

Brighton & Hove



# Emergency Food Network Annual Report 2023

An annual report to record and raise awareness of the impact and support needs of emergency food projects across Brighton and Hove



# Table of contents

<b>Brighton &amp; Hove Food Partnership</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Report Summary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2023 Headline Stats</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Emergency Food Network Members</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>CONTEXT</b>	
<b>A National Cost-of-Living Crisis</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Emergency Food provision in Brighton and Hove</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Types of Food Provision</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2023 EMERGENCY FOOD NETWORK SURVEY FINDINGS</b>	
<b>Who uses emergency food services?</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>What do food projects provide?</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Student beneficiary case study</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>What do food projects need?</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>CAMPAIGN REQUESTS</b>	
<b>1. Against the new normal of food insecurity</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2. Assistance with food sourcing</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>3. Local &amp; national government support</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>What Next?</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Appendix: Methodology &amp; Contact</b>	<b>23</b>



## Brighton & Hove Food Partnership

Brighton & Hove Food Partnership (BHFP) is a non-profit organisation, established in 2003 as a hub for information, inspiration and connection around food.

We help people learn to cook, grow food, eat a healthy diet and waste less. We prioritise work with people who are struggling to put food on the table and who experience isolation and poor health. We support local food networks and work at a policy and strategy level to achieve healthy, sustainable and fair food for all

BHFP set up the Emergency Food Network (EFN) in 2013. This collaborative network enables emergency food projects to come together and share common problems, learn from each other's experiences and develop joint solutions.

Since 2014, in July each year BHFP has coordinated an annual survey to record and raise awareness of the support needs and impact of emergency food projects across Brighton and Hove. Previous reports and other research can be found online.

The Food Partnership's resources for people experiencing food poverty can be found online, or get support by contacting our enquiries team on 01273 234 810 or [info@bhfood.org.uk](mailto:info@bhfood.org.uk)



## Report Summary

The findings of the 2023 EFN report show thousands of people in Brighton and Hove now depend on week-in week-out support from charities to meet their everyday food needs.

Our summer survey of food projects reveals more than 6,400 people rely on food banks, social supermarkets and community meal providers each week, a rise in 25% from the previous year. Almost a third of these are children and two-thirds need food support on an ongoing basis. The situation is only expected to worsen as we enter the winter season.

With food costs rising and donations falling, the city's food providers are spending £15,800 each week to top-up dwindling stock levels, up 59% from last year. This level of expenditure is unsustainable and some food banks are already having to pause new referrals or reduce the amount of food they can offer. Almost half the city's emergency food providers report not having enough money for the year ahead. Food projects have asked BHFP to campaign for more support from local and national government. Importantly, they would like to see an end to food insecurity becoming the new normal.

BHFP would like to thank all the projects, staff and volunteers involved in food projects for their enduring commitment to providing food for people in need, as well as their tireless dedication, enthusiasm, and their willingness to support each other.

# 2023 Headline Stats

**The Emergency Food Network now comprises 51 active member projects**

They operate out of more than 60 locations.

**Fewer than half EFN projects had sufficient funding for the next year**

## In one week:

**Over 6,400 people used emergency food services**

- Projects noticed an increase in people with mental health issues, people in work, and refugees, migrants and asylum seekers.
- The main reasons projects thought people accessed their food were low income, the cost of living, and ill health or disability.
- Food projects reported an average of 65% of people using their services were doing so on an ongoing basis.

Projects across the city reported **over £15,800 was spent on food**

That's £821,600 per year.

**Over 1,300 emergency food parcels were provided**

**Affordable food providers gave out 632 food shops to members**

**\*see page 9**

with an average fee of £5.41.

# Emergency Food Network Members

- Balfour Mutual Aid Food Bank
- Bevendean Food Bank
- BHCC Family Hubs
- Black & Minority Ethnic Community Partnership
- Brighton and Hove LGBT Switchboard
- Brighton Food Bank
- Brighton Grub Hub
- Brighton Unemployed Centre Families Project
- Brighton Students Union
- Brighton Women's Centre
- BrightStore
- C.A.S.E (Community Advice Support Education)
- Carelink
- Chomp, One Church Brighton
- Christians Against Poverty
- Cornerstone Community Centre
- Cravenvale Food Bank
- East Brighton Food Co-op
- Elm Grove PTA The Pantry
- Fareshare Sussex & Surrey
- Food & Friendship
- Fresh Start Community Association
- Hangleton & West Blatchington Food Bank
- Hangleton and Knoll Project
- Hollingbury Foodbank at the Gathering Place
- Hollingdean Food Bank
- Impact Initiatives Food Access Support Services
- Lunch Positive
- Moulsecomb Community Market
- Mutual Aid Vegan Food Bank
- Old Boat Corner Community Centre
- Pankhurst Pantry
- Phoenix Food Hub
- Purple People Kitchen Food Bank
- Saltdean, Rottingdean and Ovingdean Food Bank
- St John the Baptist Food Bank
- Sussex Bakedown
- Sussex Homeless Support
- Sussex Surplus
- The Crew Club
- The Pantry (St Mary Magdalen Foodbank)
- The Real Junk Food Project
- The Salvation Army – Hove
- The Vale Community Centre Food Bank/ Craven Vale
- The Whitehawk Foodbank
- Very Local Food Hubs
- Voices in Exile Food Bank
- We Are Emmanuel
- Weald Allotments Community Fridge
- Woodingdean Community Food Hub
- YMCA DLG Youth Advice Centre Brighton

**"A very supportive network. I don't work in isolation anymore."**

**"Sharing issues and best practice is very useful."**

**"It's lovely and useful to gather with other leaders in this work across this city, and discuss how we best serve people together."**

**-Food project staff/ volunteers**

# Context

## A National Cost-of-Living Crisis

The ongoing cost-of-living crisis in the UK means the price of food, fuel and utilities continue to rise in 2023.

Food price inflation eased slightly after hitting the highest rate for over 45 years, but was still at 14.5% at the time of this survey, and people have less money to spend on food. Poverty is increasing and over 17% of UK households experience food insecurity.

Around one in twenty adults in Britain report running out of food and being unable to afford to buy more. The Trussell Trust has also calculated that the current weekly rate of Universal Credit (UC) falls short of the true cost of essentials such as food by £35 for singles and £66 for couples.

Brighton and Hove City Council has a large number of UC claimants for such a small geographical area, higher than the mean of UK local authorities. In July 2023, there were 25,649 people claiming UC in the area, with that number increasing every month.

More people are facing the prospect of being unable to feed themselves and their families, and many are seeking out food support for the first time.

