

IMPACT REPORT



2022/23

March 2023

The SFPA 2018-2023

The Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance (SFPA) came into being in 2018 in response to growing concerns across the county about the levels of food poverty being seen in communities. The SFPA's membership includes various Shropshire based 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. The paid resource of the SFPA has consisted of a funded coordinator role (initially part-time, now a full-time post) which has had ad-hoc support from a few short-term funding pots on specific projects. During the 5 years it has been established the SFPA has developed a [Menu For Action](#) for tackling food poverty in the county, [supported grass roots community action](#), carried out several local research projects (of which [children's food poverty was a year-long theme of research](#)) to better understand the issue of food poverty in Shropshire, 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 cover what has been achieved by the SFPA since its move to Citizens Advice Shropshire in April 2022 (The SFPA was initially hosted by the food waste charity Shrewsbury Food Hub).

A year with unique challenges

We cannot talk about our work to address food insecurity in the county without first talking about the current cost-of-living crisis and the impact it has had on food insecurity levels both nationally and locally. Sadly, the current economic crisis means that food insecurity levels have risen significantly.

- Data released by the [Food Foundation in February 2023](#) shows a continued rise in food insecurity across the UK. Compared with July 2021 the figure has risen from 7.3% of UK households to 8.8% (4.7 million adults) who had experienced food insecurity in the previous month.
- [The Office for National Statistics found](#) that in the 12 months to January 2023, the output food product producer prices increased by 17.1%, their joint-highest annual rate since records began in January 1997.
- Food bank usage is at an all-time high (locally and nationally) [89% of organisations surveyed by the Independent Food Aid Network](#) saw demand increase when comparing December 2021/January 2022 with December 2022/January 2023. Ludlow Food Bank has seen its demand increase 10-fold in the 12 years it has been open (2010: 73 food parcels, 2022: 789 food parcels).

The SFPA currently has funding secured until March 2024, but the challenges presented by the current cost of living crisis will unfortunately be with us well past this date. It is crucial that the vital work of the SFPA continues.

The SFPA 2022/23

Core areas of work

Over the past year the SFPA's work have fallen under three key areas:

- Prevention
- Changing the policy landscape
- Crisis support

This report will lay out the impact made in each of these key work streams over the past year.

Prevention

With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic a large amount of the SFPA's resources was, unsurprisingly, focused on supporting crisis food provision. As restrictions eased, we had hoped to be able to shift our focus to prevention and changing the policy landscape. However, the subsequent cost-of-living crisis has meant that crisis support has still been a core focus. That being said, the SFPA has spent a significant amount of time and resource this year on projects which aim to prevent people needing to access crisis food provision. We have seen a shift in the most common reasons for people needing crisis support, from benefits delays and sanctions, to negative budgets. Or more simply put, increasingly the amount of money coming in each month is not enough to cover the essentials going out. This makes preventative work considerably more difficult, and crisis situations more challenging for our frontline partners to resolve. This stream of work has focused on creating and promoting resources which can help people to maximise their incomes where possible.

Partnership working around the cost-of-living crisis

The SFPA has been part of key local groups which look at how we can best support residents through the cost-of-living crisis including the Social Taskforce, the Hardship and Poverty group and a cost-of-living communications working group, where we have developed resources to support residents and frontline staff to navigate the challenging economic landscape. The SFPA has played a central role in bringing together local organisations to provide cost-of-living briefing sessions for frontline staff and volunteers.

Key facts and figures for cost-of-living work

- **Hosted 3 sessions in September 2022, October 2022 and February 2023, 7 different organisations presented, and we reached over 650 frontline staff and volunteers (at event or viewed on YouTube)**
- **Contributed to the development of a cost-of-living webpage, hosted on Shropshire Council's website**
- **Contributed to the development of 2 cost-of-living support leaflets and a cost-of-living check list**

Cost of living briefing sessions



350 frontline staff attended live sessions

Over 500 reached in total with recording of session



98% of people now feel better equipped to signpost people to the support available

"The course was extremely well presented and informative. Thank you to everyone, great session!"



