

An appeal to the new Prime Minister from Brighton & Hove Emergency Food Network



Dear Prime Minister,

Congratulations on becoming the new Prime Minister. Whilst we thank you for your immediate intervention on energy costs we are still very concerned about the coming months and the impact of household food insecurity on people's health and well-being.

We are a network of 44 food banks, social supermarkets and meal projects whose volunteers support the growing numbers of people in food need in Brighton & Hove. We are writing to urge you to put in place a package of measures to immediately address the impact of the current cost-of-living crisis by targeting help so that people have enough money to eat and heat their homes this winter.

Data from the Food Foundation shows that in 2022 food insecurity is the highest it has ever been. This national picture echoes our own local data. The numbers of people needing food support in Brighton & Hove rose by 18% in 2022, from an average of 4,370 people a week using our members' services in 2021 to 5,159 people using them in 2022.

Further, data from our Emergency Food Network's annual survey of food need in the city shows 63% of people are turning to our members for long-term support to meet their food needs as they experience deep and ongoing poverty. This amounts to more than 3,250 people in our small city finding their weekly income fails to meet their weekly expenditure.

This is the situation now. We are alarmed at what will happen this winter as prices continue to rise. We fear we will not be able to cope with the inevitable increase in demand for our support.

"We are really struggling to meet the needs due to lack of funding. We are using our reserve after shutting down for weeks and many people were calling every week to check when we are opening again."

Black Minority Ethnic Centre Partnership - Food Bank

We urge that you take immediate action to:

- 1. Ensure benefits are increased with the true cost of inflation.**
- 2. Reinstate the £20 uplift to Universal Credit** in recognition that the additional household costs it was designed to help cover have not reduced post pandemic.
- 3. Immediately take action to address fuel poverty** proportionate to the financial needs of the household. Specific attention must be paid to prepayment customers many of whom already regularly live without electricity or gas and the needs of households whose health conditions mean that they consume more energy.
- 4. Improve insulation and implement other energy-conserving measures** in the most energy-inefficient homes.
- 5. Remove the five-week waiting period for Universal Credit claimants.** Nearly half those supported by Trussell Trust food banks last year sought support because of their debt to the Government resulting from UC delays.
- 6. Unfreeze Local Housing Allowance rates** so housing benefit keeps pace with inflation.
- 7. Fund local councils to commission community delivered meals** for housebound residents who cannot afford to feed themselves.
- 8. Work with local areas to implement a measurable plan to increase the uptake of Pension Credit** by pensioners in poverty from the currently low 35% uptake.
- 9. Increase the permitted work rate to allow employers to raise the wages of people with disabilities** employed on this basis.
- 10. Remove the No Recourse to Public Funds rules** that mean the increasing numbers of asylum seekers and refugees cannot access local authority or Government support.
- 11. Introduce a holistic programme of support to prevent children's health and education being impacted due to food poverty.** To include - extended eligibility to Healthy Start Vouchers and FSM to all children from families entitled to Universal Credit, extending the age limit for HSV by one year so that there is not a gap between the end of eligibility to HS and the start of FSM and to lift the two-child limit to eligibility for child Benefit.
- 12. Address the benefits cap and the need for affordable childcare** so parents can work more hours, as these are well-known barriers which particularly affect lone parents with young children.
- 13. Raise the minimum wage for young people aged 18 or older** to the same level as the over-23s as the increase in food and energy bills affects everybody equally.
- 14. Introduce funding or grants for those providing food and fuel support,** alongside the welcome support from Household Support Fund.

Our volunteers are becoming burnt out and are increasingly anxious. Already emergency food organisations have seen a 69% drop in donations. Six out of 10 members said stock levels and surplus food have significantly dropped and 63% are spending more money for the same amount of food as last year. This is happening at the same time as grants for those that provided food support during the pandemic are stopping.

Day in day out we are seeing people of all ages and backgrounds who are at risk of malnutrition, homelessness, poor educational attainment and mental and physical health breakdown. The costs of preventing this happening are less than the costs of the consequences.

"Need has gone up and food is more expensive. People are coming to us more so that they can offset the cost of food to be able to pay for bills. People are panicking more and taking more than normal for fear of running out and the service disappearing, so we have had to make sure we are voicing that with the users and letting them know that we are a stable fixture. They are seeing other places shut down or have less sources and that is making them panic."

The Old Boat Community Centre

"Many of us feel we are now facing Armageddon, we know people will die this winter fearful of switching heating on. The food donation chain is drying up while dependents numbers grow, we output 1000 meals a week now. Our shelves are getting close to empty and we are forced to buy ourself out of the problem. Where does it all end?"

Sussex Homeless Support

The Brighton & Hove Emergency Food Network has grown from six organisations providing 220 weekly parcels in 2013 to 44 organisations providing 1,184 weekly food parcels or vouchers, 2,548 meals and 658 affordable shops in 2022. For a long time the narrative has been that people choose between heating or eating. We are now in the situation where people cannot afford to do either as benefit levels or low and insecure wages fail to meet household living costs.

Food security is both a short-term crisis and a long-term challenge. Alongside immediate action to target help to those most in need we need to tackle the long term social, health environmental and economic issues related to food. We call on the UK government to build on the recent Food Strategy White Paper and work with Food Partnerships across the country to address the current food system issues.

"People are starting to queue about 2 hours before the doors open, whilst donations have dropped, it is a sign of the times."

Real Junk Food Project

Yours Sincerely,

Brighton & Hove Emergency Food Network

Food banks and food voucher providers

- Balfour Mutual Aid Food Bank
- Bevendean Food Bank
- Black & Minority Ethnic Community Partnership Food Bank
- BHCC Children's Centres
- Brighton Food Bank
- Brighton Women's Centre
- C.A.S.E
- CEDP Chinese Centre
- Clarendon Foodbank
- Cornerstone Community Centre
- Craven Vale Food Bank
- Fresh Start
- Hangleton & West Blatchington Food Bank
- Hollingdean Food Bank
- Impact Initiatives Food Access Support Services
- Mutual Aid Vegan Food Bank
- Purple People Kitchen Food Bank
- St John the Baptist Food Bank
- Sussex Bakedown
- The Pantry (St Mary Magdalen Foodbank)
- The Salvation Army – Hove
- The Villas Food Bank
- The Whitehawk Foodbank
- Voices in Exile Food Bank

Affordable Food & other providers

- BrightStore (four locations)
- Cravenvale Food bank
- Hollingbury Foodbank at the Gathering Place
- Moulsecoomb Community Market
- Old Boat Corner Community Centre
- Pankhurst Pantry
- Phoenix Food Shop
- Woodingdean Food Hub
- Weald Allotments Community Fridge
- YMCA DLG Youth Advice Centre Brighton

Community meal projects

- Brighton Unemployed Centre Families Project
- Chomp, One Church Brighton
- Christians Against Poverty
- East Brighton Food Co-op
- Food & Friendship
- Lunch Positive
- Sussex Homeless Support
- Sussex Surplus
- The Bevy Community Pub
- The Trust for Developing Communities
- The Real Junk Food Project (four locations)

"30% increase in client numbers last year and 18% year to date. What is concerning is to see clients who we had managed to stabilise their position and not need our services - return to us this year. Also, an increase in those who have never ever needed support - 20 to 30 years in work - now being thrown into the system."

Brighton Food Bank