includes the desire for each member to be motivated to make a positive difference to their lives. This is because we recognised from the very beginning that it is our members who have the power to change their lives, all they need is the support and hand-up to do so.

Similarly, we connect, engage and inspire every member who comes through our doors. Our methodology within Community Shop draws on the principles of human agency and solidarity, and our colleagues take time to speak with each member so that they can tell their own stories and experiences, importantly ensuring that this is not written or assumed on their behalf.

This enables us to prepare bespoke personal development programmes, which we know will empower them to move on in life, rather than serve against them. Similarly, by listening to the people we support we can play their voices back every day, so we can adjust their support as needed but also so that we can be advocates for them within wider arenas. Too often, the voices of leaders are amplified and listened to, rather than the very people receiving, or needing the support.

Due to the speed in which aid needs to be delivered to those in food crisis, such as through food banks or emergency parcels, inevitably it is not always possible to generate the human connection which is so essential in predicting successful outcomes in the support of another. However, this can often mean that people who are at their most vulnerable are receiving support which is much more transactional, and short-term. Even more critically, it can also deepen or re-trigger the trauma that the individual is experiencing, as all agency is taken away.



Whilst this is of course never the intention, it is essential that we understand how current food aid models hinder, as well as help. Those in the helping community bear a tremendous weight of responsibility to frame interventions in a way which ensures we are accountable for the long-term consequences of the recipient. It is also on businesses and the Government to understand the true impact of aid intervention, and to consider this when it is the first option of support they turn to.

Holistic food aid provision must go hand-in-hand with the delivery of longer-term support, to empower people, give them control and provide dignity. Government and business can facilitate this by broadening the horizons of their support to provide genuine growth and opportunity for all.

> **"At Community Shop, our model focuses on the fundamentals of the human experience. We provide the physical and emotional infrastructure, support and opportunities for people to explore how they can develop their own capabilities and motivation."**

Recommendations

1

Food security policy should focus on outcomes, not processes, and should not favour charities and grassroots bodies over businesses and social enterprises.

Incentives and rewards such as VAT relief should be given for the act of donating surplus food, not be based on the status of the beneficiary.

2

Government to acknowledge that emergency food parcels and other short term fixes cannot be a solution to food insecurity.

In its 2024 manifesto, the Labour Government committed to ending the use of emergency food parcels. To do this, it must evolve away from only supporting food banks towards backing organisations and social enterprises that are self-sustainable and offer long-term help to those who need it.

challenge 2 challenge

Hungry people & a sustainable solution.

Comment from...

Dr Christina Holweg

Associate Professor, University of Vienna

With the opening of the first Community Shop in 2013, the range of so-called social supermarkets that had previously existed in Europe was expanded to include a new, successful variant. Social supermarkets emerged in Europe in the late 1980s in France, Belgium, and Switzerland. In 2011, the first scientific study on social supermarkets in Austria was published, highlighting the innovative and alternative retail format. The first international report in 2016 revealed that there were already over 1,000 social supermarkets in six countries in Europe.†

Community Shops in the UK are remarkable in several respects: A targeted personal development programme enables a high level of individual customer service with clearly measurable successes. The unique financial set-up results from a unique co-operation between a not-for-profit company (Community Shop) and a for-profit company (Company Shop Group) enhancing the availability of resources. Strong integration into local communities increases visibility and acceptance within society.

An important success factor of both Community Shops and social supermarkets is a close and sustainable co-operation with important stakeholder groups such as retailers, manufacturers, communities, and public policy institutions. Another success factor is the remarkable work of store managers. They master the balancing act of successfully managing a company economically and sustainably and at the same time giving customer care top priority.††

Finally, we should consider the question of why Community Shops and social supermarkets were founded in highly developed countries with well-established social systems.



Photo: Stoebbauer

One potential answer is that they offer an unconventional and pragmatic solution to numerous current social challenges such as poverty, unemployment, education, food waste, or social integration. The ongoing expansion of social supermarkets across Europe and the opening of the first social supermarkets in the USA can be seen as confirmation of their high societal relevance.

> **"An important success factor of both Community Shops and social supermarkets is a close and sustainable co-operation with important stakeholder groups such as retailers, manufacturers, communities, and public policy institutions."**

† Holweg and Lienbacher 2011, 2016 †† Gruber et al. 2024



Community Hub: more than food.