99% of people thought the information shared in the session was relevant and helpful



"The information shared was well presented, clear and easy to understand along with covering a vast age group."



Cost of living Q&A session February 14th 2023



Over 80 frontline staff and volunteers reached from a cross section of organisations



100%

100% of those who took our feedback survey said the information shared was relevant and helpful

"Thank you for the session, brilliant help and signposting where to go. Will be sharing all the information with colleagues and friends."



93% of people now feel more confident to support people with cost of living issues

"Can't fault anything! Only positive feedback from me! Thank you."



"The SFPA has played a key role in the response to the cost-of-living crisis in Shropshire. The SFPA coordinator provided insight and knowledge via the Social Taskforce, Hardship and Poverty group and cost-of-living communications group. They took the lead in bringing together the cost-of-living briefing sessions, coordinating seven organisations to present information to over 650 frontline staff and volunteers. They also wrote and featured in a video focused on the stigma felt by food bank clients and contributed to the cost-of-living communications campaign. The contribution from the SFPA coordinator has been invaluable to the cost-of-living partnership work to support residents."

Cash-first referral leaflets

The SFPA has worked with the Independent Food Aid Network and other local organisations to co-produce a 'Worrying About Money?' leaflet for Shropshire. These leaflets form part of a national project and aim to reduce the need for charitable food aid through the creation of this resource that helps people facing financial crisis, and those supporting them, to more easily navigate the cash-first advice and support available to them locally. These leaflets are a brilliant resource within themselves but the process of creating and updating these leaflets has helped to build strong relationships with local organisations. The project has also enabled us to start conversations locally about the best, most dignified way we can support those experiencing, and at risk of, food poverty.



Cash-first referral leaflets key facts and figures

- **Over 30,000 hard copies of the leaflet distributed**
- **Launch event and training sessions run to promote the new leaflet and support frontline staff and volunteers with how to use it as a resource**
- **Online, interactive version of the leaflet developed**
- **Easy-read version of the leaflet developed**
- **Polish and Bulgarian translations of the leaflet developed**
- **Built closer links with town and parish councils by promoting the leaflet**
- **Considered 'best practice' example by the Independent Food Aid Network and have presented the work we have done in Shropshire at their AGM and cash-first conference**

Working with Shropshire Council to distribute discretionary funds in a cash-first way

The SFPA has now fed into a consultation process for three rounds of the Household Support Fund. We have contributed to the development of core-principles around how this funding should be used. Transparent, partnership working around this fund at a time where there are limited funds available locally to support vulnerable households has been crucial to ensuring we are supporting residents in the most effective and dignified way possible.

Shropshire principles for the allocation of the Household Support Fund

Preference for Cash first approach

Ease of administration

Targeted at groups most impacted

Based on what has worked well previously

Review process in place & plan B if funds underspent (meet January)

Transparent and objective criteria for allocation of grants/welfare funds

Clear understanding of how each organisation is allocating funds

A variety of places for people to access support (recognising that people will go to a place they feel comfortable)

Increasing local uptake of the Healthy Start scheme

The SFPA has worked closely with Shropshire Council's Public Health team and the Trussell Trust's area manager to increase local uptake of the Healthy Start Scheme (a government-funded scheme which provides a nutritional safety net for children under the age of 4 in low-income households). We have produced promotional materials, mapped stakeholders and done extensive promotion of the scheme through key networks. We have also highlighted the scheme through local media.

