

Brighton & Hove



Emergency Food Network Annual Report 2024

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

Brighton & Hove Food Partnership	1
Report Summary	2
2024 Headline Stats	3
The Context in Brighton & Hove	4
The Emergency Food Network	5
Emergency Food Network Members List	7
2024 EMERGENCY FOOD NETWORK SURVEY FINDINGS	
Who Uses Emergency Food Services?	8
Food Bank Advice Services Case Study	11
University Student Case Study	14
What Do Food Projects Provide?	15
Community Shop Member Case Study	16
What Do Food Projects Need?	18
2024 CAMPAIGN AREAS	23
APPENDIX	
Types of Food Support	25
Methodology & Contact	28



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 food projects to come together, share common problems, learn from each other's experiences and develop joint solutions.

Since 2014, 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 publications can be found online.

The survey is sent to EFN members in July each year which allows us to compare data year-on-year. This is the quietest time of year for emergency food projects, compared to winter when higher fuel and utility bills lead to more people in need of food help. In July, projects have more capacity to respond and the risk of over-reporting annual numbers is reduced.

For more on how we conduct the survey, view the methodology in the appendix.

The Food Partnership's resources for people experiencing food poverty can be found online, or get support by contacting the Food Access Support team at Impact Initiatives - 01273 322 950



Report Summary

The 2024 EFN report finds that thousands of Brighton and Hove residents still need the help of food banks, social supermarkets and community meals.

Our annual survey of food projects reveals 6,297 people need food support each week, with more than half seeking help on an ongoing basis. This is a similar number to the total beneficiaries supported in 2023, but still 18% higher than in 2022.

There are concerns that food insecurity is becoming the new normal. 60 locations across all parts of the city offer food support. Projects are noticing an increase in the numbers of people with mental health issues, Black, Asian & Minoritised Ethnic people, and people in work seeking help. Volunteers and staff can be at risk of burnout due to the high level of need.

The continued level of elevated need, high costs and declining food donations means projects spend £15,770 a week to stock their shelves. This level of expenditure is unsustainable. Half of projects expressed worries about insufficient funds to sustain their operations for the rest of the year. Some food banks have chosen to limit their service only to those in the most urgent crisis.

People will continue to need food banks if underlying issues that mean household incomes don't meet the costs of essentials for housing, food and utilities (negative budgets) are not addressed. Community supermarkets offer longer-term support, but they are not available everywhere. On p16 a case study of a Community Shop shows the impact of food sharing initiatives run by and for the community. There is good practice in the network of linking food support to advice work (see case study p11) and this model of wrap around support is the direction the network plans to go.

Food projects need staff, volunteers, resources, food supply, and funding. Members have again expressed how essential the Household Support Fund is to keep their doors open, but the short-term nature of decisions by Government about extending this support make planning hard.

The Emergency Food Network provides a valuable platform for mutual support. BHFP will continue to co-ordinate the network, to facilitate collaboration between the voluntary and statutory sector whilst also campaigning to end the need for food banks.

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

2024 Headline Stats

The Emergency Food Network survey recorded 48 active food projects

Food support is offered in at least 60 locations across Brighton & Hove.

Over half of respondents did not have funds to cover the rest of 2024

In one week:

6,297 people were supported

- ¼ of those were children.
- Projects noticed an increase in people with mental health issues, Black, Asian & Minoritised Ethnic people, and people in work.
- The main reason by far that projects thought people accessed their food was the increase in costs of living.
- Food projects reported on average 58% of people using their services were doing so indefinitely.

Projects across the city reported £15,770 was spent on food each week. That's £820,040 per year.

Volunteers give over 3,400 hours each week to food projects and surplus food distributors.

The Context of Emergency Food Provision in Brighton & Hove

Inflation continues to drop from its historic peak last year. Still, many people are struggling to afford essential food items. Income levels from wages and benefits often do not cover basic costs of living (housing, utilities, food, fuel).

It has been harder to eat well on a budget over the last two years and inflation on fruit and vegetables has been particularly high. In April alone, 5.4 million UK households experienced food insecurity. An analysis by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation argues that economic growth alone will not lessen food poverty in the UK. Addressing the root causes of poverty will need to start with cash-based solutions to food poverty, including fair benefits and wages.

While the overall poverty rate in the southeast is not the UK's highest, Brighton and Hove has a high cost of living. Poor quality and energy inefficient homes mean a greater proportion of income is spent on housing and fuel, leaving less for food. The city has several areas of high deprivation. Brighton & Hove City Council's Economic Plan notes that people in certain areas of the city can have annual incomes £5,000 lower than the national average, can be isolated from services, and are therefore more likely to be exposed to food insecurity.

Although patterns in food bank use can indicate current trends in food insecurity, it is important to note that this survey is only the tip of the iceberg. Even in an emergency, many people do not access emergency food services. The JRF cost of living tracker survey found that 7 million low-income UK households went without essentials in the first half of 2024 and food was the most common item they went without. In one month, 5.1 million families reduced meal sizes or skipped meals, while 4 million went hungry.

