

## DEVIZES AND DISTRICT FOODBANK'S COMMUNITY ORGANISER AND CAMPAIGNS MANAGER'S ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

Devizes and District Foodbank has been part of the Trussell Trust's Organising and Local Mobilisation scheme for almost two years, since June 2022. At its core, this scheme is about listening to the community about what is contributing to financial hardship and food bank need locally, and how we can come together to change this. It has been great to speak to so many people in the areas served by the food bank over the last year. Thank you to everyone who has spoken to the Community Organiser about their experiences of financial hardship, and how they want to work towards a UK where no-one is in the position of needing to use a food bank.

The last year has seen local people brought together to challenge issues that are affecting their ability to afford the basics we all need, such as food, heating, clothing and electricity. This includes over 30 people living on the waterways in Wiltshire and across the UK who formed a team called UK Boaters for Energy Justice. This team is calling for the inclusion of all boaters in support given to everyone in England, Scotland and Wales by the UK Government in 2022 and 2023 for rising energy bills. Some boaters received this support later in 2023, but others with certain types of mooring did not, leaving some households unable to heat their boats or buy food for their families as fuel prices rose steeply. The actions and media coverage of the campaigning team led to Wiltshire Council's Public Health team implementing a £200,000 fund for boaters who hadn't received other support, which reached over 400 boaters in Wiltshire with either £600 cash or shopping vouchers, or £200 if they'd previously received Winter fuel support through Julian House. Boaters worked with the Public Health team and Community Organiser to facilitate and distribute this fund, which has had a major impact in allowing households to afford fuel and food. Our campaign [petition](#) for the UK Government will be handed into Downing Street by Boaters alongside a meeting with MPs.

Through collective action, this group continues to challenge one of the drivers of hardship and food bank need locally. Another team working hard in 2023-24 was the group of parents, guardians and carers calling for Affordable Uniform costs.

School uniform can cost between £300 and £500 a year per child, and this cost can push families towards debt or being unable to afford other essentials, and can impact learning if children aren't able to access affordable uniform. After the campaigning team's Affordable Uniform Pledge for Wiltshire, calling on schools to limit branded items amongst other things, Wiltshire Council launched their Affordable Schools Strategy in September 2023. This strategy covers aspects of the school day such as uniform, provision of free school meals, activities and trips. So far, there are around 30 active schools receiving resources and networking on affordability, to benefit all families.

Finally, a new campaign launched in 2024 is seeking to change the fact that 98% of social housing properties nationally are fully unfurnished, without carpets, flooring or curtains. New tenants face costs of hundreds of pounds to make properties liveable, or have to go without the items we all need for insulation, privacy, safety and dignity. National Citizens Advice data shows that social housing tenants are more likely to need support from food banks than people with other tenures, and a group of tenants will be raising awareness of this issue and working with social housing providers to make sure people move into homes not empty shells.


**YOU'RE INVITED!**

If you're living in social housing in Wiltshire, you're invited to a free event in Devizes to discuss how to make sure properties come with flooring, carpets, curtain poles, blinds and the bare essentials needed to make a house a home.

Tea, coffee and a wide range of snacks will be provided, and there'll be a chance to share stories of empty houses and come up with solutions with a trained, qualified campaign organiser.

Please come along to protect households, including families, from being moved into empty houses with huge costs to repaint, recarpet and make liveable.

Contact Alex on [alex@devizesanddistrict.foodbank.org.uk](mailto:alex@devizesanddistrict.foodbank.org.uk) or 07483 377346 to say you're coming or to share your story. This event is being organised by Devizes and District Foodbank's Community Organiser

 For more information on this event and the movement to make empty houses into homes, follow our Facebook page, An Empty House Isn't a Home

**ST JAMES CENTRE, DEVIZES  
SN10 1LR, 6:30-7:40PM  
TUESDAY 21ST MAY**

2023-24 has been a busy year, alongside continuing to support the Trussell Trust's Guarantee our Essentials campaign making sure Universal Credit is enough to live off for the six million people receiving it in the UK. This Summer will see a new Guarantee our Essentials campaign activity, Laying It All Out on the Table, where people in the community write down the impact of insufficient social security payments, and their hopes for the future, on tablecloths, which will be shared with Prospective Parliamentary Candidates and decision-makers.

Thank you to everyone who has been involved so far, and please get in touch if you'd like to hear more.

*Alex Montegriffo, Community Organiser and Campaigns Manager, May 2024*

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