

2023/24

IMPACT REPORT

A year during an ongoing
cost-of-living crisis
supporting food banks

**citizens
advice**

Shropshire

SFPA
Shropshire Food
Poverty Alliance



The Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance 2018-2023

The Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance (SFPA) was formed in 2018 in the face of growing levels of food poverty being seen across Shropshire. The SFPA's membership includes various Shropshire organisations including, Citizens Advice Shropshire, Age UK Shropshire Telford and Wrekin, Shropshire Council, Marches Energy Agency, The Trussell Trust Area Manager, The Diocese of Hereford and

many of the county's food banks. In the first 5 years the alliance developed; a Menu for Action, researched child's food poverty, submitted successful funding bids to bring more resource to the county to tackle the issue, supported food aid providers and worked to embed poverty in local council and NHS policy.

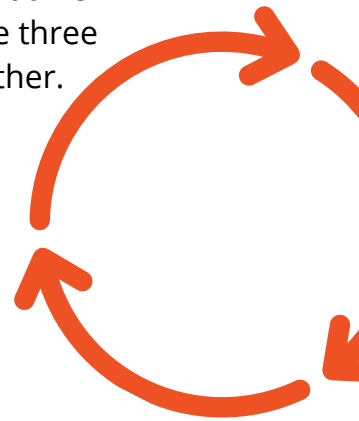
This report will be covering the impact the SFPA has had in 2023/24. The year has seen a change in the full-time co-ordinator position, meaning there were months in which no co-ordinator was in post.

Core areas of work:

- Prevention
- Changing the policy landscape
- Crisis support

In our previous reports we have discussed our work in these three specific channels. Whilst this is still what we use when thinking and planning future work this year has seen a much more holistic view when approaching our work as an Alliance. As impact of cost-of-living it is now more evident, these 3 work streams are more important than ever.

As the cost-of-living crisis has continued and we face increasing households moving deeper into poverty our thinking has shifted. It is important that we recognise the interplay these three channels have with one another.



Context of 2023/24

In 2023/24 the SFPAs were working against a backdrop of increasing levels of food insecurity:



The Trussell Trust revealed that 14% of all UK adults had experienced food insecurity



The Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that more than 1 in 5 people in the UK (22%) were in poverty in 2021/22 – 14.4 million people.



The Times reported that thousands of people across the UK were hospitalised for malnutrition and its related conditions. This has quadrupled since 2007/08.

Change of focus

This year has seen a shift within the SFPA. With a change in co-ordinator and the ongoing financial pressures on people the SFPA has become more explicitly about the factors *causing* food poverty.

This means looking at why someone is in need of a food parcel and understanding the drivers of this situation. As such we have updated our vision, aims and principles.

We continue to work closely with the Shropshire Good Food Partnership under their Healthy food for all workstream, which includes wider community food projects.

This year the SFPA want to place emphasis on the drivers of poverty. This focusing of our work has meant we have updated our vision, aims, and principles.

Our Vision

Everyone in Shropshire should:

- Have access to sufficient, healthy food
- Have an income able to afford a healthy diet
- Live in county without the need for food banks.



Our Aims

- To learn from and offer support to those affected by food poverty, ensuring their voices lead the way.
- To put an end to food poverty across Shropshire, ensuring no one is left hungry.
- To enhance the availability of and access to affordable, healthy food for everyone.
- To provide high-quality, effective emergency crisis support, preventing hunger.
- To ensure food poverty is recognized and addressed on both local and national policy agendas.
- To continuously research and monitor the state of food poverty in Shropshire, adapting our strategies to meet emerging needs.



Our Principles

At the heart of our initiative are core principles that guide our actions and strategies:

- Work in collaboration with existing organisations.
- Building on work already done.
- Build from grassroots, rather than top down.
- Work in and create an environment where people feel safe.
- Work directed by the people we work with, not decided for them.

With our new aims and objectives we are clear that food banks are not a long-term solution to food poverty. Whilst they have a need to exist they should be supported and provide a good, dignified service to people. We are working t

towards a county in which foodbanks are not needed. This involves communities working together to address health inequalities, raising awareness of rural poverty and ensuring residents are maximising their incomes wherever possible.



Prevention

The SFPA has spent a significant amount of time this year on projects which aim to prevent people needing to access crisis food. Since the pandemic we have observed an increase in the number of households in Shropshire in a negative budget.

A negative budget is one in which people who, despite expert advice, do not have enough money to cover their essential bills. For people in this situation, cutting back on food is often the first response and pushes them towards food banks. For people in this situation preventative work is incredibly

difficult and for our front line partners it often poses an intractable problem.