Global factors and supply chain issues are keeping the cost of staple foods high into the latter part of 2023. This is stretching the capacity of emergency food providers.

Whilst food prices and supply issues are challenging, it is the high number of households in poverty that means projects are feeling stretched and concerned for the months ahead. Since the pandemic in 2020, the removal of the £20 a week uplift to UC in 2021 and the impact of increasing food, fuel and transport costs in 2022, there has been no respite in the increased demand on food projects.

In 2022, the city's community food projects asked BHFP to co-ordinate a campaign urging national and local government to address the underlying causes of food poverty. This campaign had a clear message: that people need help with household incomes, and that emergency food provision cannot be relied on as the solution. This work continues and the findings from this survey will feed into our campaigning for this year. Read about the next steps on page 22.

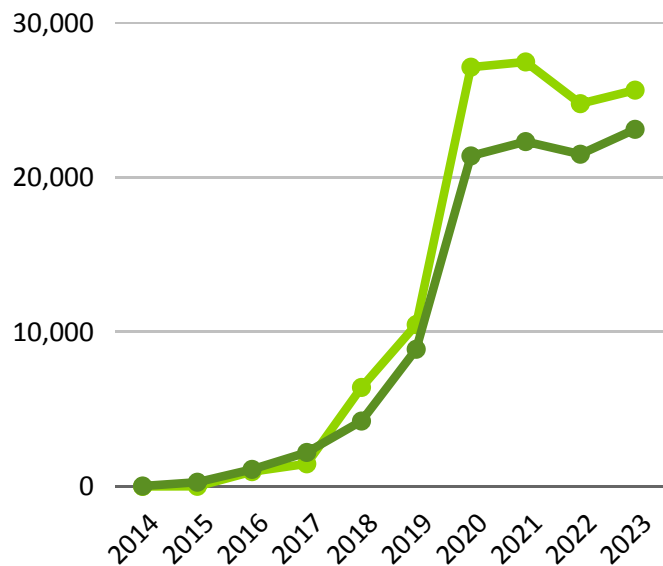


Figure 1. Total number of people claiming UC in Brighton and Hove (light green), compared to the mean across English councils (dark green). Sourced from Department for Work and Pensions data from July each year.

# Emergency Food Provision in Brighton and Hove

Although patterns in food bank use can indicate current trends in food insecurity, it is only the tip of the iceberg. Even in an emergency, some people do not access emergency food services. This could be due to many reasons, including lack of information or inability to get to the food bank.

Stigma attached to accessing food support is also a significant factor. [A study of Food Poverty Trauma in 2022](#) found that the stigma of seeking food support meant that skipping meals or eating out-of-date food is often a first choice.

**“[There’s the] stigma of it ... it’s degrading to wait in a line for something you shouldn’t have to be waiting in line for. And I think we’ve done our best to address that aspect of it.”**

**“You know, a lot of people were quite ashamed about coming to use the food bank. So we literally just do it and it’s quite a brief exchange.”**

**-Food project staff/ volunteers**

In 2013 there were only six food banks in Brighton. The number of new food projects has risen annually since then. Many opened in rapid response to the pandemic, particularly to deliver to the housebound. BHFP produced a [report of findings from a survey of 230 people in food poverty in August 2020](#) which detailed the reasons people needed food support and recommendations of how to address this during the lockdowns. While some of the pandemic response projects have now closed, other food providers have opened and the range of support has diversified to address ongoing levels of need.

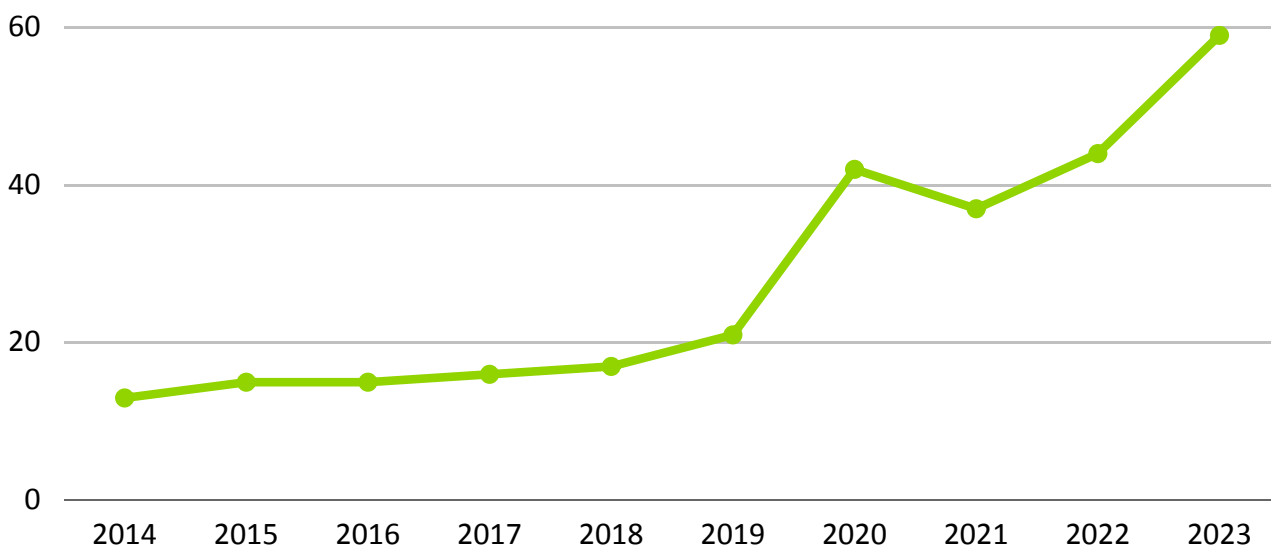


Figure 2. The number of food projects operating since 2014 has followed an upward trend overall

# Types of Food Provision

Emergency food support in Brighton and Hove now includes food banks, food vouchers, affordable food projects, community meals, meals-on-wheels, pantries, veg boxes, lunch or breakfast clubs and more. Projects may be providing a combination of these types of service. At the time of writing, in July 2023, the Emergency Food Network comprised 51 member projects.



Figure 3. Locations of network members and their projects across the area at the time of the 2023 EFN survey.

## 1. Food Banks

Food banks provide free parcels, usually containing enough food for three days and sometimes essential toiletries. Most operate a referral system, whereby appointments can be arranged by a care professional or agency worker. Some food banks only distribute food parcels to people living within their catchment area and/ or who fit specific criteria.

