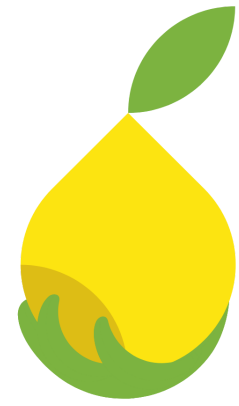


# ADUR & WORTHING FOOD PARTNERSHIP



## Community Food Network statement on the Cost of Living Crisis

**Adur & Worthing Community Food Network is a network of 10 local groups who provide food to our neighbours.**

Community food support is under increasing pressure. Need for support has continued to rise exponentially while food and financial support has decreased.

Our network have consistently been communicating increasing need at bi-weekly Community Food Network meetings. We know there are hundreds of people, children and families out there who do not have enough food in their cupboards and are not currently accessing support.

We are gravely concerned that our groups will not be able to continue to meet demand, resulting in the ceasing of many food support organisations and therefore a huge number of people in our community going without food, fuel and other basic essentials.

The stories and insights from the experiences of our neighbours show the inadequacy of our welfare system. Increases in cost of living crisis, mean our social security system is less-equipped to support our neighbours than it was in the pandemic. This is compounded by the stigma around reliance on community food, likely many who need support are simply not reaching out.

In combination with the cost of living crisis, there is less attention on food support and poverty than there was during 2020-1. In the peaks of the pandemic Government and citizen attention was on hunger and adequate nutrition. Grant funding that could not be spent elsewhere was directed toward community food support, a huge number of volunteers were available as people had more time, and the Government funded FareShare to purchase and distribute food to groups.

Since September 2021, the Universal Credit uplift has been removed while rent, energy and food prices have increased. As society has opened up again, funding available to food projects for food has reduced and food donations have continued to drop. A significant number people who donate to community food groups are often people who have experienced a need to rely on community food in the past. The increase in costs, means these people are less able to give.

At the moment there is no 'right to food' in our country. Which means that neither Government or employers have the responsibility for ensuring people have enough money for food. Our neighbours both in Adur and Worthing, and across the country are doing what they can to make sure people and children have at least one meal a day. We are intimately aware community food is not a solution to hunger, in the absence of another solution we are doing all we can to make sure people have something to eat. Unfortunately, this is simply not enough.

We are finding that people who are accessing their full level of benefits (especially Universal Credit) are unable to meet their basic living costs, and are being forced to turn to community food support. Unfortunately, the transfer of people from historic benefits to UC and increases in inflation is likely to further compound the problem. DWP found pre-pandemic, 43% of people claiming Universal Credit were living in food insecurity.

**“The whole idea that you have to queue up to get something so personal to you, it's not easy to ask for help, it's not easy to put your hand up”**

- neighbour who relied on community food support

It is not just people on benefits who are in need of support, the number of people in-work who need access to food for themselves and their families continues to rise. The cost of feeding people adequate diets is much lower than the cost of combating the physical and mental health that the trauma of food insecurity causes and exacerbates.

**“We are beginning to see people we have never seen before, and people we have helped to become financially stable are coming back. We are particularly concerned about the older members of our community who have begun to reach out for support. We need a long term solution that ensures people get at least one hot meal a day”**

- Matthew Potter, Worthing Food Foundation

The damage that food insecurity causes to the education of our children will affect our society for years to come. We are seriously concerned that people are not just going to get ill, but are going to die, and are especially worried about the older neighbours in our community.

It currently falls to the community to ensure our neighbours have at least one meal to eat each day and stave off the worst effects of malnutrition and food insecurity trauma. Volunteer burnout is a huge risk, one that is compounded as groups are having to reduce the amount of food support available. Turning people away and having to reduce the amount of food given is extremely demoralising for our volunteers.

At the same time, our community care about our neighbours and want to continue to support each other. We are also acutely aware that local council resources have been reduced and that our model, which relies on thousands of hours of volunteer support per year, and takes a person-centered approach is extremely efficient in supporting people who are living in food insecurity.

We want a more joined up approach, across the public, private and community sector that enables better and more efficient use of limited resources. We need food support to be the last solution, not the first. We need solutions to reduce reliance on community food and to take a person-centered approach, putting the experiences of people experiencing hunger and food insecurity at the heart of each action.

## **Adur & Worthing Community Food Network would like to see:**

- A cash-first approach, administered through the local council, by the community organisations, in a way that supports people to make the best use of limited funds
- Sufficient Cost of Living emergency funding made available to ensure our neighbours have enough food to eat in the short-term
- A Food Action plan, developed in partnership with our community and with sufficient resources behind it
- The experiences of people experiencing food, fuel and housing insecurity at the center of all solutions
- To actively listen to the community food network and base the short and long term solutions on the information from community experts who support people every day
- The development of a pathway of support for those experiencing hunger and food, fuel and housing insecurity that does not put community food support as the first or only port of call
- Consistent communications to ensure people in need of support know how to access it
- To actively challenge the stigma and oppression of people in poverty perpetuated within institutions and communications

- Further funding made available for other community food schemes, such as community cafés, food hubs and community canteens
- Long-term, low-cost suitable solutions for food storage and to house our community food operations
- The embedding of questions surrounding food and fuel poverty to identify people at risk of food insecurity and better target support at District, Borough and County level
- The development of a local indicator for food poverty, based on national best-practice, published annually
- A recognition of the Right to Food and a commitment to upholding this right at a District, Borough and County level
- The championing of the Real Living Wage across our local area, at District, Borough and County level

We want to see an active Food Action Plan developed at the District and Borough level with support and commitment to it's development at the county level. We want this Action Plan to acknowledge the risks and inadequacies of relying on community food support and surplus food to feed our neighbors. We need all of the actions to be centered on the experience of those who have, are and will go hungry. We need to prioritise actions that will provide effective relief for those experiencing food, fuel and housing insecurity. We need to work together.

Sincerely,

**Adur Community Cafe**  
**Adur Community Gateway**  
**Broadwater Support Group**  
**Community House**  
**Fishersgate Food Bank**

**Lancing & Sompting Food Bank**  
**Worthing Food Foundation**  
**Worthing Soup Kitchen (SHOUT WSK)**  
**Worthing Vegan**  
**Shoreham & Adur Food Bank**