

# Emergency Food Network statement on the cost of living crisis



**Lewes District Emergency Food Network are a coalition of eight community organisations supporting people in poverty who rely on us for food.**

In 2021, research from Sheffield University found that 3% of people living in Lewes District had experienced hunger, because they did not have enough to eat. 8% had struggled to access sufficient food and 1 in 10 adults had worried about having enough food.

Anecdotal evidence from our network tells us that these figures have risen substantially in the past year and are set to continue to rise as the cost of living crisis deepens this year.

In 2021 our network provided over 500 households a week with emergency food parcels. During the last two years of the pandemic volunteers across the district have gone to extraordinary lengths to feed people through a very difficult time. We are alarmed at what will happen this year as energy prices increase and food prices continue to rise. We are concerned that we will not be able to cope with the increase in demand for our support.

"Foodbanks are not 'normal' and should never become acceptable as so. It is still shocking that so many people find they have no other option than to turn to what is in the main, a group of volunteers to help them survive. Children are going hungry and people are at their wits end and it is as a direct result of a benefits system that is inadequate at best and ultimately is trapping more and more people in a spiral of debt and insecurity." – Debbie Twitchen, Landport Foodbank

For a long time, the narrative has been that people choose between heating or eating – we are now in the situation where people can't afford to do either, as benefit levels or low, insecure wages simply do not meet household living costs. We in the community sector cannot continue to be the only line of defence in preventing people from experiencing malnutrition. People need income levels that allow them to meet their basic needs.

Crucially, it is not just one group that are experiencing poverty. Day in day out we are seeing people of all ages and backgrounds who are at risk of malnutrition, homelessness, poor educational attainment, mental and physical health breakdown.

**In March, the government announced that they were allocating another £500 million to the household support fund. We want to start a conversation about what action can be taken in Lewes District to support people at risk of experiencing hunger. We want to build on the amazing work that has already been done, and ensure that we are taking pro-active steps to build community resilience, rather than simply funding the emergency efforts of food banks.**

Food banks see people week in week out who are in deep and ongoing poverty. Volunteers are becoming burnt out and increasingly anxious that they will not be able to support the increased numbers in need in the months ahead. There needs to be a joined up response that reduces the pressure on these services, rather than embedding them in our communities.

"Increasingly we are hearing from people with disabilities who are unable to leave their homes and who are experiencing food & fuel insecurity – unable to properly heat their homes and buy sufficient food. People aren't just looking for a sticking plaster, they want a long term solution and a place where they can get a hot meal and meet with friends, free from the stigma of poverty." – Stef Lake, Seahaven Community Food, SCDA

"I still believe there is some sort of stigma attached to having to use the foodbank and a lot of people who are entitled and who should use it, [but] don't." – Foodbank User

## **Lewes District Emergency Food Network would like to see:**

- Vouchers for food, fuel and other essential living costs distributed at a district and borough level
- A simple application process that does not exclude those people who do not have internet access
- An information leaflet letting people know what financial support is available, to be distributed eg. via emergency food providers, schools, health visitors and CAB
- Further funding for projects that build community resilience, such as affordable food schemes, social eating programmes and community growing projects

Additionally we ask that a food poverty action plan is developed at a district level, to prioritise actions that will lift people out of poverty and reduce people's concerns about how they will afford sufficient food and fuel. As part of this, we should surely challenge the role that food banks, informal food aid, pantries etc have ended up playing in plugging the gaps in the welfare state. We must understand the risks and implications of this informal safety net held together by volunteers, with a reliance on surplus food via organisations such as FareShare.

**Yours sincerely,**

### **Lewes District Emergency Food Network**

Fitzjohns Foodbank, Lewes

Havens Community Hub, Denton

Landport Foodbank, Lewes

Malling Foodbank, Lewes

Newhaven Baptist Church, Newhaven

Ringmer Foodbank, Ringmer

Seahaven Community Food (SCDA),  
Newhaven & Peacehaven

Seahaven Storehouse, Seaford



**With thanks to Brighton & Hove Food Partnership & Sheffield University**