Britain's largest food bank network is coordinated by the Trussell Trust (TT), a not-for-profit organisation supporting over 1,200 food bank centres. Clients can be referred to receive a digital voucher which can be redeemed for up to six weekly food parcels at their local participating food bank. Brighton and Hove now has two TT food banks and a further three food banks operating with the use of TT vouchers. There are also three family hubs (formerly children's centres) within Brighton and Hove that provide food support. Previously they ran food banks, and now they operate a cash-first approach by providing digital groceries vouchers within a package of holistic support for the whole family. The remaining food banks are independently run, predominantly by volunteers.

## 2. Affordable Food Projects

Affordable food projects can be defined as:

- Projects that 'sell' food at a reduced cost or have a membership fee
- Projects that have a model that moves beyond emergency food provision
- Projects that aim to reduce long-term food insecurity

BHFP supported the start-up of the Affordable Food Network in 2020. The Network aims to assist local residents to access affordable food that is healthy, sustainable and culturally appropriate, and joining together affordable food providers to ensure an effective, coordinated approach.

## 3. Community Meal Projects

BHFP also supports the work of community meal projects that provide low- or no-cost meals, including lunch clubs, pay-as-you-feel cafes and home delivery services.

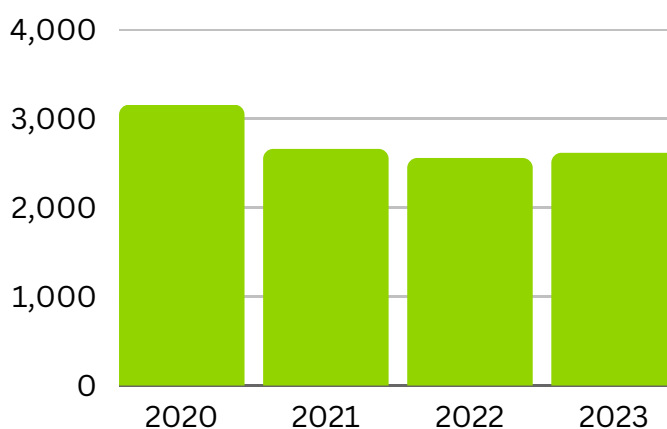


Figure 4. The number of Free meals provided in a week

### Street Kitchens

Street kitchens provide meals to people experiencing homelessness. Sussex Homeless Support cooks meals which are served hot in an outdoor location in central Brighton, to be eaten in place or taken away. As with many of the projects, it has diversified to provide other support such as clothing, advocacy and household items for those moving into emergency and temporary accommodation.

### Community Cafés

Seated shared meals in a warm space can offer an opportunity for socialising and companionship. This aims to combat the loneliness of food insecurity. Pay-as-you-feel cafes can also reduce stigma as paying and non-paying customers can eat the same meal side by side. One example is the Real Junk Food Project, which at the time of the survey provides meals out of four pay-as-you-feel cafes and one food hub offering its surplus ingredients.

### Meal Deliveries

Brighton and Hove City Council's last contract for a meals-on-wheels service ended in 2016. Today the only similar service provided in the area is coordinated by East Brighton Food Co-op (EBFC). This volunteer-run project cooks balanced meals with portions to cover every meal of the week for their members. This service gets a high proportion of referrals for older people, people who have recently been discharged from hospital and the long-term housebound.

## 4. Other Providers

This survey endeavored to reach all emergency food providers in the area. However, there may be some projects operating which are not included.

### Educational settings and community food cupboards

The timing of this survey means that it does not capture the support that a growing number of educational settings are providing for food insecure students and their guardians during term time. This is not insignificant. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) highlights that the number of children living in poverty has risen by around 600,000 since 2012.

An evaluation of the food poverty fund for schools, a grant scheme developed by Public Health Schools, reports receiving applications from 20 primary schools and three secondary schools to join the East Sussex scheme in autumn 2022.

Five of the schools wanted to use the funding to create or maintain community food cupboards, reflecting a demand for more access to food support in settings such as primary schools and universities. Similar to the Community Fridge model, these can be a discreet way for people to donate or take supplies as they need, but as a result they do not always record service use.

### Surplus food distributors

The surplus food distributors, such as Fareshare Sussex and Surrey and members of the city's Surplus Food Network, are integral to emergency food provision. They provide stock for emergency food providers. Food distributors will not make up the main discussion of this report but will be included where relevant.

### Household Support Funding

Much of the food-related work in the city is funded via the Household Support Fund (HSF). Started in October 2021, this money is allocated from central government to local authority areas so they can provide support to people struggling to pay for food, energy and other essentials. The value of HSF to cover 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 is £1 billion nationally and the allocation for Brighton and Hove is £4.28m.

The largest proportion of this funding (£1,485,000) is used to cover the cost of a £15 per week voucher for each child entitled to benefits-related free school meals for each week of the school holidays. A further £1,418,000 is distributed by Brighton & Hove City Council Local Discretionary Social Fund. Recognising that many people prefer to receive support from community-based organisations, affordable food projects, community and delivered meals, food banks and vouchers provided via community organisations received a total of £510,000 to make support accessible to residents in crisis via their existing networks.

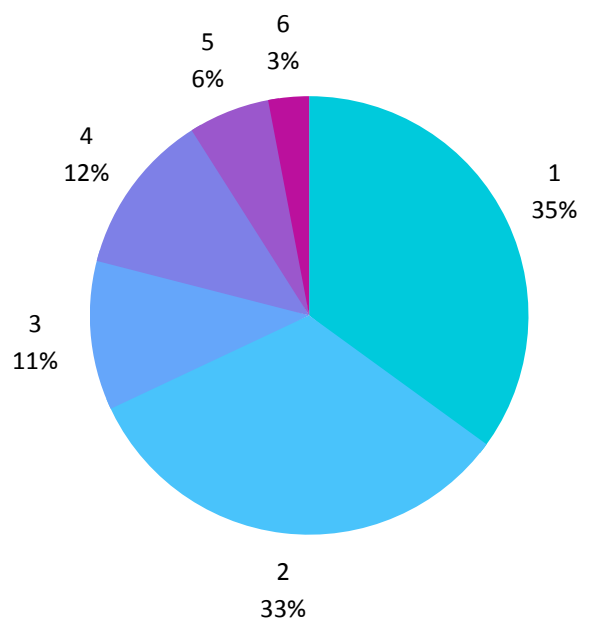


Figure 5. The division in allocation of % Allocation of £4.28m HSF

1. Free School Meals Holiday Vouchers
2. Local Social Discretionary Fund
3. Other support via Brighton & Hove City Council e.g., council tax reduction
4. Community food support
5. Community energy support
6. Family Hub and Social Services



# 2023 Emergency Food Network Survey Findings

The survey collected responses from 47 emergency food providers and one surplus food redistributor. Participants answered the questions most relevant to their project so did not respond to every question. The data shows a snapshot of a week in July-August 2023.

