

# Epping Forest Foodbank



## Annual Report 2023/2024



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# From the Director

*Jacob Forman has been Director of Epping Forest Foodbank since January.*

2024/2025 has been Epping Forest Foodbank's thirteenth year operating as a foodbank and sixth year as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. It has also been a year of great change at the Foodbank and the opening up of additional services. We have worked closely with partner organisations to bring in additional support from experts stationed at our Hubs including Mental Health, Energy advice and Benefits assistance. Most importantly we have worked with VAEF to have a fully trained benefits advisor present in all our hubs, providing a vital service to people who are struggling to get their entitlement in the often Byzantine systems.



We spent the year at our new office and warehouse space having moved in February 2024. The space has revolutionised our offering to staff and supporters alike. As well as the additional storage space, we can now host school trips and other youth groups, which Margot, our Community and Church Engagement Officer has been doing regularly.

We've continued to work closely with partner churches as well, with weekly sessions and hubs being held in St Mary's and Trinity Church in Loughton and Debden respectively. We wish to thank these churches for this tremendous support without which we wouldn't be able to complete our vital work.

For the first time in the Foodbanks existence we have seen a drop in clients from the year before, whilst this is a cause for some celebration, there are some caveats. Whilst the raw numbers have gone down, part of this was due to the fall of Easter not being in this financial year, meaning that the Holiday rush was not included in the figures, secondly, even with this, 2024/2025 was still our second busiest year on record, seeing over 7,000 people need our services.

We have a great team of committed volunteers and much support from the local community and Trussell. It was wonderful in February to have 60 volunteers join us in a celebration of their commitment and achievements to the cause, ensuring that no one needs to go hungry in Epping Forest.

As well as our emergency food provision, we have utilised the Frontline system to make referrals onwards to further support organisations, giving our clients the best possible chance of not needing our services in the future.

Sadly, as the impact of the cost of living crisis continues to grow, so we don't expect the fall in demand to be a sustained one, and fear that demand will soon rise again. But at Epping Forest Foodbank we are ready to meet whatever the future throws at us with the same compassion and commitment to our community as we have always had.

A stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Forman'.

**Jacob Forman**

**Director**

# A change at the top

*This year has seen a change in the position of Chair of Trustees as Julian Dutnall steps down after three years and is replaced by*

## A message from outgoing Chair Julian Dutnall

I have had an amazing three years leading the dedicated team of trustee volunteers who support the work of the Foodbank through regular meetings, strategic vision and oversight of finance. Working closely with Jacob, our Director, we have legal responsibility for the charity. Many of us also volunteer in other ways through supporting at the warehouse, at our centres or through attending events.

The new Chair of Trustees will be Sharon Heather. Sharon has been involved with the Foodbank for many years as a volunteer, is a leader in one of our local churches and is currently the Vice Chair of Trustees. She has a background in Human Resources and is an experienced leader of education.

Rashni Chalal-Holden will become the new Vice Chair. Rashni is a local councillor and has considerable experience in the public sector and in community work. What we have achieved collectively over the past years is phenomenal. Starting from a team of

committed volunteers at St Mary's Church in Loughton, we have now grown to a stage where we have significant warehouse and office spaces, multiple hubs, a national media presence and most importantly, we are making a positive impact on thousands of lives in our local area on a regular basis.

I will continue as a trustee for the foreseeable future and want to thank you all again for the selfless and immeasurably valuable work that you do, and have done, for those in need in our community.



## A message from incoming Chair Sharon Heather & Vice Chair Rashni Chalal-Holden

### Sharon Heather

Prior to my retirement I worked for a Global Bank where I was responsible for Employee Relations across UK, Europe and the Americas. I am a Governor of two schools in Tower Hamlets and a Trustee at Loughton Methodist Church where I attend Worship regularly. I have volunteered at the Foodbank for five years initially starting as a driver during the Covid Pandemic. My mum grew up in food poverty and I have seen the lasting impact that Food poverty can have on families first hand. I am committed to helping the Foodbank to do all it can to support those in need in our Community.

Firstly we would like to thank Julian for his Leadership and all he has done to support the Foodbank, we are grateful that Julian will remain a member of the Trustee board and we value his experience and knowledge.

We would also like to acknowledge our staff team and all of the Volunteers without whom the Foodbank would not be what it is today. We are looking forward to getting to know you all more and to working alongside you.

