



# SHROPSHIRE FOOD POVERTY ACTION PLAN

Report For The Health And Wellbeing Board  
December 2018

**TACKLING  
FOOD  
POVERTY  
TOGETHER**

Shropshire Food  
Poverty Alliance

## 1. Summary

Food poverty is a growing problem in Shropshire. An estimated 27,000 households both in and out of work will be impacted by changes to the benefits system. Research suggests that Shropshire residents will lose £102,000,000 per year, or an average of £550 per working age adult. This will reduce their ability to buy enough nutritious food and this will impact on their health, as food is often the only flexible part of their budget.

The Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance was formed in 2018 to tackle this issue and core members include Shropshire Council, NHS, Food Banks, Age UK and Citizens Advice Shropshire. Shrewsbury Food Hub have provided co-ordination funded by Sustain and Shropshire Council and with support from University Centre Shrewsbury.

The Alliance have developed an action plan to:

- increase support for people in crisis,
- prevent food poverty by supporting people in maximising their income and supporting projects to improve access to low cost food, growing and skills in health and nutrition
- Increase awareness of the issue and embed it in the policy of statutory bodies and community organisations, so that we can develop an effective strategic response across the county.

The Alliance are seeking resources to continue co-ordination of this vital work and to fund community food projects.

## 2. Recommendation

We ask that the Health and Well Being Board support the Action Plan developed by the Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance.

We ask that the Health and Well Being Board consider what resources might be made available to support this work, whether financial resources, access to buildings, cooking facilities or linkages to existing work which might connect to the Action Plan.

### 3. Background



#### Our Vision

Everyone in Shropshire should

- have access to sufficient good food
- be able to afford a healthy diet
- have the skills and knowledge to prepare healthy food

Food poverty can be defined as “the inability of individuals and households to obtain an adequate and nutritious diet because they cannot afford healthy food”. People can find themselves in food poverty due to a financial crisis, but in many cases people find themselves unable to afford healthy food over extended periods of time.

Food poverty is an issue affecting many households in Shropshire. Families and individuals may be increasingly financially squeezed as a result of increases in the cost of living combined with slow wage increases and the cumulative impact of welfare reforms on both working and non-working households. In many cases the food budget is the only area where households can cut their spending.

The Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance was formed in January 2018 by a consortium of organisations who are committed to work together to tackle food poverty in Shropshire. Our membership includes public, faith and voluntary organisations including food banks from across the county. The Alliance is currently being co-ordinated by Shrewsbury Food Hub, with a steering group of organisations including Citizens Advice Shropshire, Shropshire Council, Age UK and University Centre, Shrewsbury.

Throughout 2018 we have researched levels of food poverty across the county and mapped current provision to identify gaps and potential solutions. This research was participatory, with a wide range of organisations and stakeholders involved. Fifty-eight people attended workshops and 108 responded to our consultation. Sixteen people with lived experience of food poverty were interviewed.

#### 4. Key findings on Food Poverty in Shropshire

Food poverty is increasing in Shropshire. 81% of respondents to our survey felt that food poverty had increased in the past year. Food banks report an increase in referrals from across the county. Low wages and welfare reforms are impacting on both working and non-working households. In many cases the food budget is the only area where households can cut their spending.

- Food prices rose 28% in UK between 2007 and 2016, but average household incomes rose 5.1% in the same time period.
- Shropshire is a low wage economy. 81% are employed, but much of this work is part time or insecure
- An estimated 27,000 families both in and out of work will be impacted by benefits cuts. Shropshire will lose £102,000,000 per year, or an average of £550 per working age adult
- 1 in 5 children are classified as living in poverty
- 70% of adults living in Shropshire are overweight or obese

#### 5. Menu for Action

We have developed a draft 12-point Menu for Action, which is published on [www.shropshirefoodpoverty.org.uk](http://www.shropshirefoodpoverty.org.uk). The menu highlights three main areas:

- **Enhancing emergency support for people in food crisis**
- **A focus on prevention**
- **Changing the landscape**

We have called it a menu as this enables organisations to prioritise which actions they would like to adopt. Any response to food poverty needs to build from the resources available in each community and meet local needs, grassroots up. This menu sets out how we can build on what we already have to support people in food crisis, prevent people falling into food poverty and strengthen partnership working. Some actions can be achieved by connecting existing resources, but many will need additional resources over a long period to put into practice.

## Enhancing emergency support for people in food crisis

Food banks across Shropshire provide invaluable support to people in food crisis. Communities across Shropshire have started their own food banks in response to growing levels of food poverty. Initiated by local church groups, food banks are run on limited resources, relying on the goodwill of the community for food donations and volunteers to run each session.