## Who uses emergency food services?

46 projects served 6,441 beneficiaries, a rise of 25% on 2022 beneficiaries.

Around 800 were pensioners, a rise of 34% on 2022. Around 3,700 were adults, a rise of 40% on 2022. Around 1,880 were children, a rise of 28% on 2022.

Both the number of projects and the number of beneficiaries grew significantly in 2023. This could reflect an increasing demand for food support, and increasing access to food support as new projects open in local communities.

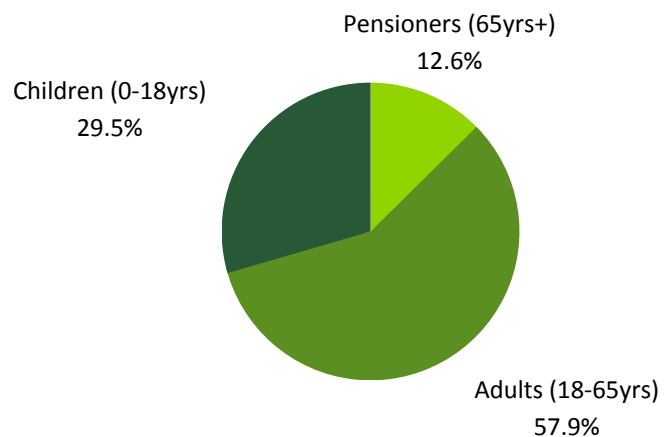


Figure 6. The proportions of age groups of beneficiaries.

The average proportion of people using services indefinitely has risen from 52% in 2022 to 65% in 2023. This could be a result of more affordable food providers in the network providing ongoing memberships. It could also be due to the cost-of-living crisis continuing, causing people to live in a state of emergency for long periods.

**“Are we just a plaster over a wound that's not being addressed? We'd love to know whether the people who refer into us are actually providing some holistic support for that person to try and address whatever is bringing them to us.”**

**-Food project staff/ volunteers**

## Service use by particular groups

Thirty-one projects noticed an increase in people with mental health issues and twenty-six noticed an increase in people in work. This agrees with the [2022 findings from the Office of National Statistics \(ONS\)](#) that adults on low income and those with moderate-to-severe depressive symptoms are more likely to experience food insecurity. In-work poverty in the UK, related to food insecurity, was [found by the JRF to be remaining high into 2023](#), with over two thirds of children in poverty living in a working family.

Twenty-four organisations noticed an increase in refugees, migrants and asylum seekers. [Asylum Matter's 2022 survey](#) of people living on Home Office asylum support found over 80% do not always have enough money for food. [Research into the food access needs of black and racially minoritised communities and refugee and asylum seekers in March 2023](#) found that the food provided to asylum seekers housed in hotels in Brighton and Hove was often cold, came in small portions and involved little or no choice for beneficiaries. In some cases, the poor quality and clumsy presentation of unfamiliar, cold items together made people feel unwell.

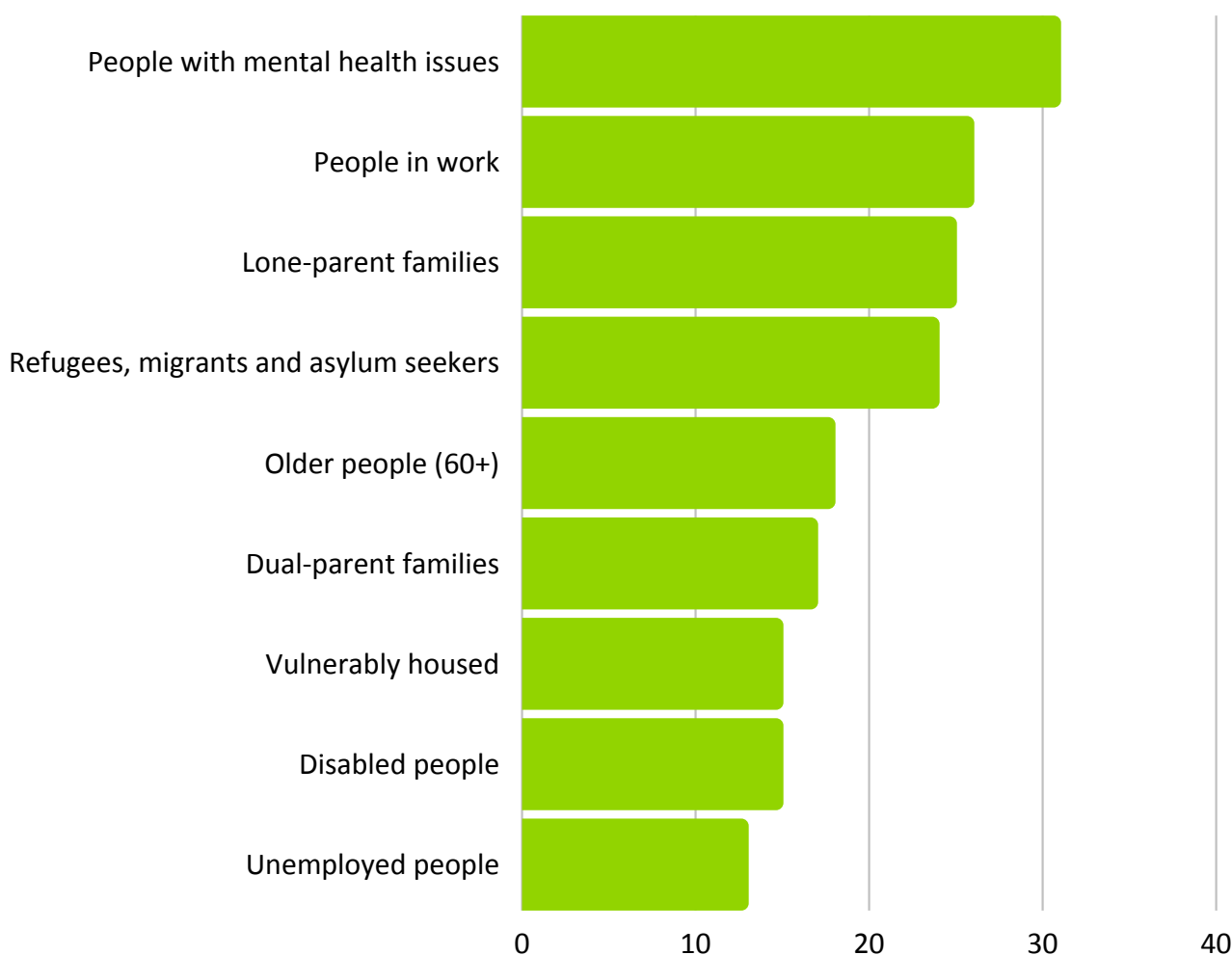


Figure 7. The number of projects which noted an increase in particular groups of beneficiaries.