### Rashni Chalal-Holden

I am passionate about giving back to my community. I have been a Trustee for another local charity as well as now serving as a District Councillor for Epping Forest Council. I am a Managing Director in a global Bank where I am responsible for the Bank's technology procurement. My corporate and community skills will help Epping Forest Food Bank continue on its journey to help those affected by food poverty.





# Volunteers

Epping Forest Foodbank is a volunteer-powered organisation. Now numbering over one hundred and fifty volunteers. Our volunteers come from a diverse range of backgrounds, religious beliefs, employment experience and ages.

There are numerous roles and responsibilities including warehouse, governance, collection and delivery drivers, office and admin, social media, training, communications, liaison with donors, referral agents, premises, recruitment, accounts, research and keeping records of local services. We are fortunate and grateful to have a committed, enthusiastic, dedicated group who work as a team to provide the best service we can to the people we serve and support.

We have worked creatively to support people remotely, to signpost and understand what to include in their food parcels.



Volunteers at our Volunteer Get Together in February



## Long Service Recognition

In February we had a volunteer get together, which included a celebration of our long serving volunteers.

Recognitions were given to 26 volunteers for 5 years service, and 5 volunteers who have been with us for over 10 years!

# Donations received

Donations rose from 30.5 Tons in 23/24 up to 33.2 Tons in 24/25. The main source for this rise was donations from Churches and Supermarket collection points. We had a new donation point set up at Waltham Abbey Tesco Superstore. In addition to this, we also have collection points at Epping Tesco, Waitrose Buckhurst Hill, Tesco Theydon Bois, Aldi Debden and Phil the Trolley in St Mary's Church. Schools also played a big role in donation drives, particularly at Christmas and Easter.

Three supermarkets ; Tesco Epping, Tesco Waltham Abbey and Waitrose Buckhurst Hill, we held in person drives, this allowed us to have volunteers in store speaking to the public and requesting donations directly. It proved a great success and was a great chance to meet and explain our work.

Finally, we saw donations from our new Online shop, allowing members of the public to purchase our most needed items online to be delivered directly to us. This led to a 950kg rise in the donations direct from individuals to the Foodbank.

As well as donations of Food, we have also worked hard to secure financial donations, we have undertaken successful fundraising efforts through a combination of grant applications, public donations, and support from statutory bodies. These funds have been critical in enabling the continuation and expansion of essential services for individuals and families in need. Grant funding has been secured from several charitable foundations, while generous contributions from members of the public have demonstrated strong community support. Additionally, financial backing from local authorities and other statutory partners has provided vital resources to strengthen our service delivery. This multi-source funding approach ensures greater sustainability and has allowed us to cover all costs in the past year.

# VAEF Partnership

In 2024, Epping Forest Foodbank proudly partnered with Volunteer Action Epping Forest (VAEF) to launch a transformative new service across all our foodbank hubs. Together, we introduced a dedicated, professional Benefits Advisor to provide expert support to individuals and families navigating the often-complex welfare system. Rosie Coffee is currently in her second year working with us, and has gone from strength to strength and seen immense success in her role.



This collaboration has had a profound impact. Over the past year, 107 foodbank clients received tailored, one-to-one guidance on accessing the financial support they are entitled to. The results speak for themselves: a total of £269,643 was successfully secured for local people who were struggling to make ends meet.

Beyond the numbers, this project has delivered dignity, stability, and hope to those facing hardship. From ensuring access to disability benefits to helping families receive Universal Credit, our benefits advisor has empowered clients to take positive steps toward a more secure future.

We are incredibly grateful to VAEF for their expertise and dedication. This partnership is a testament to what can be achieved when local organisations work together to meet the real needs of our community. We look forward to building on this success in the year ahead.

## Case Study

Ms G is a single adult in receipt of Universal Credit, including the housing element. Initially a regular user of the local foodbank, Ms G was supported following the establishment of trust and a detailed assessment of her circumstances. It was identified that she was experiencing significant financial hardship, including substantial debts. A referral was made to a debt advice agency, which subsequently led to the successful implementation of a Debt Relief Order, clearing most of her outstanding liabilities.