Healthy Start key facts and figures

- **Healthy Start taskforce established (prior to this no one within the Public Health team was working on Healthy Start)**
- **Healthy Start is now a metric in Shropshire's Health Inequalities Plan**
- **Local uptake has increased from 49% uptake in 2021, 64% uptake in 2023 (it should be noted that there have been ongoing issues with the centralised data collection around the Healthy Start scheme and some questions around how accurately it is currently capturing local level uptake)**

"Over the last 12 months the Shropshire Council's Public Health team have been working closely with the SFPA and the Trussell Trust to design and deliver a campaign to promote the Healthy Start Voucher scheme in Shropshire. Collectively, we recognised from the data that uptake of Healthy Start vouchers was low and identified a need to increase the knowledge and awareness of Healthy Start in our local organisations and communities. The SFPA have been instrumental in the design and delivery of this campaign, recognising that many of our eligible families will often be supported through local food banks. The campaign has been a success and we are now beginning to see the impact of our joint ongoing efforts. Public Health are grateful for the ongoing support the SFPA provide to our local communities and hope to continue to work in partnership to improve health outcomes for families in Shropshire."

Collating income maximisation information on the Shropshire Larder website

The SFPA has continued to update and maintain the Shropshire Larder, a website which brings together information which helps low-income households to maximise their incomes. This year we have fully updated the mental health and debt pages. The website does still not have the reach we would like, but more dedicated resource would make further promotion possible. We do know that key local partners also find the website a useful signposting tool.

"I use the Shropshire Larder website because it's a great resource that pulls together all the emergency food support available to clients and means I'm able to find local support quickly. The website itself is very accessible, so it's easy to read and understand where would be best for a client whilst I'm on the phone. So I'm not spending longer looking for what's available or asking supervisors which is what we used to do."

Telephone Assessor from Citizens Advice Shropshire

Shropshire Larder key facts and figures

- **Nearly 2,500 unique site visitors in the past year**
- **Over 3000 site visits in the past year**



The SFPA also produces a monthly newsletter to share key national and local updates on the issues of food poverty. This is currently circulated to 150 each month, there is scope to grow this.

Tackling stigma and increasing understanding of the implications of poverty

The stigma that is experienced by those on low-incomes is something that has come through strongly as an issue in the various pieces of local level research that the SFPA has been involved in. We know that it negatively impacts people's mental health and can prevent people coming forward for support. Unhelpful narratives around those on low-incomes can also influence the ways in which services which support vulnerable households are designed and delivered. The SFPA has worked on a variety of projects in the past year to help tackle stigma and increase understanding of the implications of poverty in people's lives.

Key projects/ work streams to tackle stigma locally include:

- **Writing the script for and presenting a video in partnership with the cost-of-living communications groups to encourage people to come forward for support.**
- **Coordinating a letter signed by over 30 Shropshire based organisations which pushes back at some of the more unhelpful narratives about those on low-incomes and asking for longer term solutions to reduce poverty. The letter was published in the Shropshire Star and sent to MPs.**

Key projects/ work streams to tackle stigma locally include (continued)

- **Worked with Citizens Advice Shropshire's Research and Campaigns Officer to carry out a piece of research to understand people's experience of accessing support in Shropshire. This involved travelling around community venues across the county with a survey and conducting various lived-experience interviews. The findings of this research will be published soon, and we will use the report to amplify the voices of those with lived experience of poverty and increase understanding locally of how it impacts people's lives.**
- **Ran a training session for the providers of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme on how to ensure that their food provision was as de-stigmatising and inclusive as possible.**
- **Attend Shropshire's Trauma Informed Steering group and advocate for the work stream to recognise that trauma can happen at all stages of life and to recognise poverty as an experience which can traumatise people.**
- **Created a Poverty Fact File for the SFPA website.**

Working closely with other key workstreams in the county

The SFPA works closely with the Shaping Places For Healthier Lives project (a 3-year funded project which looks at food insecurity in the South West of the county). This project is made possible through a successful 3-year funding bid which the SFPA was central to delivering. The SFPA continues to be closely involved with the project, offering support and guidance to help achieve common goals, particularly around the additional barriers presented by the rurality of Shropshire.

The SFPA also works closely with the Research and Campaigns team at Citizens Advice Shropshire. Most notably on the collaborative research project referenced above. By working closely with both, the SFPA is well placed to take a strategic view on where our limited resources are best spent to achieve the greatest outcomes for Shropshire residents.

Changing the policy landscape

This area of work is centred around the local policy and advocacy work that the SFPA does. Here there is also a great focus on partnership working around shared goals, relationship building and awareness raising.