Other notable groups were BAME people, younger people (16-25), people who have experienced domestic abuse, people with substance issues, people from the LGBTQIA+ community, offenders/ex-offenders, those with learning difficulties, isolated people and students.

## Main reasons for food access

The main reasons organisations thought people accessed their food was low income (44 of the 51 organisations asked), the cost of living (41), and ill health or disability (34). This continues the trend from previous EFN reports, with more factors being noticed in addition to benefits issues as the main reasons for accessing food. The rising costs of care, bills and rent may hit people in the area especially hard. For example, Brighton has one of the most expensive rental markets in the UK and the [ONS](#) found that renters were more likely to report spending less on, or running out of, food than mortgage holders in 2023.



Figure 8. The main reasons projects thought people access their food, with circle size increasing with number of responses.

# What do food projects provide?

Twenty-nine organisations gave out 1,339 emergency food parcels. Nine projects gave out 81 groceries vouchers. The total number of emergency food parcels and vouchers provided rose by 20% on 2022.

Overall the number of people receiving food support has increased. However not all providers have increased numbers and some of this may be because clients move between projects as some providers have a limited time period that beneficiaries can receive support.

Nine affordable food providers gave out 632 food shops of groceries for members for a fee, with an average fee of £5.41. This number remains similar to the 2022 figure of 658 affordable food shops provided, but the make-up of providers dropped from 11 in 2022 due to some projects closing and others opening. Some projects may be providing affordable food as part of a wider offering of other services, or may have transitioned entirely to an affordable food project model. Such projects will be the focus of the upcoming national Good Food Enterprise projects led by Sustain and on which BHFP will be working.

Unlike parcels, vouchers and affordable food shops, which are issued weekly or fortnightly, meals can be provided on a daily basis. Sixteen projects gave out a total of 2,606 free meals over a week, similar to the figure of 2,548 in 2022. Three projects gave out 717 meals for a small fee, with an average fee of £2.79.

Fourteen projects gave out 352 free food 'shops' via shops, markets, pantries etc. We have categorised these as 'other providers' for the purposes of this report. As previously discussed, this figure may be lower than reality due to the difficulty of recording usage and being outside of term time when free pantries in educational settings would be operating.

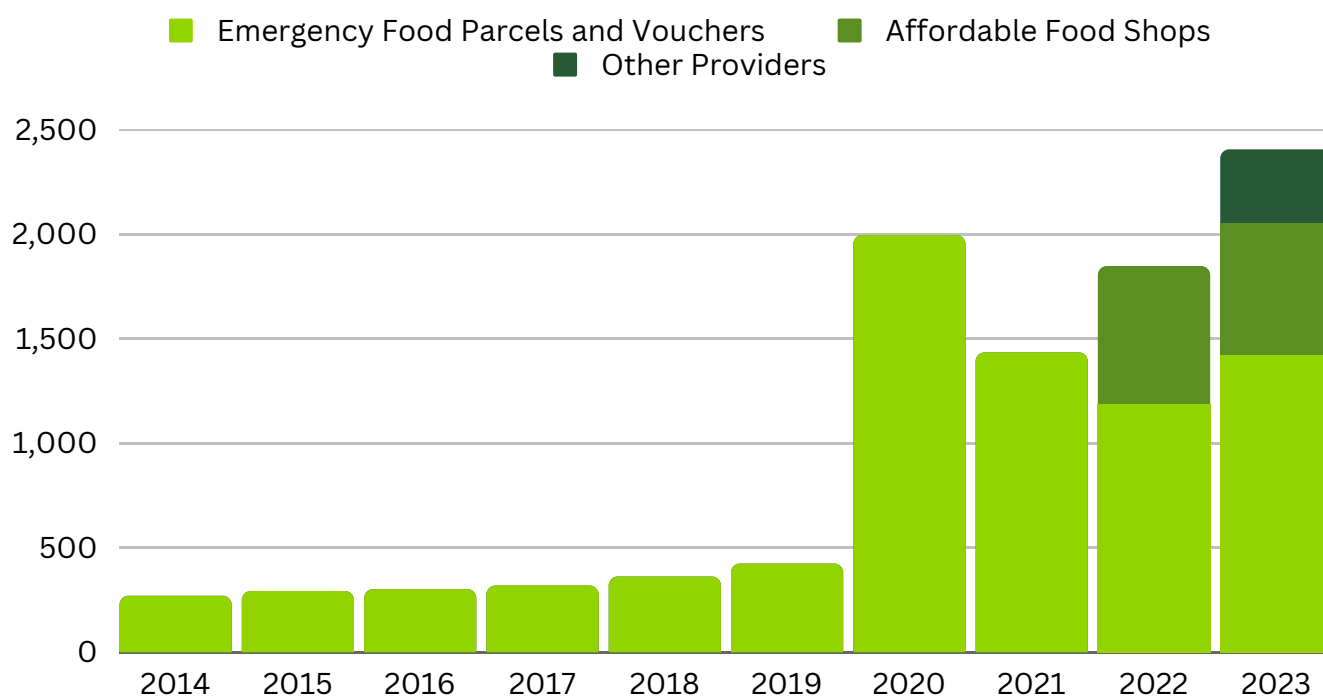


Figure 9. The trends in amount of food support provided since 2014, divided by type of support provided.

It also highlights the diversification of offerings from food projects. Fewer projects fit into the defined category of a 'food bank' than a decade ago. On top of the main categories of food support, the projects also responded that they are providing services such as:

- Cafes
- Cakes from Sussex Bakedown
- Childrens' items from Pelican Parcels
- Clothing and school uniforms
- Community Fridges
- Counselling and wellbeing services
- Free hygiene products
- Fresh fruit for children
- Holiday lunch clubs
- On-site support, information and Household Support Fund advice
- Safe Spaces and Warm Spaces
- Training and empowering
- Veg Boxes

**"In a future without food banks, it's hypothetical that [our community cafe] would still last. That's where we've seen the numbers are still busy, but the actual quietening down is the food bank access. Which is good ... It used to be a case of only food bank clients would rock up to the cafe and just use the space to wait while a food parcel was packed. But now that's a very busy space because there's free cake and coffee. There's advice services, there's people about to chat to you. They offer fruit and veg, fresh fruit juice and sometimes bread."**

**-Food project staff/ volunteers**



## Student Beneficiary Case Study

Scarlet (not her real name) is a university student in Brighton. She wants to share her story of experiencing food insecurity as a young person, working on a zero-hours contract, using the BHFP enquiries line and being referred to emergency food services in the city.