Food banks do much more than provide emergency food parcels to people in food crisis. Trained volunteers ensure that referrals are made to services who can help clients with the underlying causes of their situation. Some of Shropshire's larger foodbanks have also been able to develop their own inhouse programmes.

Shrewsbury Food Bank have developed their Food Bank PLUS model, enabling them to work with clients more intensively over the longer term on the causes of their situation. Through their 360 programme they are able to offer money advice, cooking courses and assistance in getting back into the workplace.

Bridgnorth foodbank have developed their weekly sessions by inviting representatives from the local housing association and mental health teams, who are able to offer immediate support to clients when it is needed.

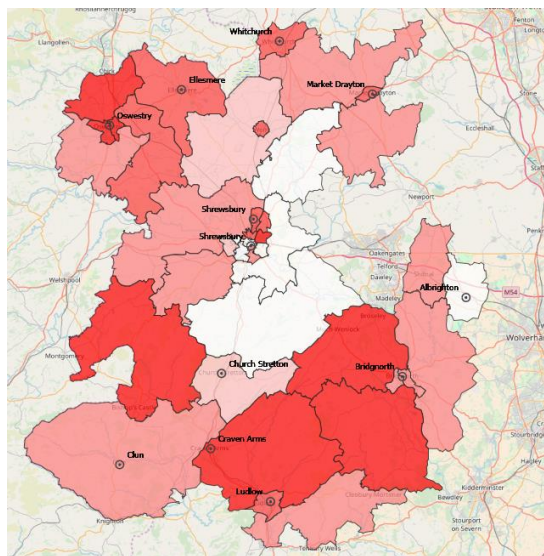
### **Action 1: Support food banks to build on the services they currently offer to tackle the causes of food poverty**

Each Shropshire food bank has been developed by a group of volunteers to address local need. Many food banks offer more than an emergency food parcel, however the services offered vary around the county. With additional funding, training for food bank volunteers or building partnerships with other organisations there is potential to extend the range of services offered to people in food crisis to help them move out of food poverty.

### **Action 2: Support food banks by creating a Shropshire Food Bank Network to share learning and solutions**

Building on the South Shropshire meetings run by the Diocese of Hereford, a Shropshire Food Bank Network would provide the opportunity for food banks to share knowledge and experiences and build closer links with other organisations. Creating partnerships with other agencies across Shropshire could enhance the existing referral process and lead to improved signposting to ensure that people in food crisis receive the help they need to improve their situation.

### Action 3: Improve access to emergency food parcels out of hours and in rural areas



Food bank locations. Darker red areas indicate areas with higher risk of food poverty

All Shropshire food banks cover large geographic areas. With such a large rural county, transport issues can be a major barrier for people needing to visit a food bank. The preference is for recipients to attend a food bank session, as volunteers are able to provide additional support and advice when people need it most. Some food banks have explored delivering food parcels out to rural areas but have found this to be resource intensive. One possibility is to identify partner organisations who may be able to store emergency parcels so that people

### Action 4: Enhance the range of food and non-food items provided in emergency parcels

Food banks rely on the generosity of the community to donate food items. A food parcel is made up of mainly long-life foods, and may also contain toiletries, household essentials and pet food. However, in some parts of the county donations do not meet the demand or the specific dietary needs of food bank clients. Food parcels for people living in emergency accommodation can be particularly challenging, as often there is no access to cooking facilities apart from a kettle.

#### Food bank innovation: Introducing Fresh fruit & vegetables

Surplus food - Shrewsbury and Bridgnorth food banks have started to offer surplus fruit, vegetables and bakery items from supermarkets to food bank clients. As most of this food is past its best before date, it is offered separately in addition to the food parcel.

Fresh fruit & Veg - Ludlow food bank issue vouchers to food bank clients which can be exchanged for fresh fruit and vegetables at local greengrocers. They have also developed a cookery leaflet which helps clients to make the most of their food parcel.

Holiday Hunger - Whitchurch foodbank have been working with local schools to address holiday hunger. School staff identify families who struggle financially in the school holidays. Families are invited to attend the food bank throughout the school holidays to receive food parcels.

## A focus on prevention

Many people on low incomes in Shropshire are at risk of falling into food poverty. What is needed is initiatives which work with people before they reach a crisis point. Many organisations across Shropshire are already involved in preventative action providing community meals, preventative action and access to low cost food.

