

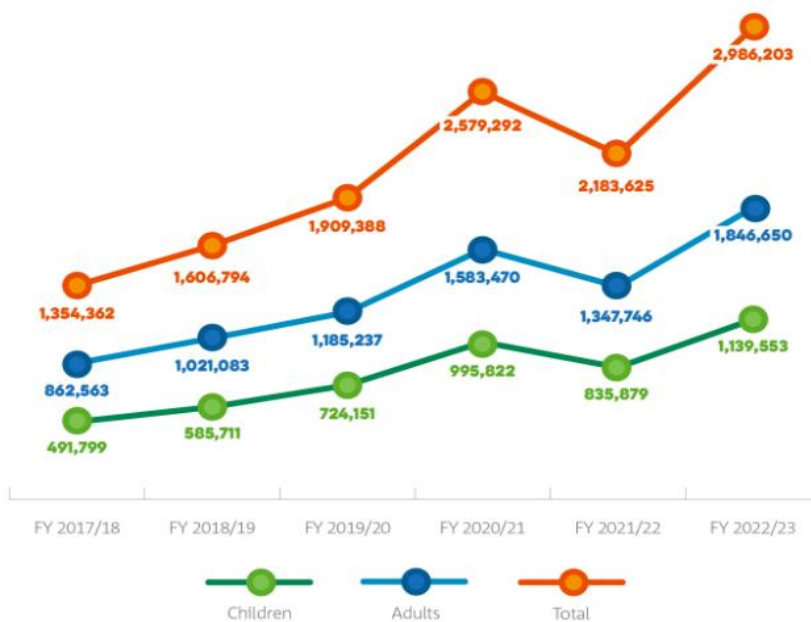
Update for Devizes Area Board meeting Monday 19<sup>th</sup> June 2023

Community Organiser and Campaigns Manager, Devizes and District Foodbank

Alex Montegriffo; alex@devizesanddistrict.foodbank.org.uk

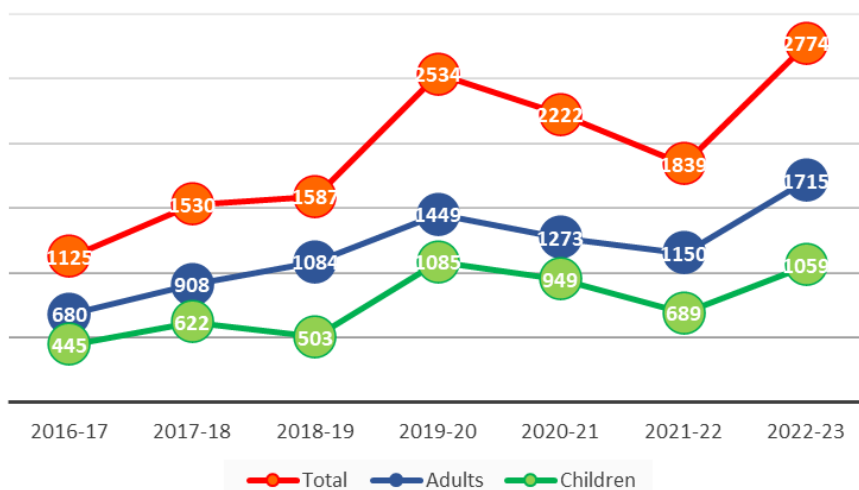
- The Trussell Trust released their end of year statistics for 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, showing that more emergency food parcels had been given out than ever before, at close to 3 million (2,986,203), over a million of which were for children (1,139,553). In the same year, 760,000 people used a food bank for the first time.

Number of emergency food parcels given by food banks in the Trussell Trust network in the last years



This roughly matches the data released for Devizes and District Foodbank, where more people were supported than ever before in 2022-23, as demonstrated below.

Number of people supported at DDFB over time



- Devizes and District Foodbank recently began a Financial Inclusion project with Citizens Advice Wiltshire (CAW), where clients of the food bank with a voucher can pick up boxes from the St James' Centre in Devizes, and speak to a CAW worker. This aims to help clients work through the issues that are causing them to need a food bank, such as debt or not having all the benefits they are eligible for, and provides much-needed in person support. CAW workers started at the St James' Centre on 1<sup>st</sup> June.
- Other ongoing projects for the Community Organising side of Devizes and District Foodbank are the Wiltshire Food Collaborative, which had its second meeting in May, with 18 organisations or departments represented across Wiltshire (the mailing list has over 50 organisations).

It was decided to adopt the following as an introduction to the group:

*The Wiltshire Food Collaborative is a group of food providers and distributors, charitable organisations, community groups, and public sector representatives across Wiltshire, coming together to work holistically and collaboratively to ensure secure access to food in the county through:*

1. Emergency food provision,
2. Projects to increase incomes, and
3. The removal of other barriers to nutrition.

*The collaborative was formed in response to the rising need for emergency food support in 2022/23. It functions to provide practical support for food-based organisations, to allow for networking so that service-users are fully supported, and to utilise collaborative work to increase food security through various routes.*

The Collaborative especially aims to provide a network for small, rural and/or independent food-based organisations. Member organisations can decide their goals and level of involvement in the group, e.g. information gathering, attending meetings and networking, using the Collaborative to implement local projects, or working across the county on food and financial security projects, for example. The full Terms of Reference are [here](#).