Universities and students Unions in Brighton have measures in place to support students through hardship which can be found [on our website](#). However, this case study and feedback from food projects in the survey indicate students in food insecurity need more help and resources.

Scarlet grew up in a low-income family in London and it was always her goal to move out of the expensive capital city. When she decided to study for a university degree in Brighton, her family was eager to support her. Her mother helped her to find a rented house and the coastal city quickly began to feel like home. But the financial support promised by her father did not arrive and she struggled to make her student loan cover her costs.

**"I see now why there's not a lot of low-income families doing this [university] course because they can't afford it... I'm not a professional yet, so there should be more support with that."**

By the summer, her budget for daily essentials had begun to dwindle and her diagnosed learning difficulties made accessing helpful information an even bigger challenge. She tried to apply for financial support for the summer holidays through her university, only to find she had missed the deadline. She went to a local job fair desperate to find work. She was relieved to be accepted for a well-paying role with a care provider, but this was not as good as it initially seemed.

**"I was in a zero-hours contract and I didn't even know...I put down my availability for every single day in the week. It's the summer holidays, I can work. I was getting an hour a day, which is insane. That's £12 a day and I have to pay for a bus ticket. Deduct £3.20. So I'm making £8.80 a day... It's the fact that you can't get a second job because your contract is so unpredictable... It's very shady that practice."**

In just one hour she had to deliver a full package of care for clients with dementia. This high pressure for little financial gain forced Scarlet to make the difficult decision to leave the job after three months.

Scarlet suddenly found herself with no food in the cupboards and with the real worry she would lose her house. She didn't want to tell anyone and she didn't know where to turn for support. After finding information online, she rang the BHFP enquiries team who provided a reference and made sure she knew how to get to her local food projects.

**“It didn’t feel like it could happen to me... Anybody who knows me knows I don’t ask for help. But I’m so happy I did. I thought it was gonna have to be invasive. But I felt like there was a lot of humanity in it... When you’re really hungry, nothing really makes sense. You just need one answer and that’s what I got.”**

One of the first food projects Scarlet visited was the [Real Junk Food Project Bevendean Food Hub](#). This project stocks surplus food and anyone can take what they want and pay what they can afford. Like many people visiting food projects for the first time, Scarlet was nervous and unsure what to expect. One of the volunteers started up a conversation and helped her to fill her bag with food essentials.

**“I called my mum afterwards, and I didn’t tell her because I was so ashamed of how the situation had panned out, but I said there are really people looking out for all of us.**

**I felt so welcome... We’re supposed to have tasty food. You can’t live like I was, on bread, for a very long time... it was lovely seeing a pantry that was empty get filled with stuff that people had donated, and knowing that these good-hearted people are out there looking to help other strangers.”**

But with just a couple of weeks to go until term restarting and her student loan arriving in September, Scarlet found her cupboards empty again. Because the weekend was fast approaching and none of her local projects was open that day, she decided to ring the BHFP enquiries line again. The BHFP enquiries team provided her with a one-off groceries gift card voucher. This cash-first approach gave her the security she needed to get through that fortnight.

**“[The voucher was] a stepping stone... now my student loan is coming in two days, so at least I’m not gonna be out for the count.”**

Now that Scarlet feels more secure, she is keen to pass on what she has learnt from the experience. Her main advice to others is not to feel alone or embarrassed, because you never know who else might be going through the same thing

**“I’m so thankful that I’m now getting out of it, but I know now that if I needed help those places are there...When I can give back, I 100% will. And thank you for your work as well. You change a lot of people’s lives every day. Even that phone call. If they don’t reach out, at least they know it’s there, and that in itself is just amazing.”**



## What do food projects need?

The majority of projects (31) report spending more money on the same size of parcel and the surplus food supply dropping.

Projects gave a weekly figure on how much they spend to top up food parcels, or to make sure they have all the ingredients for the meals, which does not include what they already get from surplus or donated food. Across 44 food projects, £15,870 is being spent on food overall. The total food spend by projects across the city is 59% more than was spent in 2022. Food spend was an average £360 per project, compared to £322 in 2022.

A high number of projects also reported food and/or financial donation levels dropping (26), stock levels significantly reducing (24), being unable to buy in bulk at supermarkets and having to dip into financial reserves (23). Thirty reported a need to find more sources of food over the next year, while 13 reported a need to find storage facilities. Cooking oil, meat, fresh fruit and vegetables, and eggs were in particularly high demand.

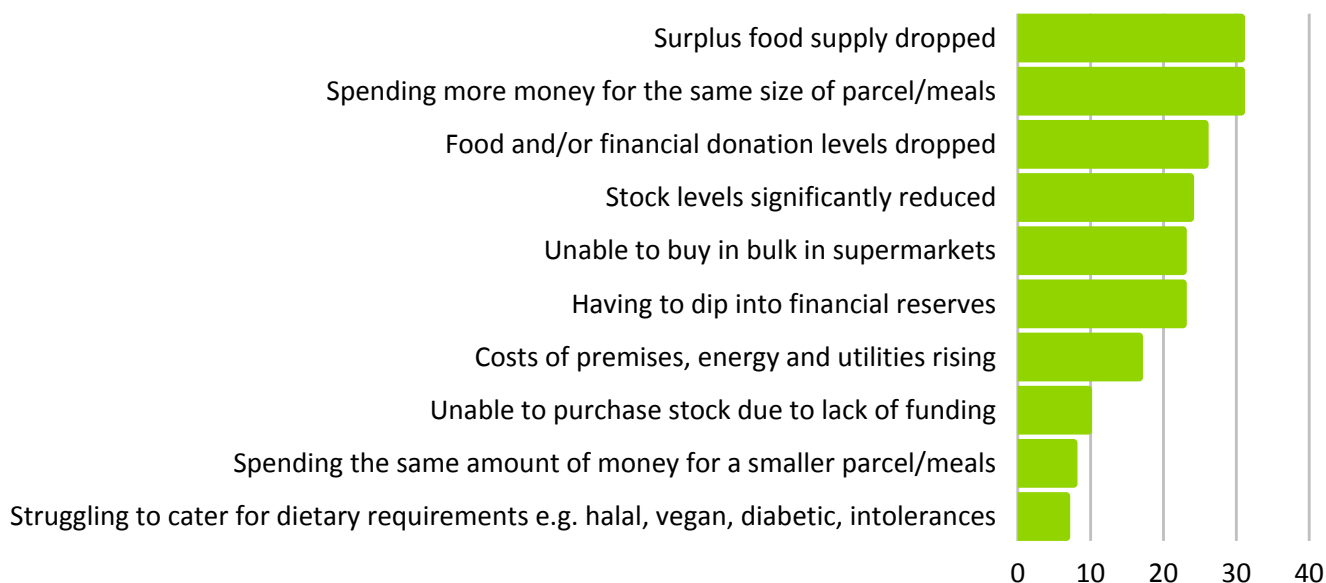


Figure 10. The number of food projects who reported experiencing food supply issues. Other issues raised by projects included the closure of the BHFP Food Hub, and items such as eggs being out of stock for extended periods of time.

