

STATEMENT TO COUNCIL MEETING 11 JULY 2019: Jane Middleton

When I came to speak at the last meeting here, I asked you to be the council that put an end to food poverty in Bath and North East Somerset. So I'd like to thank the Lib Dem group for taking the first step towards that by putting forward a motion on food poverty. I am hugely grateful that you have given this issue priority, and especially grateful to Ruth Malloy, proposer of the motion, for reassuring me of her commitment to it.

Now that this motion is before you, you have a chance to change the lives of the thousands of people in Bath and North East Somerset who cannot afford to put food on the table. Because food poverty is so devastating in its impact – and especially because it disproportionately affects children, the disabled and the long-term sick – it's vital that the motion you vote on tonight clearly defines the council's priorities and the most effective agenda for the food poverty action plan. To achieve this, I believe the motion needs to be strengthened in two ways:

- First, it must make an unequivocal statement about Council responsibility and accountability, by saying that it will put food poverty at the heart of all its policy making. This is a point I stressed in my last statement, and it will send out a powerful message that hunger is unacceptable here in our community and that the Council is serious about addressing it. But responsibility is also about recognising that the Council is the biggest referrer to food banks locally. And that it must therefore use every lever at its disposal to intervene on food poverty *before* people have to resort to food banks. It should, for example ensure that the Welfare Support Scheme hands out food bank referrals as a last resort, not a first, as I believe happens too often now.

- Secondly, the motion must formally recognise that hunger – the most extreme manifestation of food poverty – needs urgent priority attention. It should do this by including concrete proposals, such as:

- Measuring the extent of food poverty and setting targets for its reduction
- And pledging to prioritise feeding hungry children – through holiday projects, through school breakfast clubs, and through improving uptake of free school meals. There are examples available of councils tackling children's food poverty – Hammersmith & Fulham council offers one model, for example, and Bristol another.

Everything I have just suggested is currently under consideration by Guildford Council – like Banes, a new Lib Dem council – following a Lib Dem-led report into food poverty there. It's a brilliant report, and if in Guildford they can make a strong mission statement on food poverty, backed up by powerful action, we can do it here too. So please, use tonight to make this motion as powerful and effective as possible. Because there are so many local people whose well-being depends on it.