Embedding food insecurity into NHS and Council policy

The SFPA regularly attends key local forums where we make sure that food poverty is on the agenda of the county's decision makers. We keep up to date with both national and local affairs which ensure we are a respected authority on the issue of food poverty. The SFPA plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between the frontline organisations it works closely with and senior figures within the local authority, making sure their voices, experiences and concerns are heard.

Membership of key groups includes:

- **Social Taskforce**
- **Hardship and Poverty Group**
- **Cost-of-Living Communications Group**
- **Healthy Lives Steering Group**
- **VCSA Board**
- **Trauma Informed Steering Group**
- **Food Partnership Steering Group and Healthy Food For All lead**
- **Money Advice Forum**
- **Holiday Activities and Food stakeholders' group**
- **Shropshire's newly established Homelessness Forum**

"Food insecurity is one of the priorities of the Shropshire Health and Wellbeing Board; we have grant funded the Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance as it is a key partner in delivering this priority, and they are a proactive member of the Healthy Lives Steering Group, whose purpose is to actively progress the different priorities.

The SFPA don't just attend these meetings. They consistently raise the profile of food poverty and the Cost of Living Crisis through infrastructure support, providing up to date, high quality information, sharing real life stories of peoples' struggles, sharing the work they are doing to tackle this difficult situation and how we as a partnership group can actively contribute to help make a difference. Sophie is amazing, and her passion shines through."

Val Cross- SFPA member and Shropshire Council's responsible officer for Shropshire's Health and Wellbeing Board.

Building awareness of key issues both with the public and among key figures across the county

When the SFPA began in 2018 food poverty was not widely recognised as an issue effecting Shropshire residents. A combination of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent cost-of-living crisis have unfortunately seen food insecurity levels increase sharply. This has however meant that nationally there has been much greater news coverage of the subject and, consequently, much greater awareness locally that this is a pressing issue. The SFPA has developed a vast network of contacts over the 5 years it has existed. This valuable network and our in-depth understanding of the local system allows us to effectively keep food poverty on the agenda and to make sure that the most up to date and relevant evidence is being shared with key figures in the county. We also work frequently with local media to raise awareness of key issues.

More recently the SFPA has worked closely with the Shaping Places for Healthier Lives Project to raise awareness of the additional barriers presented by the rural geography of Shropshire. These issues are well summarised [in a piece we wrote for the New Philanthropy Capital](#) on the cost-of-living crisis in Shropshire.

Key activities

- **19 articles published in local press/ on the websites of national charities**
- **8 local radio appearances**
- **2 meetings with local MPs**

Centring mental health and wellbeing as a key part of the food insecurity conversation

The mental health implications of not having enough money to access everyday essentials have become increasingly apparent over the last year. The food banks we work closely with tell us that mental health is a growing concern. It is also a concern for those who are working on the frontline in increasingly challenging and complex roles.

This year we have worked closely with the Shrewsbury Samaritans to provide support with food banks in the following areas:

- **Hosted an 'Active Listening' workshop at the Barnabas centre for 30 food bank staff and volunteers- this session was tailored to food banks aiming to give them more skills and resources to approach the difficult conversations they are having with people on a daily basis.**
- **Facilitated 4 further 'Active Listening' workshops to take place in food banks across the county.**
- **Hosted an online 'introduction to debriefing' workshop with the Samaritans and food bank teams to support them in building well-being practices into their organisations. It also promoted the importance of having strong safeguarding and confidentiality policies. 13 people attended.**

"Many thanks for session just now – introduction to debriefing - found it very useful and certainly something we do not actively do - only incidentally anyway. Very interested in pursuing this!"

Crisis support

The cost-of-living crisis has meant that the SFPA is still working very actively on crisis support within the county. While our move to Citizens Advice Shropshire has seen us move away from administering grants and food supplies, we have continued to support a network of food banks across the county.