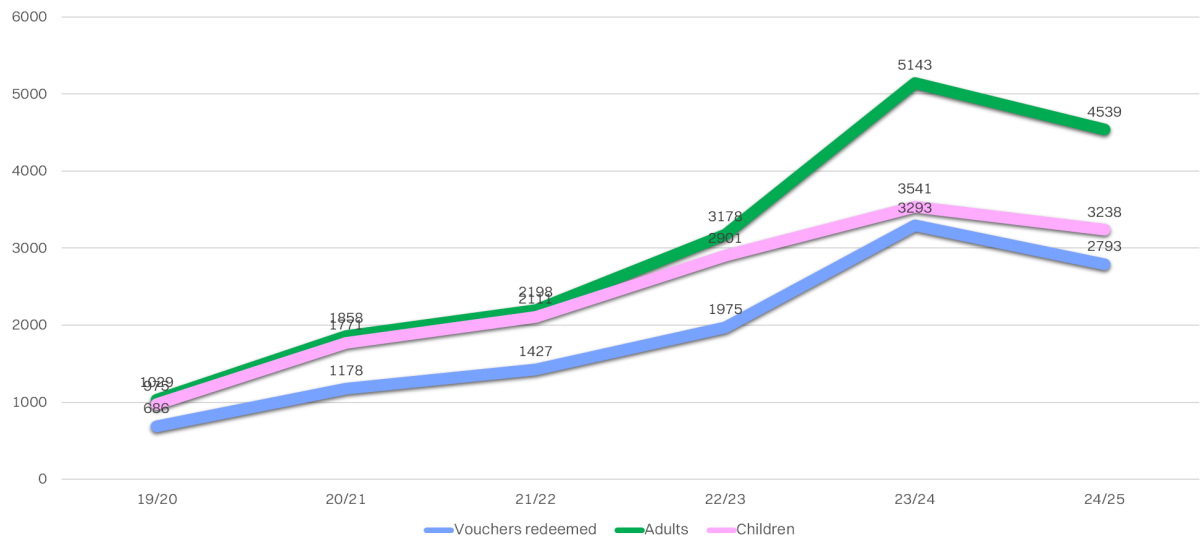
Ms G also experiences complex mental health challenges, including severe depression and anxiety, which had contributed to her avoidance of addressing financial matters, making phone calls, and using digital services due to her lack of computer literacy and the associated stress. Comprehensive support was provided to Ms G, including assistance with a successful Personal Independence Payment (PIP) application, arrangement of council tax support, termination of a court order, and capping of her water charges.

Due to difficulties managing energy costs, a referral was also made to the National Energy Action (NEA), through which Ms G received energy vouchers and was added to the Priority Services Register. As a result of sustained intervention, Ms G has experienced a significant financial improvement, with an average monthly increase in income of approximately £400. Her reliance on foodbank services has substantially decreased, with only one visit in the past four months, during which she sought guidance on setting up a new online council tax direct debit.

Ms G now presents as visibly healthier and less stressed, and has expressed deep gratitude for the support she has received.

