

Citizens Advice Eastbourne & Eastbourne Foodbank

Cost of Living report

October 2022

Executive Summary

The current cost of living increases will continue to place increased demand on voluntary sector organisations especially CA Eastbourne and Eastbourne Foodbank and we will remain committed to supporting people through these difficult times.

However, as demand increases, our limited resources need to be recognised and enhanced where possible. Money spent on increasing our staff and volunteer capacity will generate additional income for the community which will help people live stable and productive lives and increase their well-being.

Other aspects need to be reviewed including local issues, for which we make recommendations below.

We ask that the administration of local support funds be reviewed so it can work in a co-ordinated manner and provide targeted support to those in greatest need, effectively and efficiently.

Key messages

- The number of people accessing Eastbourne Foodbank during June-August 2022 has increased by over 100% compared to the same period in 2021.
- Eastbourne Foodbank is now providing emergency food to over 2,000 people per month.
- Citizens Advice Eastbourne is seeing a significant increase in demand for advice around cost of living issues, energy bills and debts.
- We predict by December 2022 we will be supporting 300 people per month to access Foodbank and other sources of charitable support.
- Enquiries regarding disability benefits have remained high for the past 5 years. People with disabilities or long term health conditions are more often contacting us for advice on issues related to cost of living - benefits, debt, energy etc.
- Both CA Eastbourne and Eastbourne Foodbank are local charities with limited resources. Our capacity does not increase automatically to match the increase in demand.
- Both services are staffed by a small number of paid staff and a large number of volunteers who provide essential help to the community.
- With more funding we can recruit and train more staff and volunteers and therefore help more people.

The full report can be downloaded from

<http://www.eastbournecab.co.uk/eastbourne-citizens-advice/campaigns>

For more information contact manager@eastbournecab.cabnet.org.uk

Recommendations

Local

- Benefit uptake campaign – eligibility, help to apply, increased resources
- Digital Inclusion work—expand this by supporting existing agencies and targeting advice towards those in need
- Council support systems – review Household Support fund, DESS scheme etc
- Blue Badge scheme—review application and renewal process to ensure maximum accessibility
- Review of Council tax arrangements: We recommend a review of local Council Tax arrangements, as many people are using the foodbank because of significant difficulties with paying debt they owe to the government.

National

- Personal Independence Payment—we need a system which is fair and efficient for all applicants
- Universal Credit rates / eligibility— these need to be reviewed to enable more people on low incomes to receive support and to provide better rates of financial support to those who are not in work
- We need a commitment in the social security system that benefit rates will always be enough to protect people from destitution. This support is needed not just in a national crisis, but every day.
- Review of Local Housing Allowance rates: As the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is much lower than the cost of local rents, many of our clients are thrown into dire financial difficulty and debt by their housing costs. We would recommend more regular reviews of local LHA rates, in order to ensure these are better matched with up-to-date local rent prices.

Digital Exclusion

- There should always be an alternative to digital communication e.g. phone number or paper form.
- Using non-digital means of application should not be a disadvantage e.g. the phone line should be adequately staffed or messages checked.
- If people are to be encouraged to use digital services then websites need to be safe, clear and efficient, systems and processes need to work.
- No one should be prevented from accessing the financial support which is available because of digital exclusion.