**“Stock levels have definitely reduced and we're spending more money. We're really lucky that we get the premises for free ... I think it's just we need either more funding or more food ... I'm always relieved after lunchtime and it's gone OK, we've had enough for everyone. Yeah, it's quite a worry really.”**

**-Food project staff/ volunteers**

Fewer than half responded that they had sufficient funding for the rest of the year, and even then many were unsure about what would happen after Christmas. Eleven projects did not have sufficient funding to meet their likely needs for the next year. Overall, 23 of the projects expressed a need for help with fundraising over the next year.

**“If we don't take on new referrals the money might take us to December. Unfortunately, we are getting more referrals and these are families with children who I find difficult to turn down.”**

**-Food project staff/ volunteers**

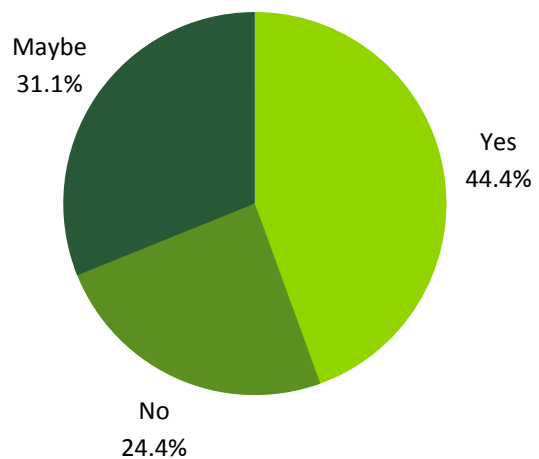


Figure 11. Food Projects answers to the question “do you have sufficient funding to meet your likely needs for the rest of 2023?”

178 paid staff are working 1,214 hours to food projects per week. Needs around volunteer support, recruitment, training and retention were mentioned by multiple survey responses. Over 700 volunteers are providing more than 3,000 hours to food projects weekly, many in key managerial roles.

Total staff and volunteer hours can be calculated to cost £45,954 a week if paid the Brighton and Hove real Living Wage of £10.90.

**“[Our food project staff and volunteers could benefit from more training in] how to direct people to longer-term solutions in an empathetic way without causing any more stress to the individual.”**

**-Food project staff/ volunteers**

# Campaign Requests

The final questions of the survey asked if there was anything projects would like BHFP to campaign about. Nineteen projects responded and from their answers three overarching themes were identified as important to the frontline experiences of the EFN. These will inform the areas for BHFP campaigning focus going forward.

## Campaign Area 1

### Against the new normal of food insecurity

Food projects expressed concern about the increasing and continuing cost-of-living crisis, rising inequality, food poverty and insecurity. This is a view also held by the public, with nine in 10 adults seeing the cost of living as an important issue.

The most common reported reason by far among UK adults who said their cost of living had increased compared with a month ago continued to be the price of food shopping (96%). Themes from the interviews from ONS included “well-being and worries about the future, response by government and businesses, worry about others, and widening inequality”. This campaign request therefore reflects the experiences and concerns of ordinary people.

The argument that hunger and food insecurity has become “normalised” in the UK is also expressed in an Institute of Development Studies working paper from 2022. The authors discuss how inequality, austerity and food insecurity work together as a self-reinforcing system.

**“How do we highlight that we still do want to be supporting people who are in emergency crisis, but we don't want to institutionalise ourselves further at the same time, as though this is a normal or a healthy way of living?”**

**-Food project staff/ volunteers**

Action, especially on a national level, is necessary to address this. Key issues noticed by food projects, such as zero-hours contracts, unfair wages, and poor conditions and facilities in emergency and temporary housing, could also be highlighted for local and national action.

**“We are scrambling for the cash to fund the amount of surplus shopping we need to buy each week at the moment. This is not something we have had to do before the cost-of-living crisis.”**

**-Food project staff/ volunteers**

## Campaign Area 2

### Assistance with food sourcing - supply reliability, health and cost

Ensuring fresh and healthy food reaches food banks is one of the actions in the city's 2018-2023 Food Strategy Action Plan, led by BHFP. In previous years, food banks have raised issues regarding a lack of certain items being donated by members of the public. Different projects have different capacities for storage of ambient, fresh or frozen products, and may seek out different foods that are appropriate for their community. However, it is fair to generalise that food projects are again low in stock overall.

Many of the projects pay for regular deliveries of surplus food from Fareshare Sussex and Surrey's warehouse in Moulescoomb, Brighton. In response to the 2023 EFN survey, Fareshare Sussex and Surrey also reported a significant drop in food supply and stock levels, and rising costs of premises, energy and utilities.

Food waste is a problem, but a reduction in supermarket surplus and supply chain disruption has resulted in redistributors like FareShare Sussex and Surrey reporting a gap between donations and the rising demand from community groups. UK product ranges within supermarkets have shrunk by 12% and UK food production is down 7%. Food levels have been falling since 2021 due to Brexit, climate change and lower numbers of HGV drivers. FareShare Sussex and Surrey aims to tackle this with a new regional food-sourcing manager and is implementing strategies to double the supply coming to new and existing community partners by 2024.

Integration of community growing projects to supply fresh produce and provide opportunities for people to get growing was suggested by several survey responses. One current example of this in Brighton is Nature Through Nurture, a charity-run allotment group which grows produce for local food banks. Another is Brighton Unemployed Centre Families Project, a food project with its own plot which supplements its food banks with fresh produce.

The recent report from Eastbourne Food Partnership and a study from Sheffield both find that community growing can increase access to healthy food, something Brighton's projects are expressing a need for.