# Emergency Suppl

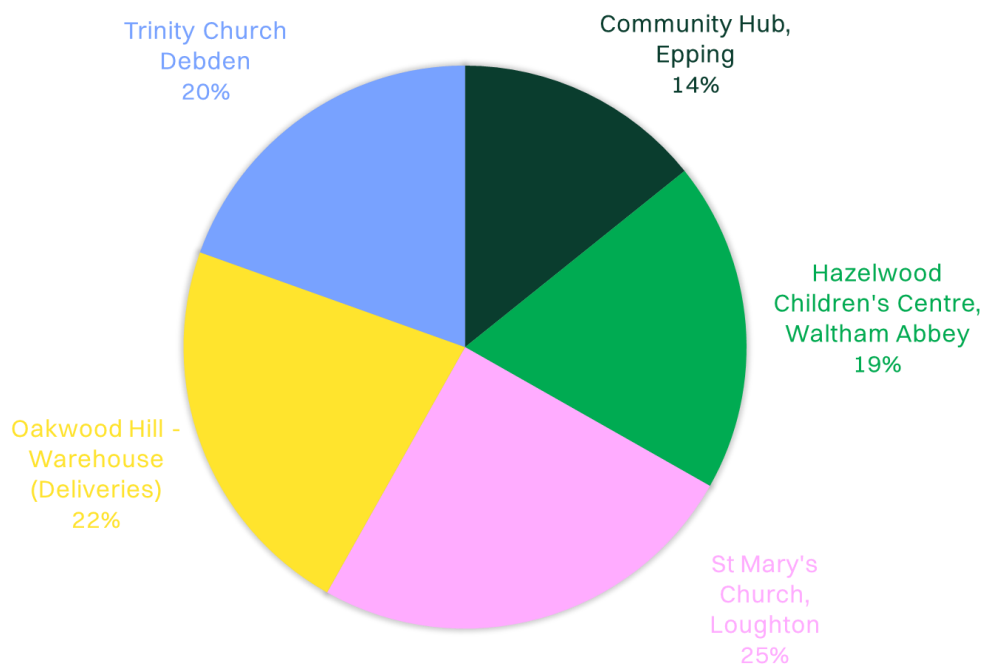
## Foodbank usage by years



2024/2025 was the first year that saw a slight dip in usage, previously we had seen a huge climb lasting several years.

However, 2024/2025 was still our second busiest year ever and so there is still a great deal of need for our services.

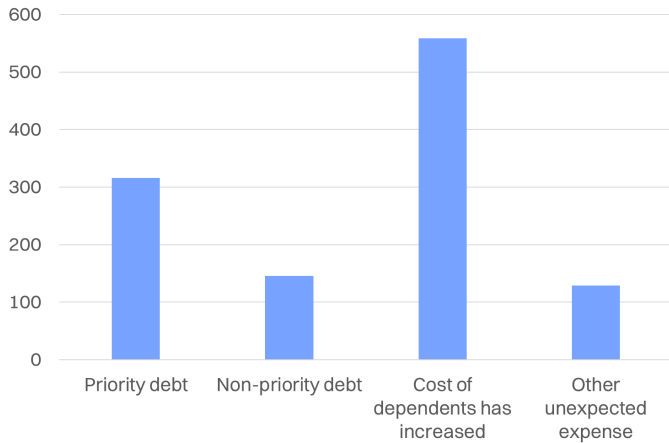
## Which hubs our clients use



The usage at each of our hubs is still spread evenly across the entire district.

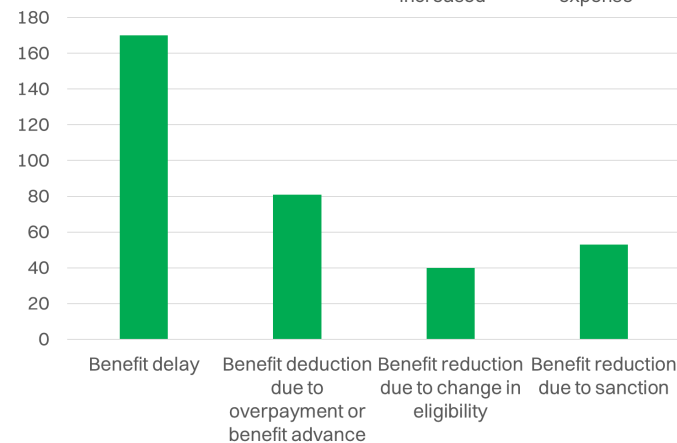
# -ies Distributed

## What is driving people to need our services



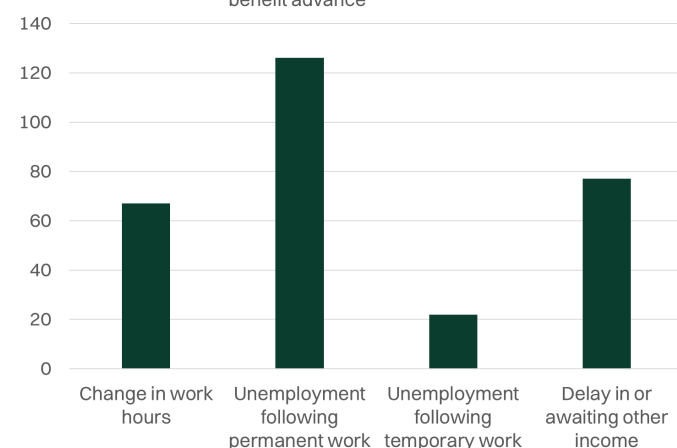
### Rise in the cost of living

Perhaps unsurprisingly, most of our clients place at least some blame on the rising cost of living to driving them to need the foodbank.