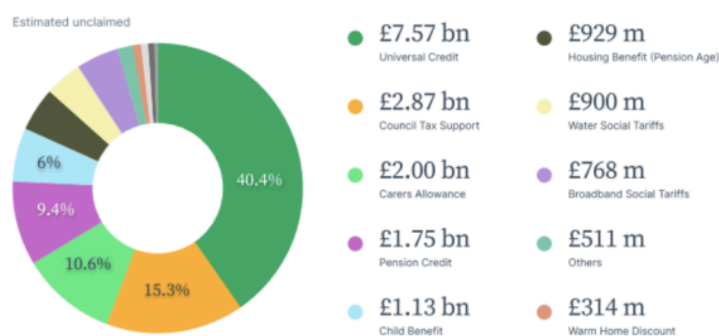
As such our work in this area has been focused on income maximisation. How can we, in the system, help people to get access to benefits, financial, or debt advice. For some clients there may not be a benefit to which they are eligible and unfortunately they are forced to rely on emergency food support. But there are clients for whom there is further support out there. We cannot fix the issue of benefit payment amounts nor of deep poverty however we can try to stem the demand which is so strong on food banks.

Income Maximisation

As part of our work to change the policy landscape the SFPA wrote a report on the current workings of food banks in Shropshire (we will go into this further in the next section). One of our recommendations from this work has been a focus on income maximisation.

In 2023 Policy in Practice published their research, and methodology, in which they revealed that £19 billion of support is unclaimed in the UK every year. The SFPA, with Citizens Advice Shropshire, then used this methodology to look at the amount of unclaimed benefits in

£19 billion estimated unclaimed value by benefit



Source: "Missing out: £19 billion of support goes unclaimed each year" - Policy in Practice, April 2023

Shropshire. Our calculations revealed a large amount of unclaimed benefits in Shropshire.

The SFPA, working with Citizens Advice Shropshire and the Shaping Places team have been highlighting the benefits of Income Maximisation to organisations across our local system. We have contributed to communications and training sessions to encourage organisations to talk to residents about seeking advice

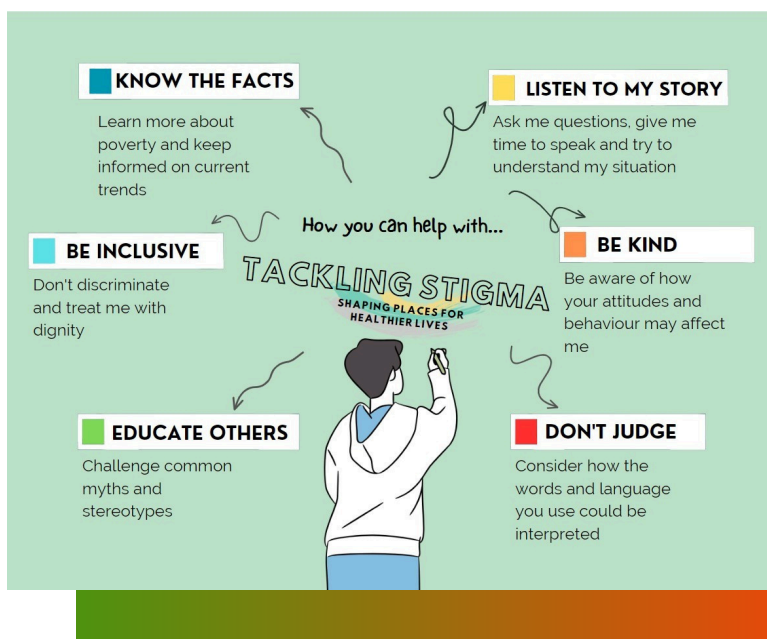
To support our work around Income maximisation we have updated the entire Shropshire Larder website. The site now contains up to date information and is more aesthetically modern and professional looking. We have worked with the DWP locally to get the Shropshire Larder on the referral slips given out by job centres in Shropshire.

Ask, Assist, Act

Alongside our work on income maximisation the SFPA has been working with Shaping Places for Healthier Lives (SPHL) towards getting advice and benefits information out to wider audiences.

SPHL is a 3 year partnership project between Shropshire Council, Citizens Advice Shropshire and SFPA, which focuses on food insecurity in the South West of the county. The project is supported by the Health Foundation in partnership with the Local Government Association.

This means that more and more people are directed to our resource. Meaning that the information on the website is all the more important. This has meant the Shropshire Larder has become a more effective resource for all our key partners.



We have been working with the SPHL team to share information about the benefits of income maximisation to different audiences.



Work with churches

As part of our prevention work this year, the SFPA has begun working with representatives from both the Diocese of Hereford and Lichfield. This work has been around how churches can act as a place of support for people facing food insecurity.