Any organisation wishing to get involved can email Alex on [alex@devizesanddistrict.foodbank.org.uk](mailto:alex@devizesanddistrict.foodbank.org.uk).

- The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) ran a campaign day on Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> May called 'Claim Your Energy Voucher Day', targeted at households on prepayment meters who have not yet claimed their Energy Bills Support Scheme (EBSS) vouchers. £160 million of these paper, email or text vouchers, at £400 per household, have not been claimed at a registered store. There are [resources](#) available to raise awareness of this campaign, before **vouchers expire on 30<sup>th</sup> June**.
- The Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding (EBSS AF) portal closed on 31<sup>st</sup> May, meaning households not connected to mains electricity who did not automatically receive the EBSS, can no longer apply for this fund. This is despite the fact that many people living on houseboats have been unable to receive the £400, while fuel, license fees and mooring fees have all risen. Houseboats with a continuous cruising license were explicitly excluded, but houseboats with a permanent non-residential mooring, such as a marina, should have either been included or guidance should have been clearer about their eligibility for the fund.

If the fund was only available for people living off-grid but paying Council Tax, e.g. houseboats with a permanent residential mooring, then this should have been made clear from the start, rather than cause stress and upset to Boaters moored at marinas or other non-residential locations.

Boaters at Caen Hill Marina, for example, have reported significant price rises since 2022, with petrol and diesel prices rising by 50%, Liquid Petroleum Gas by 40%, and solid fuels also rising in price (e.g. a bag of coal from £9 to £16, and a bag of wood from £5 to up to £30). License fees have risen by a total of 17% from April 2022, and electricity at the marina has gone from 19p to 43p per kWh. Some Boaters have calculated spending £100 a week during the winter to heat and live on their boats. The impacts on mental and physical health cannot be stressed enough, with many Boaters struggling not just with a lack of income to afford the essentials, but also the uncertainty around if they could receive funds, and feelings of being excluded despite paying significant amounts to organisations such as marinas and the Canal and River Trust.

Danny Kruger is meeting with Boaters at the marina on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> June to hear their concerns, and Boaters, or any interested individuals, are being invited to write to their local newspapers on the topic with [this](#) template letter. Local newspapers have also been invited to write articles, and research will form the basis for a report, which MPs can pass onto the DESNZ, who distributed the EBSS AF. Because of a lack of support, some Boaters are having to use a food bank, with a subsequent loss of dignity.

- A poll of 18 families in Devizes suggests that the average annual cost of school uniform is £200-300, including shoes, bags and coats, which is a huge amount for a family on a low income, or even a family on a higher income. This cost is one part of the reason people are having to use a food bank in Devizes, with CAW advisors reporting families going into debt or worse debt, or cutting back on other bills to be able to afford uniform. A [report](#) from the Children's Society outlines the impacts of the high cost of uniform, including the above and also children wearing ill-fitting or unclean uniform, and impacts on school choice.

The UK Government have released two lots of guidance on the cost of uniform in light of the Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms Act in 2021, one [statutory](#) and one [non-statutory](#). Schools should have responded to this act by September 2022, including adopting guidance such as:

- Schools should keep the use of branded items to a minimum.
- A school's uniform policy should be published on the school's website, be available for all parents, including parents of prospective pupils, and be easily understood.
- Schools should ensure that their uniform supplier arrangements give the highest priority to cost and value for money (including the quality and durability of the garment).
- Single supplier contracts should be avoided unless regular tendering competitions are run where more than one supplier can compete for the contract and where the best value for money is secured. This contract should be retendered at least every 5 years.

- Schools should ensure that second-hand uniforms are available for parents to acquire. Information on second-hand uniforms should be clear for parents of current and prospective pupils and published on the school's website.
- Schools should engage with parents and pupils when they are developing their school uniform policy.

An ongoing campaign involves sharing this guidance with local schools and educational trusts, and asking families or people with links to schools to start a conversation about the cost of school uniform, including with this [template letter](#). There have also been discussions with Wiltshire Council about adopting a school uniform affordability pledge, which schools can sign once they have made uniform more affordable. Anyone wishing to get involved should contact Alex with the details above.

- The fourth tranche of the Household Support Fund (£5.5 million to be given out by Wiltshire Council from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024) has been passed over to the Public Health department to distribute, from the Revenues and Benefits department. A question for this board is how to make sure this fund directly benefits people in need in Wiltshire in a way that is dignified, and allows for choice and flexibility in the face of a wide range of costs and pressures, such as food, fuel, communications, transport, clothes and school uniform, unexpected costs like white goods, and Council Tax and other bills. The Public Health department are using an evidence-based method to distribute the fund, but direct payments to people in need are no longer being made. These payments caused a significant workload for the council, but the fund still needs to have a direct impact on the people it is designed to support, including helping them not to need emergency food provision by increasing their income or giving wrap-around support and advice.
- The Trussell Trust are continuing to engage with the UK Government and local decision-makers on their [Essentials Guarantee](#) campaign, ensuring that the social security system has embedded in it the guarantee that it will be enough for everyone to afford the essentials. Research by Trussell Trust and Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that the average single person over 25 needs £120 a week for the bare essentials, however the basic rate of UC is just £85 a week for this age group, before any deductions or sanctions. Anyone who is interested in this national campaign can use the above link to find out more and take action to address one of the main causes of rising food bank use, low income because of failings in the social security system.