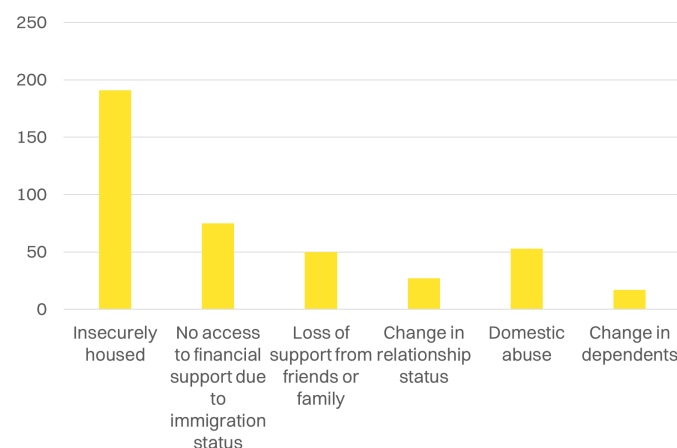
### Issues with the Benefits system

Many of our clients report issues with the benefits system, the most common is delays to payments and sanctions. People can be sanctioned for all sorts of infringements, such as being late to appointments or even just missing a phone-call.



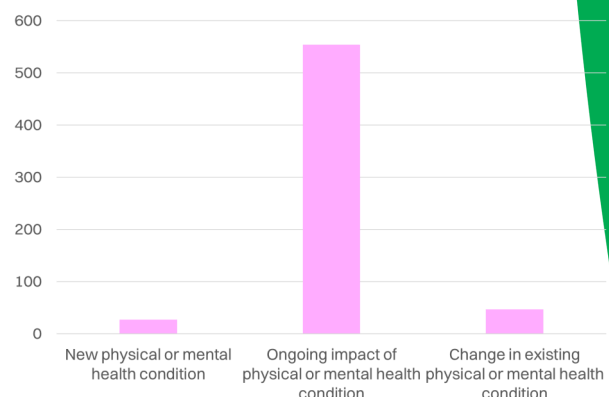
### Issues with Employment and salary

Issues following the end of work or reductions in hours drive a lot of clients to the needing the foodbank, it also makes it impossible to plan weekly/monthly budgets.



### Personal circumstances and Health

Relationships ending, domestic violence, poor housing and changing health conditions have all contributed to significant amounts of people needing our services.





# Photo Highlights

## Photo Key

**1.** Bancrofts School dropping off their Easter Egg Collection



**2.** Cadent Gas employee volunteering at our Food In School Holidays programme



**3.** Loughton Running Club with a collection to drop off from an organised collection



**4.** Tesco Superstore in Waltham Abbey set up for our in-store donations drive



**5.** Stacey Solomons and Chairman of Council, Councillor Darshan Sunger cutting the ribbon at our new warehouse in Oakwood Hill Industrial Estate.





# of 2024/2025

## Photo Key

**6.** Operations Manager Bob Glasgow showing MP Neil Hudson our warehouse

**7.** Managers from Essex Libraries assisting our Food In School Holiday Programme

**8.** Staff from Top Golf Chigwell on a staff volunteering day

**9.** JDS Recruitment visited to assist in the warehouse

**10.** Members of the Trussel media team attended St Mary's church to take photos for the summer fundraising campaign.



# Our Ethos

## Our Vision

An Epping Forest where no one needs to go hungry

## Our Mission

To make sure that everyone in Epping Forest has access to food in times of crisis, and to address the underlying causes of Food Insecurity in Epping Forest.

## Our Values

*Compassion:* We stand in solidarity with people who need the help of food banks. We put the wellbeing of people served by food banks above everything else. We always uphold and protect their dignity.

*Justice:* We are motivated by a desire to see a more just society. We don't think that it is right that anyone is facing hunger and poverty. Everyone should have enough income to afford the essentials.

*Community:* We believe we share the responsibility to support one another in our communities. To create change, we must work together for a fairer society.

*Dignity:* We recognise the innate value of each individual person and seek to prioritise the other person's needs and concerns in the spirit of mutuality and friendship, regardless of background.

Micah 6:8 - *He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

## Our Journey

Epping Forest Food bank grew from one church-based food bank based at St Marys, Loughton to a district wide food bank with 5 locations across Epping Forest. We expanded as demand grew but remained connected to our roots. Our new hubs have been placed at the heart of the community, in Churches, Children's and Civic centres.

