Item 3.3

Food Insecurity

File No: S051491

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

Across Australia, we are wasting millions of tonnes of food each year, while record numbers of people go hungry.

In the City of Sydney, food waste makes up 14 per cent of commercial waste and 35 per cent of domestic waste. This represents more than 95,000 tonnes of food waste each year going to landfill, generating the equivalent of 200,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions.

The City encourages households to reduce food waste and is researching new ways to process food scraps using more cost-effective and environmentally sustainable technology. Redirecting surplus food to those in need is another important step we can take to reduce emissions while also ensuring every person in the City has enough food to eat.

We are all aware of the food shortages experienced across Australia during Covid. Homeless people, social housing tenants, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, older people, people with disability, international students and temporary visa holders were particularly hard hit. This is why the City spent $3.1 million, and worked with over 60 businesses and community organisations, on food relief between 2020 and 2022.

Shockingly, food relief organisations tell me that demand for free food is now far higher than in Covid, with employed people on low incomes joining the queues of people who can't afford to eat. As people struggle to pay their bills amid the cost-of-living crisis, they forgo food in order to pay for housing, health and heating.

According to FoodBank's 2022 Hunger Report, over two million Australian households had experienced severe food insecurity in the preceding 12 months. And the situation is only getting worse.

OzHarvest says that demand for free food has never been so high. The majority of charities they service have seen a 73 per cent increase in people needing help, with over a third of clients seeking food relief for the first time. These charities report they could take between 25 per cent and 50 per cent more food in order to cope with demand. In 2020, OzHarvest distributed 27,000 kilos of food a month, whereas they're now distributing 46,000 kilos of food a month. At Waterloo Market, demand has risen from 1,500 people a week during Covid to 2,000 people a week now, and they are on track to deliver 880,000 free meals this financial year.

The Girls and Boys Brigade in Surry Hills provides free food to children after school and free dinners for families. Eighty per cent of their families live in social housing and the rest are at risk of homelessness because of rising living costs. Over the past year, demand for their food program has increased by almost 150 per cent. Many families who used to access their pantry service to stock up on free food once or twice a week are now accessing it daily.

First Nations Response is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation providing culturally appropriate food support. Requests for help have doubled since late 2022, and they are now supporting over 250 elders and families each week.

At Addison Road's Camperdown Food Pantry, demand for food has increased 32 per cent in the past year. Though social housing tenants from Camperdown, Waterloo and Redfern make up most of their customers, they are increasingly seeing low-income workers whose capacity to buy food has decreased as their rents have increased, including nurses.

Up until a few months ago, St Canice's Kitchen in Kings Cross regularly fed up to 130 people a day. That number has now increased to between 160 and 220 a day, and they are anticipating 300 a day by the end of the year. They want to expand their services to provide take away meals for people when they are closed on Sundays and Public Holidays, but they are already struggling to keep up with demand.

Food relief organisations rely on a mix of surplus and discounted food to ensure they meet the nutritional requirements of the people they serve. They also need transport, storage and equipment to collect and deliver the food at a low temperature in accordance with food safety requirements. This all costs money, and yet government funding and personal donations for food relief organisations are down, resulting in significant funding shortfalls and an inability to meet demand.

I share the disappointment of food relief organisations that the Federal Government ignored their pleas for help in this year's budget. I also share their hope that the NSW Government will step up when they deliver their budget in September, noting last year's Parliamentary Inquiry into Food Production and Supply in NSW urged the Government to introduce ongoing funding programs for food relief organisations.

The City is currently developing a Sustainable Food Systems Policy and Action Plan that will enable us to work collaboratively with stakeholders and prioritise actions to address food insecurity in a wholistic way across the City of Sydney. This will consider areas including resilience, economic participation, growing food in cities, indigenous food systems governance, and community programs and education. The Policy and Action Plan will be ready for Council and community consideration early in 2024.

However, our neighbours who are currently going hungry cannot wait. They need help now. This is why I am asking the Chief Executive Officer to consider what emergency financial support can we provide to food relief organisations as they seek to feed people across the City of Sydney. I also intend to write to the Prime Minister, Treasurer, NSW Premier and NSW Treasurer asking them to join us in providing financial support to alleviate hunger across our respective jurisdictions.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

(A) Council note:

(i) in the City of Sydney, food waste makes up 14 per cent of commercial waste and 35 per cent of domestic waste. This represents more than 95,000 tonnes of food waste each year going to landfill, generating the equivalent of 200,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions;

(ii) redirecting surplus food to those in need is an important step we can take to reduce emissions while also ensuring every person in the City has enough food to eat;

(iii) during Covid, the City spent $3.1 million, and worked with over 60 businesses and community organisations, on food relief;

(iv) food relief organisations are reporting a significant increase in demand for free food, with a number of employed people on low incomes seeking food relief for the first time; and

(v) to the best of our knowledge, the Federal and NSW Governments are yet to commit to new funding for food relief organisations amid the current cost-of-living crisis;

(B) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to investigate options for financial support for food relief organisations operating in the City of Sydney and report back to Council; and

(C) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to the Prime Minister, Treasurer, NSW Premier and NSW Treasurer asking them to provide urgent and ongoing financial support for food relief organisations amid the cost-of-living crisis.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor