

30TH OCTOBER 2022

# EASTBOURNE FOOD SECURITY NETWORK STATEMENT ON THE 'COST OF LIVING' CRISIS



Eastbourne Food Security Network is a coalition of community organisations that fight food insecurity in Eastbourne, comprising emergency food service-providers, community growing groups, wider community support groups, policy-makers and campaigners. As well as providing material food support to those with insufficient access to safe and nutritious food, our network members are aware of the intersecting causes and effects of food insecurity - we work together to provide a range of services that ultimately aim to lift people out of poverty.

Whilst emergency food services are intended to provide short-term relief to those struggling, there has been a consistent increase in the number of people relying on the network's organisations to sustain themselves. In the last year, this increase has been dramatic, as more and more people of all ages and backgrounds - single people, working people, families - struggle to keep up with the rising cost of living.

A recent 'Cost of Living' report co-authored by Eastbourne Foodbank and Citizens Advice Eastbourne revealed a 121.5% increase in people receiving three days' emergency food in August 2022 in comparison with August 2021\*. Anecdotal evidence from across the network reinforces these figures, with accounts of queues forming well before food banks and community pantries open.

The trauma associated with reliance on emergency food support - leading to experiences of stigmatisation, guilt and social isolation - is having a devastating impact on our communities.

*"When Eastbourne Foodbank started operating out of a portacabin in 2011, it provided food for thirty people in a month. At the time, we thought we were providing short-term help, and that it couldn't get any busier. Shockingly, we are now providing food for an average of 2,000 people a month from seven distribution points across Eastbourne."*

*Howard Wardle, Chief Officer of Eastbourne Foodbank.\**

As the anticipated rises in food and energy prices in the coming months leave more and more people facing hunger, our network members are concerned at their capacity to respond, compounded by a decrease in the quality and quantity of donations on which many of our organisations rely. There is simply not enough food to meet the growing need.

In May 2022, Eastbourne Borough Council was the first UK district council to declare a Cost of Living Emergency, setting up a £250,000 emergency grant scheme. We welcome the council's swift response and the recognition of the crisis that our member organisations are facing daily, as well as the much-needed financial support to Eastbourne's community sector.

However, the current crisis reveals systemic cracks in our food system and an effective response must go further than short-term funding of emergency measures. The time and resources dedicated to fighting the crisis in the short-term are undermining our efforts to tackle the underlying causes of food insecurity.

We are inspired by the work of other local authorities to develop long-term strategic responses to food emergencies. For example, Brighton and Hove City Council created a full-time Food Policy Coordinator position in response to the food crisis brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. The current crisis has spurred the creation of a dedicated Cost of Living officer in Lewes District Council, signalling an important strategic move towards tackling the root causes of food and fuel poverty, as well as providing much-needed coordination of the crisis response.

Elsewhere in the country, local authorities are declaring themselves 'right to food' cities, committing to co-design a food justice strategy that incorporates access to urban growing spaces, social supermarkets, community kitchens and cash-first solutions to emergency food.

**We call upon Eastbourne Borough Council to emulate these commitments to putting in place a long-term, strategic approach to eradicating hunger. Together, we can and must create a local food system that puts community health and well-being at its core, so that everyone in Eastbourne has the right to feed themselves in dignity.**

Eastbourne Food Security Network would like to see:

- **The declaration of Eastbourne as a 'Right to Food' town**, and the adoption of the **'Right to Grow'** on suitable council-owned land
- The **co-creation of a food strategy** with key stakeholders represented by the Eastbourne Food Partnership. We recommend that this strategy include the adoption of an action plan for eradicating hunger in Eastbourne
- The **creation of a dedicated Food Policy Officer to coordinate a joined up, long-term response to the food crisis in the borough of Eastbourne**. This officer will be a permanent member of Eastbourne Food Partnership's Steering Group.

**Yours sincerely,**

**Eastbourne Food Security Network and Eastbourne Foodbank**

**Eastbourne Food Partnership, CIC**

**Eastbourne Foodbank**

**Our Neighbourhood**

**Warming up the Homeless**

**Feedbourners**

**Volunteers Network CIC (Langney Community Larder)**

**Old Town Community Fridge**

**Seaside Community Fridge**

**Gather Community Garden**

\*Sources: **Cost of Living report, October 2022**. Citizens Advice Bureau and Eastbourne Foodbank. Contributors: Alan Bruzon, Rachel Sesu, Jodi Truss, Sarah Rose, Jess Holliday, Howard Wardle, Debbie Canning, Robert Crockford, Nikki Beckett