The causes of food poverty are complex. For people with low financial resilience an unexpected life event can quickly spiral into financial crisis and food poverty. In many cases food poverty is caused by a combination of factors, including:

- **Financial:** Low wages combined with a high rate of part time and insecure work makes it difficult for many households to keep pace with the increases in the cost of living. The complex nature of welfare changes since 2010 have also left many households temporarily without payments or confused about their eligibility to support.
- **Access to healthy affordable food:** People on low incomes need access to low cost, healthy food. However, many people living in poverty do not have a car and cuts to public transport, particularly in rural areas, makes it difficult for families to access cheaper supermarkets. Even in towns access is an issue for those without their own transport.
- **Nutritional & cooking skills:** The UK government recommends that we all plan our meals using the nutritional advice in the Eatwell Guide, costing an estimated £41.93 per person per week. Households living on low incomes will spend significantly less, focusing on foods which are filling, rather than foods which have optimum health benefits. Building cooking and nutritional skills will help people to stretch their budget further and improve diets.

### **Action 5: Enhance advice & support for people on low incomes to help them increase their financial resilience and maximise income**

The first step to preventing food poverty is to build financial resilience, however many services in this area have been impacted by austerity cuts. Actions may include:

- Ensuring that people across Shropshire know where to go for advice and support on money issues, especially where to get debt advice and collating budgeting tips and local advice to reduce outgoings such as household bills
- Providing benefit checks to ensure that people are getting all the financial support they are entitled to and promoting benefits like Healthy Start which are currently underclaimed (just 64% of eligible families in Shropshire claim the benefit)
- Promoting changes to policy which would increase incomes (the living wage, welfare reform) and working with local schools to ensure they develop the financial management skills of future generations



The Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance have developed the Shropshire Larder website [www.shropshirelarder.org.uk](http://www.shropshirelarder.org.uk) in partnership with Citizen's Advice Shropshire. The website brings together local information on food banks, community food projects, how to eat well on a budget and where to access advice services.

**Action 6: Increase access to affordable healthy food through community meals, cafes, pantries, growing projects and surplus food**

Increasing access to free or low-cost healthy food can provide invaluable assistance to people on low incomes. Using the principles of practice developed by the Alliance, both existing food projects and new food initiatives can be developed to increase access, particularly in rural areas. Community projects have the potential to increase access at the same time as increasing well-being, for example by bringing people together for a meal. Projects need to focus on groups who are at high risk of food poverty, including children, people with a long-term illness or disability, and the elderly. Actions could include:

- supporting community growing projects and linking farms to food co-ops at schools and community centres
- community cafes and meals,
- accessing surplus food through community food hubs, pantries and fridges
- food delivery services to rural areas through partnerships with existing services
- building on innovations in social prescribing and voucher schemes for healthy food



### **Existing Good Practice: Shropshire Food Projects**

**Food Sharing** - Riversway Elim Church holds an open table and community fridge three times a week. Surplus food from local supermarkets is available for local residents to take away free of charge.

**Food Hubs** - Shrewsbury Food Hub collects surplus food from supermarkets and delivers it to community groups who can make good use of it. Many of these groups work with people at risk of food poverty.

**Community Growing** - In the heart of Wem Incredible Edible grow fresh fruit and vegetables which are available for anyone from the community to harvest for free.

**Community Meals** - In Ludlow, the Rockspring Community Centre hold a weekly meal for the community. For £2 diners are able to come together to enjoy a hot meal and a pudding.

**Holiday Hunger** - The Crossbar Foundation run low cost multi-sport holiday camps across Shrewsbury and Telford. They use surplus food ensure that children have access to healthy food throughout the day and to engage children in issues surrounding health and wellbeing.

### **Existing Good Practice: UK Food Projects**

There are some fantastic community led food projects running across the UK which increase access to low cost affordable food. Many of these projects could work well in rural parts of Shropshire:

**Affordable Food Boxes** - A scheme in Chesterfield provides low income households with an affordable box of food for a weekly cost of £7. The food is sourced from Fareshare and each box would have cost around £40 if bought directly from a supermarket.

**Food Co-ops** - In Wales over 300 schools and other community venues run food co-ops where people come together to group buy fruit, vegetables, meat, eggs and bakery items, saving the average customer £220 per year.

**Breakfast Clubs & Holiday Hunger** - The National School Breakfast Programme is supporting 1775 schools to provide free breakfast clubs around the UK. Many parts of the UK are also running projects addressing children's hunger during the school holidays. Projects like Make Lunch cook meals for families throughout the holiday periods.

**Fruit & Veg** - Vouchers Children's Centres in six parts of the UK can give Rose Vouchers to low income families which can be exchanged for fresh fruit and vegetables. Most of the schemes partner with local market traders, but in Liverpool they have a mobile fruit and vegetable van which travels around the city. In London the NHS are also trialling prescriptions for fruit & vegetables as part of a wider Social Prescribing trial.