**"I would love to see a community garden growing veg in every community. I would love to see accessible cooking courses to learn the basics of cooking in every community - schools but also other places, everywhere!"**

**-Food project staff/ volunteers**

# Campaign Area 3

## Local and national government support

Excluding free school meals, the vast majority of emergency food support is provided by the voluntary sector and not directly by the state. This reliance on charities creates a vulnerability in the face of limited charity budgets and unexpected crises. An [article published in the journal Food Security](#) noted that the COVID pandemic only exacerbated existing demand stresses and unstable donated food supply was baked into this model of voluntary sector food support.

Those projects in the 2023 survey that were confident in their source of funding had taken detailed forecasts, had committed donors and connections or had an experienced volunteer or staff member dedicated to fundraising. Some projects described being unexpectedly turned down by sources of funding which they had relied on receiving in the past. Many were conscious of donations dropping as the public also feels the impact of the rising cost of living. For example, projects in religious settings reported a reliance on support from their congregations for funding and food donations.

**“I think it is a challenge and I do have sleepless nights sometimes just thinking about having enough to give everyone and trying to be fair ... How to resolve those sorts of issues without wanting to put extra barriers for people? How do you manage it long term? It's difficult, you want to help people. I'm concerned that we are creating a dependency, but then if nothing changes nationally in terms food getting cheaper, bills going down and stuff like that, we are where we are.”**

**-Food project staff/ volunteers**

The ([HSF](#)), first announced by the Government in September 2021, has been extended to provide local authorities with the means to support people struggling with the cost of essentials until 31 March 2024. Food projects have expressed concern around the short notice provided on updates to the fund and the uncertainty around the continuation of HSF after this date. Appropriate funding and support would acknowledge that food projects are delivering an essential service in unstable and demanding times.

There are [calls to end the need for food banks from both within and outside government](#) in favour of a cash-first approach, instead. The Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) highlights [how cash-based solutions to food poverty can end the need for food banks](#). It argues that food parcels are an important stop-gap measure, but do not provide the dignity of choice nor address root causes of food poverty. There are practical steps government can take to ensure everyone in the UK can afford to buy adequate and nutritious food. National Government can raise social security and wages in line with inflation and the cost of living.

Local government can make cash or vouchers available to those in emergency situations. Communication is also key to ensure people know what they are entitled to. For example, a third of Brighton and Hove's eligible families are not claiming their [Healthy Start vouchers](#), missing out on access to free fruit and vegetables, milk, infant formula and vitamins.

# What next?

Based on the report and campaign areas, we ask for action at a local and national level.

## We're asking National Government to:

- Stop the normalisation of food insecurity. Take a strategic approach to ending the need for food banks by investing in policies that prevent household food insecurity . [Track](#) progress.
- Provide ongoing funding to Local Authorities to offer a '[cash-first](#)' approach to food support (currently via Household Support Funding). Allow Local Authorities to determine how these funds are distributed based on an understanding of local need.
- Ensure the costs of a healthy diet and other essentials is accounted for when setting the level of Benefits and the Living Wage. Support [Guarantee our Essentials Trussell Trust campaign](#).
- Implement [Universal Free School Meals](#). Start by increasing the eligibility criteria to all children in families in receipt of Universal Credit, and auto-enrolling all eligible children.
- Expand eligibility, improve uptake and increase the value of [Healthy Start](#). Expand [the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme](#) to all primary school children.
- Legislate to make [community meals on wheels](#) a statutory service for housebound and vulnerable people who are unable to access a fresh, nutritious daily meal.
- Commit to a new food bill for England (based on the [National Food Strategy](#)) that includes action to increase fruit and veg production, to support local food economies and improve food security.

## We're asking Brighton and Hove City Council to:

- Ensure that budget setting and grant making for 2024 onwards invests in areas prioritised in their [Cost of Living Action plan](#).
- Extend access to the [Holiday Activity Programme Fund \(HAF\)](#) to families on low incomes who aren't currently eligible.
- Increase awareness of the support available via the Cost of Living support hub. Take action to ensure maximum uptake of benefits available to eligible people, such as [Healthy Start](#) and [Pension Credit](#).
- Take a leadership role in using public sector purchasing power to support the development of a resilient local food economy. Take action to increase local horticulture. Develop a food hub creating employment and providing healthy food for the city.
- Invest in community action that takes a preventative approach to food insecurity. For example; access land for food growing, space in council owned buildings, and grant provision.
- Re-commission a community meals on wheels service funded by BHCC/ integrated care board [as proposed by East Brighton Food Co-op in their Oct 2023 Report](#).

## We are asking employers to

- Commit to paying all employees the [Brighton & Hove Living Wage](#), reduce the use of zero hours contracts and engage in city-wide work to prevent food insecurity.

## We are asking schools, universities and colleges to

- Do more to prevent students from experiencing food insecurity and to adequately support those who do. Join the [Food SOS Campaign](#) to support local food banks.

# Appendix: Methodology

## Outline

The Brighton & Hove Food Partnership Emergency Food Network Survey 2023 asked a series of questions to organisations in Brighton and Hove providing food for people in financial insecurity. This included questions on the services they provided, the needs of the organisation, campaign requests and their experience of being part of the EFN. The survey was open for responses from June-August 2023 and asked projects to report on one week of activity.

## Aims

The aim of the survey was to add to the body of work recording, reporting and raising awareness of the impact of food projects across the Brighton area since surveying began in 2013. Findings from the survey and campaign recommendations from the projects will inform BHFPs communication to decision makers. This includes quantifying the overall scale of the problem of food insecurity and details about who is most impacted and what members of the EFN need most help with.

## Survey Distribution

The Google Forms survey was distributed via email and BHFP mailing lists. The survey was promoted online and in-person during meetings with food projects and networks. Projects providing emergency food support who completed the survey were offered remuneration from the BHFP Cost of Living Crowd Fund.

## Survey & Interview Methods

One survey was completed per organisation and telephone support was provided for any respondents who needed assistance with the online form. Projects could skip questions that were not relevant or where they did not have the data. Data entered by the projects could be approximate or exact. Some text-based answers were converted to make suitable for numerical analysis.

Two semi-structured interviews were also carried out with food project staff members to discuss the survey questions in more detail. One unstructured interview was carried out with a beneficiary for the student case study. Quotes throughout this report come directly from various qualitative survey responses and interview transcriptions carried out in 2023. Ellipses indicate where text from the original quote has been abbreviated where relevant.

If you would like more information about the annual BHFP EFN survey, please contact us.

Tel: 01273 234 810

Email: [info@bhfood.org.uk](mailto:info@bhfood.org.uk)

Visit: [www.bhfood.org.uk](http://www.bhfood.org.uk)

Follow: @btnhovefood



Report and photographs by Emma Brown, BHFP