The rural nature of Shropshire means that often churches are still a key centre of community life in villages and towns.

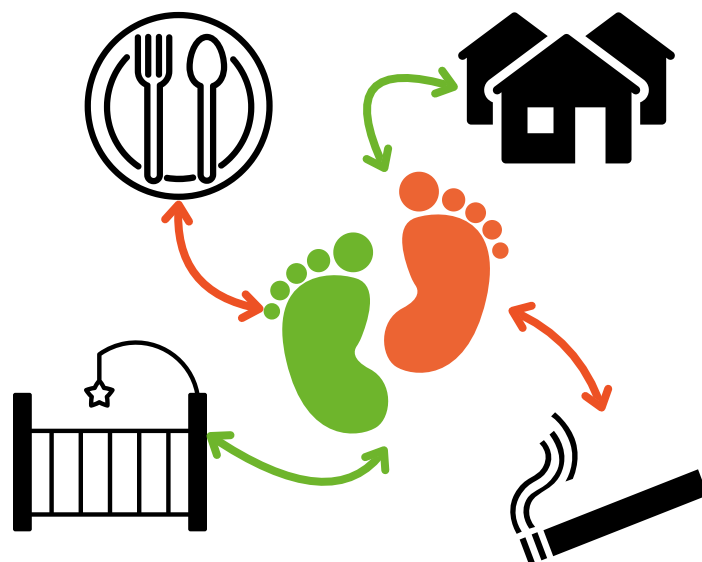


Our work with the Dioceses has been focused on the various ways in which churches could assist their communities facing food insecurity. Whether this is through exploring starting their own foodbank, starting a community growing scheme or community meal, or talking to local people about income maximisation. We will be holding a webinar to interested churches and the work will likely extend into the next year.

Infant and Child Mortality

This year SFPA has been invited to take part in wider discussions about the impact food poverty has on health outcomes. We were invited by the Integrated Care System to take part in a working group focusing on infant and child mortality. Low income is associated with poorer health outcomes and comorbidities. In Shropshire there has been a slight rise in child mortality, which has been associated with deprivation.

In Shropshire there has been a rise in child deaths, whilst not huge, it has become a focus of the ICB. As part of this work the SFPA has been invited to the working group focusing on this problem.



Housing, nutrition, parental smoking, and sleeping environment are all factors which all contribute to infant mortality.

The work is in its initial stages but already SFPA is in discussion with SaTH about how to get the relevant information into food banks. We have also taken on this work on behalf of the VCSA board, representing the VCSA views at the child mortality working group.

Changing the policy landscape

This area of our work is centred around local policy and advocacy work that the SFPA is engaged in. Here there is also a greater focus on partnership working around shared goals and awareness raising.

Report on food banks

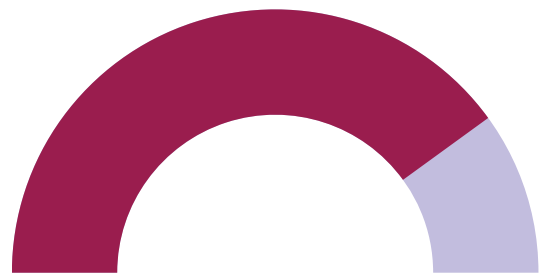
In October the SFPA researched and published a report on foodbanks in Shropshire. The report highlighted that Shropshire foodbanks were seeing an increase in demand for their services, but that some were seeing a fall in food donations. The report also shared Citizens Advice Shropshire data which demonstrated that 80% of people getting advice in foodbanks had long term health condition or disability. This report has provided local data which has proved very useful when talking to local decision makers about the reality of the experience of people in Shropshire in need of food support.



We presented this report at:

- The GP Board
- The Health and Wellbeing Board
- Shropshire Integrated Place Partnership Board
- Healthy Lives Group

We demonstrated the links between health and food poverty. In these presentations we raised the actions that health professionals can take. For example, we have now got the 'Worrying About Money Leaflet into four more GP



80% of those attending a food bank have a long term health condition or disability.

surgeries across the county, and raised the profile of the Shropshire Larder website to health professionals. It was also an opportunity for the SFPA to work with new and different organisations.

Partnership Working

The SFPA regularly attends key local groups, we are there to make sure that food poverty and its causes are on the agenda of Shropshire's decision makers. We keep up-to-date with both national and local issues which means we are a respected authority on issues surrounding food poverty.

This year our main focus in terms of partnership working has been on the impact of negative budgets, the need to focus on income maximisation and changes to the benefits system. This year we have seen the roll out of Universal Credit Migration in Shropshire. This means that a large number of Shropshire residents will need to reapply for benefits. The SFPA have prioritised work in this area as any household failing to reapply for benefits may end up falling into food poverty, increasing pressure on Shropshire food banks.