Continued support to food banks

Infrastructure support to food banks has continued this year. The SFPA works with 16 food banks in the Shropshire Council local authority area. The SFPA plays a unique role in bringing together these organisations, it also provides the SFPA with vital insight into what is happening on the frontline, monitoring trends and levels of demand which can then be shared at the forums mentioned earlier in this report.

Key elements of support to food banks:

- **Hosting monthly food bank meetings.**
- **Providing food banks with signposting information and grant funding opportunities (in 2023 we secured direct funding for food banks from the Shropshire Freemasons).**
- **Facilitating training opportunities for food bank teams.**
- **Working with food banks to submit evidence to the [APPG on ending the need for food banks](#)**
- **Acting as the point of contact between key Shropshire Council teams and food banks, ensuring that important information is communicated in an effective and timely manner and facilitating conversations where appropriate.**
- **Organising the delivery of free oral health packs to food banks/ sharing other offers of practical support.**
- **Facilitating closer relationships with Marches Energy Agency (recognising the close link between fuel and food poverty). MEA have since run many drop-in sessions at food banks. We have submitted a letter of support for a funding bid which would increase MEA's capacity to continue to work with food banks to improve referral pathways and do more outreach work in food banks.**

Organisations who have presented at food bank meetings/ provided training:

- **Marches Energy Agency**
- **Nourish Scotland ([Developed the Dignity in Practice Principles](#))**
- **No Interest Loans**
- **DWP local partnerships manager**
- **Community Resource- winter grants fund and infrastructure support team**
- **Shaping Places For Healthier Lives Food Insecurity Team (Shropshire Council Public Health)**
- **Shropshire Council's Welfare Support Team**
- **The Shrewsbury Samaritans**
- **Shropshire Libraries Service**
- **Citizens Advice Shropshire**
- **Little Stars Baby Bank**
- **Wrekin Housing**
- **Severn Trent**
- **GamCare**

What food banks say about the SFPA

"It has been extremely useful being able to attend online meetings with other food banks in Shropshire. Knowing that we are not alone and being able to share ideas has been great. Many of the emails that have been sent out have also been very useful - especially the ones about grants and information for our clients about where they can access additional help. It has been good to know that someone is fighting our corner by sending reports and letters to policy makers. This is something that we really don't have the time to do ourselves."

Ludlow Food Bank

"The SFPA has been invaluable for many reasons: Alerting us to funding opportunities, providing a platform for independent food banks to come together to share issues, having an expert group to advise us on Shropshire wide issues, just being there for support. Many thanks for all the work that you do!"

Cleobury Mortimer Food Bank

"The SFPA is invaluable to foodbanks around the county. Not only does it offer a forum for sharing information and trends, it also offers training, resources and support that make delivering the ever-increasing demands that foodbanks are facing just that little bit easier. It is a vital resource for Shropshire and its community."

Shrewsbury Food Bank

"The downloads from you - the signposting for grants, advice, etc - is extremely beneficial. The way you co-ordinate everyone's efforts and provide support where you can is valued by all. Beavering away in isolation works for some people but the monthly catch-up helps to give everyone a renewed sense of purpose as well as sharing issues, best practice, etc."

Shifnal Food Bank

"Firstly on a personal note, SFPA has been really helpful in settling into my role as coordinator of the Stretton Foodbank. Hearing what everybody else was doing got me up the learning curve quickly. Your advice was also hugely useful."

In addition, SFPA helped us with:

- 1. Keeping us informed of grants that are available and then help us get them.*
- 2. Introduced us to other agencies, e.g. Marches Energy Agency, who have subsequently helped a number of our clients with their energy debt.*
- 3. Arranged training for us and our volunteers with the Samaritans.*
- 4. Produced the Shropshire version of Worried about money leaflets.*
- 5. Provided us with access to supplies from DEFRA and facilitating sharing pallets.*

I am sure this list is not exhaustive, as you have been great."