At the outset of the Community Shop journey, we had a vision to do something different. Our solution was a concept which was positively disruptive and better than the norm. Over the decade we have grown from one store based in a former coalfield community in Barnsley, to 13 thriving hubs at the centre of their distinct communities.

We sought to develop a sustainable, dignified and affordable food aid model which followed a person-centred approach, and aimed to give people a hand-up, rather than a hand-out. For us, it was essential that at the outset of any support, every person we support retains their agency, so that they can truly shape their own journey, feel empowered and equip themselves with the skills and experiences to do so.

Over the last decade, we have delivered over 218,000 personal development programmes, based on rigorous academic research and years of experience working in deprived communities.

Our holistic approach aims to develop the whole individual and see each person for who they are. Reaching food security is just one component an individual needs to help them be the best version of themselves. There are many ways we, overtime, work together to do this...



THE WHAT IF PLAN FROM COMMUNITY SHOP

Our courses include...

Better Together

Community Connections

Our Better Together and Community Connections sessions focus on enabling people to connect with each other and develop new social connections.

HEAD Space

Our Head Space programme, using psycho-education content, equips members with the mechanisms to instil a resilient mindset.

Make It Happen

Make It Happen supports members to adopt healthy eating habits and behaviours, which is one of the simplest actions to reduce environmental impact and improve overall wellbeing.

Our Place our home

Our Place Our Home is focused on asset-based community development, building functional skills to become a change maker, working as a team, and demonstrating leadership.

Money Matters

Money Matters seeks to develop members' understanding of finance and enables them to take control of their money management.

Community Leadership Team

The Community Leadership Team programme develops connected individuals who help create confident communities by encouraging positive group behaviours that deliver social change and individual aspirations.

Progress Academy

Progress Academy, the final step of the journey, provides members with accredited qualifications which help them into the world of work through skills, training and business connections, all of which improve the local economy.

We work hand-in-hand with countless other organisations, charities and grass-roots groups, who are already doing excellent things on the ground within communities.

Throughout all our engagement with our industry partners, we ensure they can see first-hand the longevity and legacies that their support is generating.

"**Sometimes you discover yourself on that journey because** you don't realise how you're thinking can affect your whole life."

Stuart, Community Shop member

challenge 3 challenge

Missed potential & a lasting legacy



"Around 10 million people in the UK have experienced food insecurity in recent months."†

† The Food Foundation

If food insecurity, driven by economic and social imbalance, is not addressed, a generation of potential will be lost.

We know that children on free school meals have lower GCSE attainment levels than those not, and that people experiencing food insecurity are more likely to become sick, disabled or be a victim of domestic abuse. The fact that people can have such poorer outcomes for their future, due to inability to attain a basic need – food – is nothing short of a travesty.

Delivering lasting legacies to individuals and within communities, rather than continue with short-term fixes, is the only approach we should be taking as a collective.

With the new Government only just in the early stages of its plans to kick-start economic growth and create financial stability to support people into good work; a person-centred approach, like that delivered by Community Shop, is required, to work with people and communities every single day to help support their long-term needs.

The consequences of food insecurity

People help people, not systems

Our biggest learning of the decade, which we implemented right from the outset, was the power of simply putting people at the centre of methods of change. It is people that help people to progress and excel not systems, and so the first step in delivering sustainable, dignified aid is to ensure each person has, and retains, agency at every touchpoint.



> **"Our biggest learning of the decade, which we implemented right from the outset, was the power of simply putting people at the centre of methods of change."**

More than just food

Recognising that those in food poverty are facing many more challenges than just struggling to get food on the table is critical. The wider and associated mental, physical and health challenges that many people needing food aid are battling cannot be underestimated.

Taking away the burden of feeding your family and finding affordable food is certainly a first step. That is why we went further than the traditional food aid model of only handing out food, instead delivering a dignified and affordable model which enables members to shop with choice and dignity.

Unlike food banks or similar arrangements where individuals are presented with a range of pre-selected items, Community Shop's surplus redistribution model means members can choose and purchase food and household products with their own money, at hugely discounted prices. We ensure this interaction with food is framed within a normative retail model, keeping the distance between the experience of food aid and the world of normal retail shopping minimal. All the revenue raised within our stores is reinvested into our Hub and Kitchen, but the empowerment, confidence and pride that members feel being able to purchase and choose their food, rather than being dependant on others, is huge.