Membership of key groups:

- Social Taskforce
- Hardship and Poverty Group
- Cost-of-living Communications
- Healthy Lives Steering Group
- VCSA Board
- Trauma Informed Steering Group
- Shropshire Good Food Partnership Advisory Group
- Money Advice Forum
- Holiday Activities and Food Stakeholders' Group
- Homelessness Forum



Crisis Support

The SFPA coordinator has visited all the foodbanks across the county to meet with their teams and understand how they support residents and the challenges they are facing

Continued support to food banks

The SFPA holds meetings with 15 food banks across Shropshire and just over the border in Worcestershire. These meetings are unique in bringing together these organisations at a meeting which allows peer support for those who run food banks. It also allows the SFPA an ongoing source of information about what food banks across Shropshire are facing. The trends that food banks are seeing, and the real time impacts of policies such as cost-of-living payments.



Key elements of SFPA support for food banks:



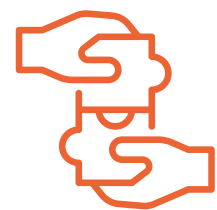
Peer Support



Signposting



Training



Partnerships

This year at our bi monthly meetings we have had training and talks on: safeguarding from Partners in Care, mental health training offers from the Qube and the Samaritans, partnership offers from the Shropshire Fire and Rescue and the Reset team, and updates from the Marches Energy Agency.

Feedback from food banks about the support SFPA offers

"The support given to food banks in Shropshire is invaluable. The meetings are an excellent opportunity to network with other rural food banks. The SFPA is great at keeping us up to date with other advice and support available in Shropshire that we can tap in to. Communication is excellent."

Cleobury Mortimer Food Bank

"I find the Shropshire regional food bank meetings extremely helpful. I enjoy meeting fellow foodbank organisers and am impressed with the amount of work going on in our county. Often, I find inspiration at these meetings, and have been able to tailor new ideas to our food bank. The visiting speakers we have are also very helpful, and we have recently benefited from a workshop held by the Samaritans. Thank you to Helen and the team for facilitating these meetings"

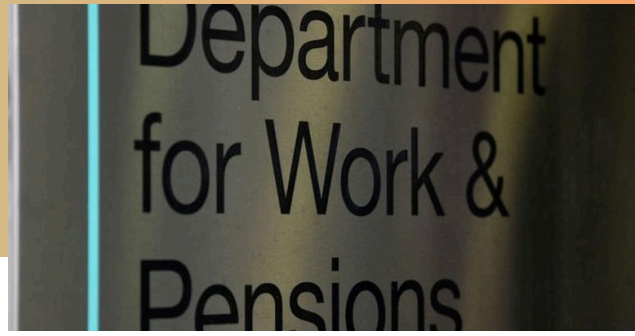
Ludlow Food Bank

"The meetings for the SFPA foodbanks are of real value in many respects. The invited speakers give us a much broader view of what is going on in the county and what is available to access for the foodbank; clients and volunteers. Of particular benefit is being able to interact with the other foodbanks - to air problems and get advice on solutions that other foodbanks have come up with and to get a sense of the levels of demand across the count. Without this useful point of contact i think small foodbanks such as Craven Arms get a bit isolated and may not come up with the best answers to problems."

Craven Arms Food Bank

"The SFPA is a valuable resource for foodbanks. Its independence means that it can work with all foodbanks in the locality. The organisation also offers a broader view of what is happening throughout the county and country in respect of food poverty. Beyond this it brings together a broad range of organisations that support the community and this is to the advantage of all those organisations and a subsequent benefit to our colleagues and clients."

Barnabas Food Bank, Shrewsbury



Key issues for the year ahead

Challenges and opportunities for the SFPA in the year ahead

An election year

Currently with no date for an election announced there is uncertainty around what changes in policy we might see over the next 12 months for people living on low incomes and those experiencing food insecurity.

Benefits changes

The government have announced a wide range of changes to the benefits system. Primarily the changes in how health conditions, especially mental conditions, are treated under the benefits system. Firstly, Universal Credit will be changing so that the 'limited capability' for work element will be scrapped instead replaced by the 'health element'. Simultaneously, the government is proposing restrictions and a tightening of the rules surrounding Personal Independence Payments. There are also proposed changes to the 'fit note' system which may mean being granted a fit note will be harder for people. The SFPA will continue to monitor these changes closely, as any changes to the benefits system for people with long term health conditions is likely to impact foodbank clients

Food banks in schools

Bristol University has published research which shows there are more food banks in schools than outside of them. This is something that we do not have data on in Shropshire. Going forward this is something the SFPA wants to investigate and research.