

Jane Middleton statement

### Why Banes needs a Food Poverty Action Plan

Here in Bath and Northeast Somerset we have a fantastic food culture. We have nationally acclaimed restaurants, we have award-winning food producers and farmers, and that is rightly celebrated.

But it's only half the picture. We have three food banks in Bath. I volunteer at one of them. Last year they gave out over 4,500 emergency food parcels – that's a 36 per cent increase on the previous year. Food banks in NES are also under huge pressure, as more and more people struggle to cope.

Food banks are just the tip of the iceberg. They're where people go when they are at rock bottom, often after enduring months of food insecurity – skipping meals, sending children to school without breakfast, having access only to nutritionally poor foods. I've volunteered in the food bank for five years and I've never met anyone who wanted to be there. People living in food poverty don't like to talk about it – there's a stigma attached. But here in Banes, with our wonderful food culture and no shortage of food, the truth is that some of our neighbours cannot afford to eat.

This growth in food poverty is the result of political decisions made by central government. But you, as local councillors, can take steps to tackle it. So I am here today to ask you to set up a Food Poverty Action plan and to make one of the Policy Development and Scrutiny panels responsible for it. Other councils have done this. It doesn't have to cost a lot of money. It *will* make a difference. But it needs the political will.

What does a food poverty action plan mean? It means you put food poverty at the heart of all your policy making – so every decision you take, you consider its impact on food poverty. It means you measure the extent of food poverty, and you map the resources already available locally, so people know what help is out there. And you set up a partnership with local businesses, charities, universities and statutory agencies. So you are not tackling the issue alone: you are spearheading a community-wide initiative.

Food poverty action plans maximise what's already there – increasing the uptake of free school meals or Healthy Start vouchers, for example, or access to discretionary funds, like the Welfare Support Service. They work with businesses and charities to set up school breakfast clubs or to feed children during the summer holidays. And some councils decide to become Living Wage employers, and encourage local businesses to do likewise. All these actions help combat food poverty.

Cities like Belfast, Cambridge, Cardiff, and many London boroughs have food poverty action plans in place. Why not Bath? It will make a huge difference to the people you represent, and in particular to the many children who are living in poverty.

Food poverty is the most urgent and pressing form of poverty, but it is also the easiest to solve. I ask you to play your part in solving the crisis of hunger here in Banes and to commit to a Food Poverty Action Plan. Please be the council that says enough is enough when it comes to hungry children and adults in our community.