This is what is so important about the role of "affordability" for the future of food aid. We should not shy away from provision which replicates mainstream, recognisable supermarket models, as it stops those on the cusp of food poverty from feeling alienated and retains their agency. Whilst there is a place for free food aid, especially for those in acute food crisis, we must again avoid defaulting to these models if we are to genuinely tackle food security for good, and do the best thing for recipients.

The wide-ranging impact delivered through 10 years of Community Shop, however, has been achieved by pursuing a model which is truly holistic. It not only focuses on alleviating the root causes of food poverty, but it connects the other challenges members may be facing which are preventing them engaging in mainstream society. This could be related to socialisation, employment, skills, and more.

Community Shop offers life-changing personal development support for its members. This is all with the aim of equipping them with the skills, confidence and experiences to be the best version of themselves. During our 10 years in operation, it has become increasingly clear that in today's society, it is not enough to support one challenge in isolation, especially if you are to deliver genuinely sustainable, far-reaching and lasting impact.



That is why we are strongly advocating for food aid provision to always have embedded in it the delivery of longer-term financial, educational and wellbeing support. This could be delivered through the food aid provider, as is the case with Community Shop with a team of expert and highly trained mentors, or by working in much closer conjunction and alignment with other organisations delivering support.

This holistic, wrap-around view of food aid can be supported further by the Government and businesses, to tackle the root causes. For example, the Government should consider support it can provide beyond immediate food aid, instead exploring enhanced employment, education or wellbeing initiatives which complement the work being done to improve food access. Similarly, like is the case with many Community Shop partners, including Ocado and McCain, businesses can do more to play their part in creating legacies within communities. Rather than one-off stock donations, at Community Shop we encourage businesses to support the establishment of our new stores, either by providing a building space or through capital funding to get the store up and running as well pledging ongoing stock donations. Each store opened is a commitment to a minimum of ten years of Community Shop presence, involvement and development within and for that community.

Pillars of the community

The sustainability of Community Shop's model and impact is supported by the fact we are physically rooted within the communities we support each day. We strongly believe in the impact of having physical structures around food aid delivery, so that you deeply understand the community you serve and can clearly demonstrate that you are there for as long as is needed.

By having a physical space, not only are you visible for those who benefit so much from just knowing you are there, but it also means you are building stronger local economies in all parts of the country, supporting growth and opportunity. This helps to invest in urban regeneration and empowers the communities you are seeking to serve. Like Community Shop, this may be by breathing life into otherwise unused community buildings, creating permanent, paid and fulfilling jobs (over 140 people employed on paid basis for Community Shop as of July 2024), or generally improving pride in places, high streets and communities.

Future food aid models should seek to anchor themselves within the community, and we would urge those involved in helping make this happen to redouble their efforts to ensure unnecessary barriers such as finding appropriate spaces to set up, are removed.

As such, new powers are also needed for local authorities to ensure unused or underutilised buildings are made available for regeneration so they can add value to people and communities.

> **"It is not enough to support one challenge in isolation, especially if you are to deliver genuinely sustainable, far-reaching and lasting impact."**

Recommendations

1

Tackling food insecurity should go hand-in-hand with the delivery of longer-term financial, educational, training and wellbeing support,

to ensure people involved retain agency, are treated with dignity, and ultimately are empowered to improve their circumstances permanently.

2

Food aid provision to be provided through a physical infrastructure such as shops

enabling support to be anchored in the community, investing in urban regeneration and supporting the local economy through the creation of paid roles. To support this, new powers are needed for local authorities to take over any unused buildings in deprived areas to put them to community use.

challenge 3 challenge

Missed potential & a lasting legacy.

Comment from...

Andrew Forsey OBE

National Director, Feeding Britain

Ten years ago, I was working on an all-party parliamentary inquiry into hunger in the UK. The inquiry had been set up by Frank Field in response to the alarming growth in the need for, and use of, food banks in our country. It sought to identify the reasons behind that growth and to recommend reforms for its reversal.

Throughout much of the inquiry, we had been visiting and hearing from large numbers of food banks who were having to give crisis food parcels to a small army of people who could not afford food or other essentials.

Their evidence painted a bleak and troubling picture. Many of those people seeking help had no money at all. Others had some money, but never quite enough to buy the food they needed without falling too far behind on housing or utility costs. In those cases, food had to be sacrificed to keep both the lights on at home and a roof over one's head.