Church Stretton Food Bank

"Whitchurch Foodbank would like to place on record its sincere thanks for the work of the Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance and in particular the excellent job Sophie Padgett has done in fulfilling the role of Coordinator. We have found the opportunity to hear about what is happening in other Foodbanks in the County extremely helpful. In turn we hope we have been of some value to others through our participation. We have benefitted considerably from the grant streams advised to us by SPFA which has enabled us to purchase equipment to enhance the provision we offer. SPFA has also been the hub for securing food from DEFRA which helped so many of the Foodbanks to top-up their food stocks - particularly during lockdown. One hopes that it will not be too long before a replacement coordinator is appointed and the good work of SPFA continues."

Whitchurch Food Bank

Looking ahead to the next year of the SFPA

With the current SFPA coordinator in post until the end of March 2023, the SFPA has carried out a prioritisation exercise to enable the new post holder to hit the ground running.

Key areas of work identified for the next year

- **Infrastructure support for food banks** – and wider community food projects. Core elements of this are food bank meetings and signposting information/ linking with training opportunities.
- **Signposting resources**- continuing to manage, update and distribute the Shropshire 'Worrying About Money?' leaflet. Continuing to manage, update and promote the Shropshire Larder website. Continuing to work closely with Shropshire Council around their cost-of-living resources (webpage and leaflets).
- **Research and campaigns**- follow up work around research with Citizens Advice Shropshire. Continue to work with partners on impact of cost-of-living crisis and links to fuel poverty.
- **Influencing local policy/ keep food poverty on the agenda**- continue advocacy role in key local forums.
- **Continue to work to other key work streams**- Shaping Places for Healthier Lives, Healthy Food For All work at Shropshire Good Food Partnership, CAS Research and Campaigns work.
- **Forward funding for the SFPA**- the SFPA has forward funding until March 2024 so future forward funding opportunities will need to be identified to enable SFPA work to continue.

Over the 5 years the SFPA has operated it has achieved a vast amount of impact with relatively little resource. It is an expert in partnership working and building trusted relationships and networks to achieve common goals. It is a unique resource within the county of Shropshire which will continue to be vital as we navigate both the long and short-term impacts of the cost-of-living crisis.

Links

Menu For Action - <https://www.shropshirefoodpoverty.org.uk/action-plan>

Supporting grass roots community projects- <https://www.shropshirefoodpoverty.org.uk/piloting-grass-roots-community-projects>

Children's food insecurity in Shropshire research-
<https://www.shropshirefoodpoverty.org.uk/children-s-food-insecurity-in-shropshire>

Food Foundation food insecurity data- <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/new-data-shows-food-insecurity-major-challenge-levelling-agenda>

ONS data on food price inflation -
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/recenttrendsinnukfoodanddrinkproducerandconsumerprices/january2023>

Independent Food Aid Network data on food bank demand- <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/data>

Cost-of-living briefing session for frontline staff and volunteers- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oDQaCScx5p4>

Shropshire Council cost-of-living webpage- <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help/>

Cost-of-living checklist- <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help/cost-of-living-checklist/>

Shropshire's 'Worrying About Money?' leaflet project-
<https://www.shropshirefoodpoverty.org.uk/cash-first>

Interactive version of 'Worrying About Money?' leaflet/ leaflet translations/ easy read version-
<https://www.worryingaboutmoney.co.uk/shropshire>

Shropshire Larder website- <https://www.shropshirelarder.org.uk>

Stigma video- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3QVUeviyNg>

Open letter on the cost-of-living crisis- <https://www.shropshirefoodpoverty.org.uk/open-letter-on-the-cost-of-living-crisis>

Poverty fact file- <https://www.shropshirefoodpoverty.org.uk/poverty-fact>

NPC piece on the rural cost-of-living- <https://www.thinknpc.org/blog/the-cost-of-living-crisis-ga-with-charities-from-rural-shropshire/>

APPG on Ending the Need for Food Banks, Final Inquiry Report- <https://www.trusselltrust.org/what-we-do/research-advocacy/appg-ending-food-banks/>

Nourish Scotland Dignity in Practice Project- <https://www.nourishscotland.org/dignity-in-practice-project/>