**Good Food Hubs** are being trialed in Liverpool. They re-imagine meals on wheels to create a service which feeds everyone the community well. Community centres act as Good Food Hubs, where meals can be ordered for delivery (either to the centre or to the persons home). Slow cooker bags which contain prepared ingredients are available for people with limited mobility. They also supply a 'safety box' which contains everything you would need in your cupboards after hospital discharge.

**Food Clubs** - There are many Food Clubs opening across the country. For example, the Mustard Tree Food Club allows people to choose 10 food items in return for a £2 weekly membership fee. In Stockport the local Housing Association has partnered with Church Action on Poverty to open Food Pantries. In return for a weekly membership fee of £2.50 members are able to choose 10 items of food. They are now rolling out their pantry model across the UK.

#### **Action 7: Encourage initiatives which improve nutrition and cooking skills**

Building nutrition and cooking skills will improve cooking confidence and help improve diets. Skills can be developed through cookery courses, mentoring or sharing information via social media. A focus should also be made to ensure that future generations have strong cooking skills through ensuring that local schools are prioritising the delivery of the curriculum in these areas. Information could include:

- Meal planning and shopping on a budget. How to ensure a healthy diet on even the smallest of shopping budgets
- Nutritional knowledge and promotion of the Eat well guide to encourage people to eat a healthy diet
- Cooking confidence to encourage people to cook healthily from scratch with cheaper ingredients

#### **Action 8: Improved access to cooking equipment, particularly in emergency housing**

Many people in emergency housing are placed in hotel rooms where the only cooking facilities are a kettle, or at best a microwave. People can find themselves living in this type of accommodation for extended periods of time. In these situations, alternative means of cooking a healthy diet should be explored, for example through the provision of a slow cooker.

## Changing the landscape

### **Action 9: Build awareness of food poverty amongst policy makers, front line staff and the general public**

Many people in food poverty do not seek assistance due to feelings of shame and stigma. Raising awareness of the issue and avenues for assistance should encourage more people to seek help when they need it. Training for frontline staff will ensure that people receive the best advice when they need it.

### **Action 10: Embed food poverty in council and NHS policy**

Food poverty is an issue which is related to many areas of local policy. Decision makers should be briefed in the impact of food poverty in Shropshire so that they can take the issue into account when considering future policy decisions.

### **Action 11: Bring agencies together to provide a co-ordinated approach to food poverty**

People in food poverty come into contact with a wide range of organisations across Shropshire. Bringing agencies together to work effectively in partnership will create greater impact and make best use of the available resources.

### **Action 12: Research best practice, share learning and measure impact**

Responses to food poverty are developing up and down the country. It is important that what works both within Shropshire and elsewhere is collated and shared, and that impact is measured. This will provide inspiration for new initiatives and evidence for potential funding bids.

## 6. Next Steps: Implementation

The draft action plan will be going out for consultation in the New Year. We are seeking funding for ongoing co-ordination of the alliance and to progress the action plan. With continued funding the alliances role will be to:

1. **Empower groups to identify priorities for action.** Participatory research during 2018 has identified a wide range of opportunities for action. Early in 2019 we will promote the Action Plan to organisations across Shropshire and invite them to participate in a workshop to identify actions they would like to take, the resources which would be needed, potential partners and potential barriers. People with lived experience will be engaged in driving the priorities and implementation of the action plan.
2. **Support groups to take action and gain the necessary partners and resources.** For the three or four highest priority action areas, we will research best practice and resources to support groups in taking action and share this through the Food Poverty Alliance website. We will convene meetings of potential partners to clarify roles, maximise collaboration and, where necessary, develop joint funding bids. Research on resources will identify funding opportunities with statutory bodies such as the Council and NHS, access to resources such as buildings and funding opportunities with Trusts and Foundations.
3. **Promote awareness of food poverty.** We will continue to build the robust data on the food poverty situation in Shropshire to inform policy makers, the general public and funding bids. We will promote a better understanding of food poverty through promotion of case studies of people in the press and on social media.
4. **Develop the Food Poverty Alliance network.** The network will be developed through collaborative action and learning. Research on food poverty, the action plan, case studies of those affected, potential solutions and learning will be shared on the Food Poverty Alliance website to inspire people to take action. The website will be promoted through Facebook and Twitter.
5. **Share information to support people in food poverty.** The Shropshire Larder website will be used to provide practical support to people in food poverty and frontline staff, with data on how to maximise family income and eat healthily on a low income. The site will be kept up to date and supplemented with advice by people with lived experience, as far as possible in video form.
6. **Track and evaluate progress.** Progress, outcomes and learning from implementation of the plan will be tracked and shared. In the first year, the priority will be to develop a simple but robust framework for evaluation.