What troubled me most was the sense of shame, defeat, or humiliation felt by people needing to use a food bank – notwithstanding the compassion and care shown by those volunteers who gave the crisis food parcel.

The emergence of the social supermarket model, and a visit to the first Community Shop, provided an antidote to this awful feeling and painted a more hopeful picture. Here was a model which not only provided good food, but did so with dignity, choice, and empowerment. Here was a model which embodied mutual self-help and went with the grain of human nature. It was a place where people wanted to go, to buy food and to meet people.



Ten years on, thank goodness, the UK appears slowly to be shifting toward this model and, in the process, reducing its reliance on food banks. Recent data suggest that more people now access social supermarkets (and other affordable food clubs) than food banks.

The country owes Community Shop a debt of gratitude for helping to provide a key chunk of its exit strategy from an over-reliance on food banks, and it is incumbent on all of us to make that shift an irreversible one in the years to come.

"Their evidence painted a bleak and troubling picture. Many of those people seeking help had no money at all. Others had some money, but never quite enough to buy the food they needed without falling too far behind on housing or utility costs."

The future of food aid in the UK: our recommendations.

The solution to wasted food

In the UK, 10.7 million tonnes of food is wasted every year. There is an urgent need to scale up efforts to reduce the amount going to waste further up the supply chain, by leaning on experts in redistribution who have the scale, capacity and interventions necessary to offer pragmatic solutions for the industry.

Only through mandating food waste reporting in line with the hierarchy and realistic timescales, and with Government providing equal support and signposting to services across the whole redistribution sector, including commercial redistributors, can we tackle unnecessary food waste and achieve net zero.

The solution for hungry people

With nearly 10 million people in the UK, including 3 million children, currently classed as food insecure, and 5.7 million households cutting or skipping meals, we must move away from providing emergency relief that serves only as a temporary fix. Instead, holistic, sustainable aid models which offer longer-term, person-centred support which truly tackles the root causes of food insecurity must be prioritised.

If future food security policy focuses on outcomes, rather than processes, and the Government takes demonstrable action to evolve policy away from supporting food banks toward sustainable, longer-term models such as social supermarkets, then we have the greatest chance of breaking long-term aid dependency and creating lasting legacies for individuals and communities who need it most.

The solution for avoiding missed potential

People experiencing food insecurity are more than twice as likely to have had adverse life events than those who are food secure, in addition to facing increased mental, emotional and physical challenges. To effectively address food insecurity, alleviating challenges to food access is only a starting point.

It must be coupled with longer-term financial, educational, training and wellbeing support to genuinely improve an individuals' overall circumstances, ideally delivered through physical infrastructures such as shops and hubs. This can be supported by new powers being given to local authorities to take over unused buildings for vital community use.





Our *impact.*

Over the last decade, we have delivered on our promise to create a sustainable, dignified support aid model which is about more than just giving out food.

Each member has their own story of how our model has had a positive impact in their life, but as a collective the numbers also speak wonders.

Since opening, Community Shop has:

Delivered unwavering support to

73,000+

families

in the UK's most deprived communities

Collaborated with

800+

community partners

Saved members over

£54m

on their shopping

3,000+

members have achieved employment since joining Community Shop

Empowered people to grow by delivering more than

218,000

personal development programmes

Brought communities together, serving over

10,000

Christmas dinners

2,800+

members have gone into higher education opportunities

Helped to put quality, affordable food on tables. We created

40m meals

all with food that might have otherwise gone to waste

Fed over

880,000

kids with wholesome, home-cooked meals

for free

Received generous support, funding and stock donations

from over **200**

retail and manufacturing partners

It's more than giving out food.
It's more than short-term fixes.
It's changing lives.

We could not do, *what we do,* without the support of...

"We are immensely proud to have partnered with Community Shop to open a store in Eastfield, close to our Scarborough HQ. The Eastfield store has recently celebrated its first birthday and has provided invaluable support to hundreds of families in our local community. We look forward to working with Community Shop for years to come."

Jillian Moffatt,
Regional President, McCain GB & Ireland

"As a local manufacturer in Great Britain, we're committed to supporting the communities where we operate. We have been a consistent donor of surplus product to Community Shop for over four years, and being able to bring an invaluable service to support local people means a lot to us."