The stigma attached to accessing food support continues to be a significant factor, despite the work of projects and campaigners to tackle food poverty trauma. Best practice for improving access, dignity and choice in food support is being researched by organisations such as the Alliance for Dignified Food Support and Bridging Change.

“Unfortunately, out of necessity far too many people find themselves in need of using a foodbank... Clearly benefits are insufficient to cover housing and utility costs and therefore people seek out food banks to make ends meet.

I think the stigma is reducing owing to the volume of people forced to use them, even those in full-time work.”

- Food Project Staff Member

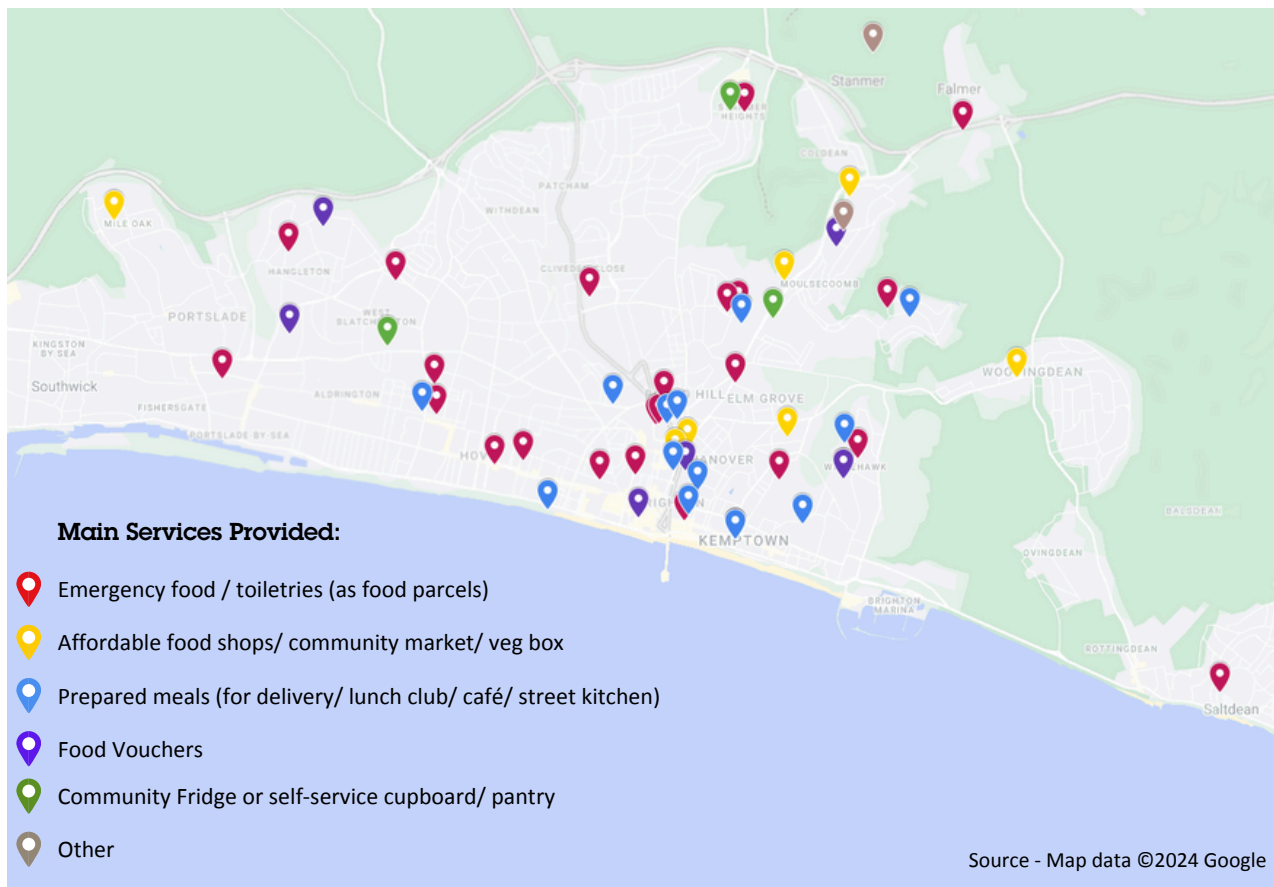


Figure 1. A map of locations where food support can be accessed at the time of the 2024 EFN survey. These locations are colour coded by the main food support type offered here, but most do offer several types of combined support.

The Emergency Food Network

Community based food support in Brighton & Hove is offered via a variety of models which includes food banks, issuing of supermarket vouchers, affordable food schemes, community meals, delivered meals, pantries, veg boxes, lunch or breakfast clubs and more*.

Projects may be providing a combination of these types of service. These projects also provide more than food. Frequently provided ‘wrap-around-services’ included welcoming safe spaces, refreshments, and community events or arts activities plus access to advice services.

Of the projects that responded to the 2024 survey:

- 24 mainly provided emergency food to those in crisis
- 7 were affordable food shops and schemes
- 9 mainly provided meals, through community cafes, street kitchens, or meal-on-wheels
- 3 mainly provided vouchers, a cash first approach to crisis support
- 3 were focused on community fridges and self-service pantries
- 2 were providing other services, such as surplus food redistribution or growing produce
- 14 projects reported that they offered access to ‘onsite advice and support eg housing, budgeting, benefits’ and 17 in total offered fuel /energy vouchers

* For details of different project types and what they offer, see appendix.

