

Devizes and District Foodbank

Update for Devizes Area Board meeting 6th March 2023

- Devizes and District Foodbank supported over 2500 people from January to December 2022, which is more than since the food bank opened in 2007.
- On the community organising side, the first meeting of the Feeding Wiltshire Partnership, a collective of food-based organisations across Wiltshire, was held at the end of January. The aim of this partnership is to work collaboratively to address food insecurity in Wiltshire, similar to partnerships in Salisbury and Swindon. Quarterly meetings will be held on different practical and policy-based topics. If you are a food-based, or adjacent, organisation, and would like to get involved, please email alex@devizesanddistrict.foodbank.org.uk.
- A round table discussion was held between Danny Kruger MP, local voluntary sector organisations (VSOs), and members of Devizes community in mid-February. This collaborative discussion on the Cost of Living covered topics such as:
 - The potential exclusion of people living on itinerant houseboats from the Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Fund, the £400 payment from the Government towards energy bills for households that do not have a direct relationship with domestic energy suppliers (also including van dwellers). If houseboats are not included in this fund, they will have to apply for a different fund through Wiltshire Council instead. Danny Kruger offered to continue asking BEIS, the Government department responsible for the fund, to make sure it informed houseboaters how to apply for the payment by 27th February. It was also raised that the Canal and River Trust has a database of all houseboats paying license fees, so the £400 could be taken off of license fees.
 - Barriers to accessing local support such as Local Welfare Provision, including complex forms; and the general inflexibility of the social security system, including the five week wait for Universal Credit (UC), the effects of the taper rate on people not working full-time, and the effect of sanctions for missing UC appointments that might not always be possible to attend. Attendees discussed how to make the social security system more holistic, person-centred and localised, for example trialling collaboration between Jobcentres, GPs, schools and VSOs, similar to the Homes and Money Hub of [Barking and Dagenham](#), but on a smaller scale.
 - Cash-first approaches to support schemes, which provide dignity and agency, and allow a choice of what the money is used for, unlike vouchers and goods. The idea of trust towards recipients was also mentioned as an important effect of cash-first schemes. This could be applied to Local Welfare Provision, and has already been put in place

for the current Household Support Fund, some of which was given out as bank transfers. The suggestion of a cash-first Local Welfare Provision scheme was raised at the last Area Board meeting in December. Danny Kruger offered to raise in Parliament the possibility of more funding for the Household Support Fund, which is more flexible and localised in its uses, and can be given out as cash.

- VSOs attending were Devizes and District Foodbank, Age UK, Citizens Advice, Sustainable Devizes and Devizes Opendoors. **If you are a VSO and would like to be involved in the future planning of projects to address the above issues, please contact Alex Montegriffo on alex@devizesanddistrict.foodbank.org.uk.**

- As part of an ongoing campaign around school uniform affordability, school uniform swap shops have been set up in Devizes, in the Children's Centre, and at regular events held by Sustainable Devizes. These are available for any family to take or give good quality, pre-loved uniform. Work with schools is ongoing to ensure uniform is affordable in the first place, so any school governors or trusts that are interested in being involved in the conversation should contact the above email address.