We have tremendous support from Churches who host regular collections, inspired to love their neighbour and to follow the commands of Jesus to care for people who are facing financial hardship.

Churches remain at the heart of our identity as Epping Forest Food bank. Our values of Justice, Dignity, Compassion and Community are recognisably, but not exclusively, Christian but are shared, understood and enriched by people of all faiths and none.

The people we support, partner with and who volunteer for us also come from all faith backgrounds and none, and we work to ensure that all share our Vision, Mission and Values.



# Media Coverage

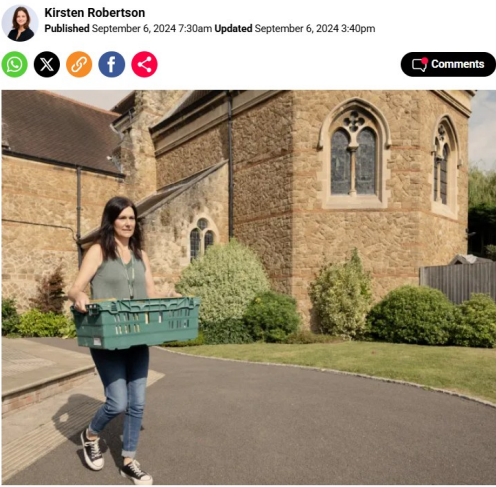
Over the past financial year, Epping Forest Foodbank has been featured across a range of national and regional media outlets, helping to raise awareness of the growing need in our community and the vital work made possible by our donors and volunteers.

In May, our Director, Jacob Forman, was interviewed live on *BBC Essex*, where he spoke about the increasing demand for emergency food support and the challenges many local families are facing. That same month, our warehouse welcomed a film crew from *ITV's Good Morning Britain*, offering viewers a behind-the-scenes look at how foodbank donations are processed and distributed.

In September, *Metro* newspaper visited our Loughton hub to speak with both volunteers and clients, sharing powerful stories that highlighted the human impact of food insecurity. The piece helped to bring national attention to the realities faced by those we support.

Finally, in December, *LBC* radio presenter Natasha Devon visited our Epping hub to explore what a modern foodbank looks like and how it operates. Her thoughtful segment helped demystify foodbanks for listeners and underlined the importance of community action.

## Donations running dry: the real story from inside Britain's foodbanks

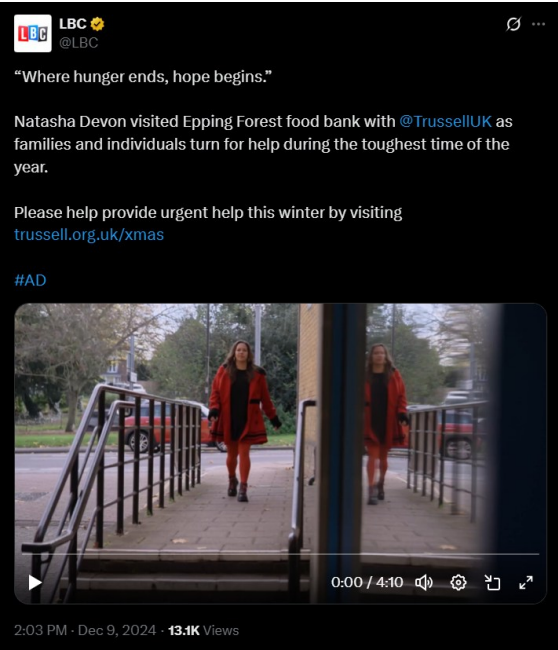


Metro visited Epping Forest Foodbank in Essex to mark National Foodbank Day (Picture: Dominic Whisson)

Susanna bumped into a friend while she walked through the Essex town of Loughton. Exchanging small talk, she was asked what she was up to. 'Oh, just shopping,' Susanna replied, holding on tightly to her bag.

In actual fact, the 61-year-old, who is going by a pseudonym, was on her way to St Mary's Church. There, she turned past the main hall and through

Metro Article, September 6th 2024



LBC's tweet, 9th December 2024

We're grateful for this media attention, which amplifies our mission and inspires continued support.



ITV's Good Morning Britain, at our warehouse 14th May 2024



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