Holly Firmin,
Senior Community Partnerships Manager,
Coca-Cola Europacific Partners

"We're proud to continue to contribute surplus food and donations that play a key part in Community Shop's mission to solve food poverty."

Jonathan Wiseman,
General Counsel and
Chief People Officer,
Ocado Retail





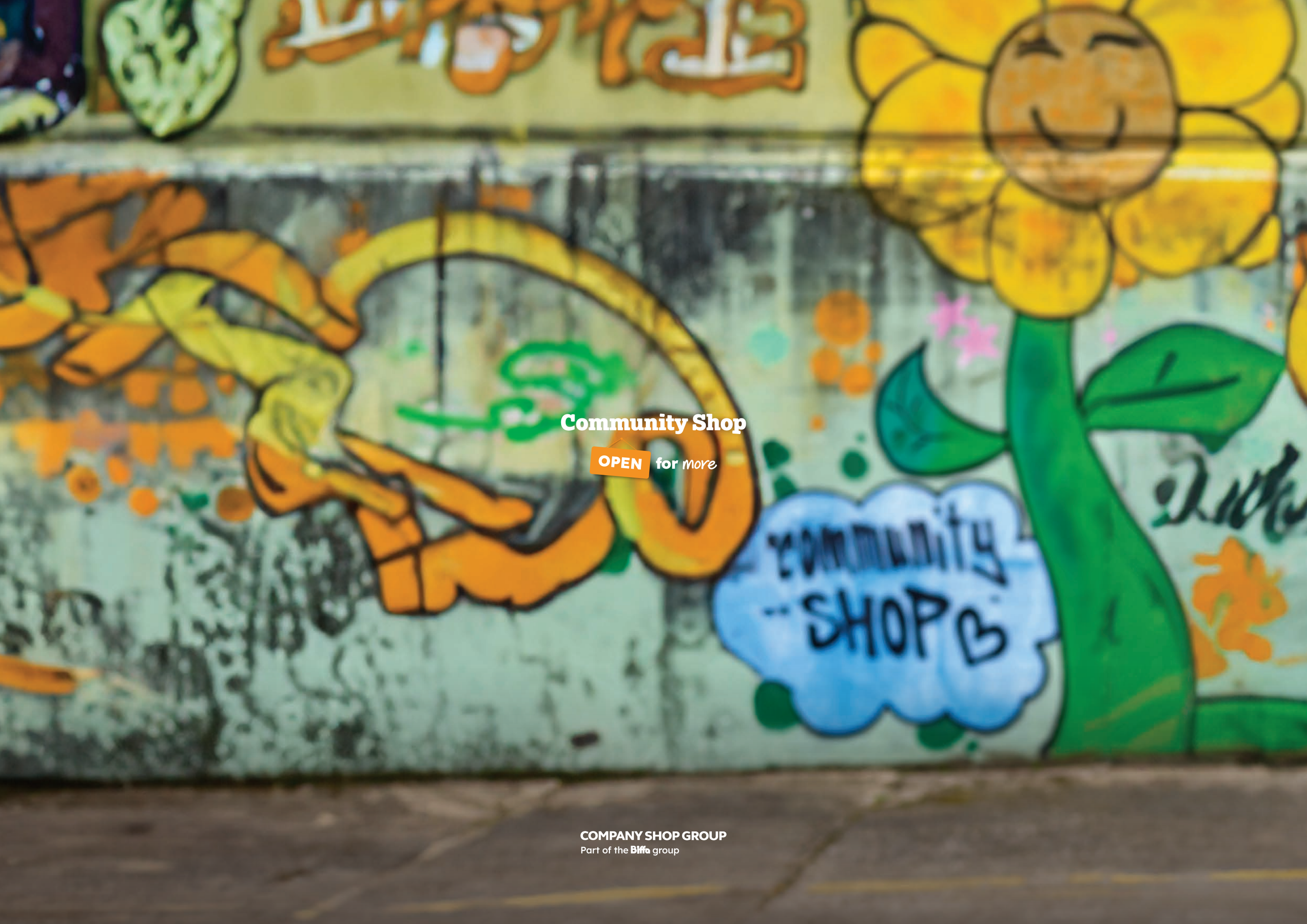












COMPANY SHOP GROUP
Part of the Biffa group