“This is an excellent network for sharing ideas/concerns within the local community. Hopefully, it continues to help spread awareness of some of the current shortfalls in support services that are out there and how much food banks etc are having to step in to help plug the gaps.”

- Food Bank Co-ordinator

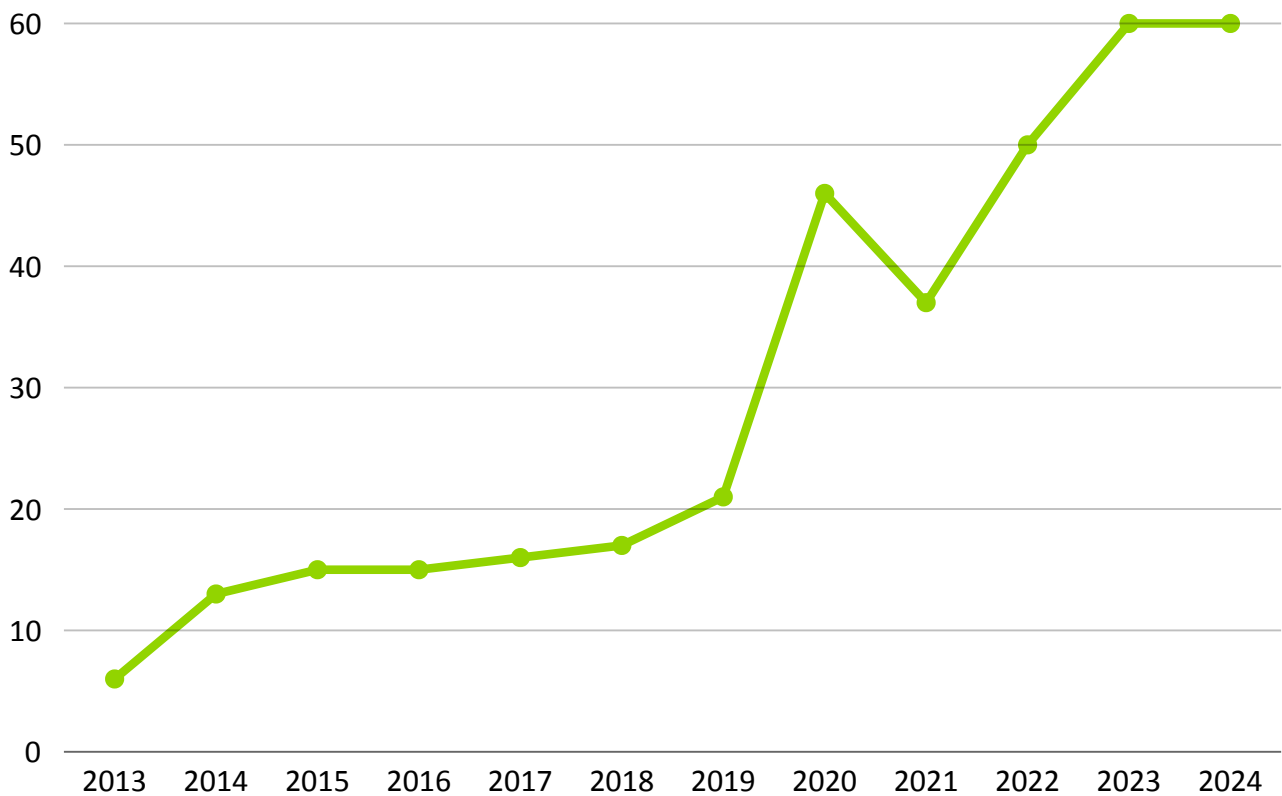


Figure 2. Since our records began, the number of locations where food support can be accessed has followed an upward trend overall. Many opened in 2020 in rapid response to the pandemic. While some of the pandemic response projects have now closed, new organisations or project locations continue to open. The range of support has diversified to address ongoing levels of need and different communities.

“The EFN has always been a really important network to measure the community needs across Sussex. Through the meetings we’re able to see where the most need is at different times and locations, and we can all respond to that and support each other. I believe it helps us to see an overall pattern of destitution throughout the year, which enables us to anticipate well and plan in advance. Thank you to everyone there at BHFP for this vital network, for the campaigns you run and for the support you give us, which often comes just when we need it the most.”

- Food Bank Co-ordinator

Emergency Food Network Members

- Balfour Mutual Aid Foodbank
- Bevendean Food Bank
- Black and Minority Ethnic Community Partnership
- Brighton and Hove City Council
- Brighton and Hove City Mission
- Brighton and Hove LGBT Switchboard
- Brighton Grub Hub*
- Brighton Light Trust
- Brighton Students' Union
- Brighton Unemployed Centre Families Project
- Brighton Women's Centre
- BrightStore CIC
- Community Advice Support Education CASE
- Cornerstone Community Centre
- Craven Vale Community Association
- East Brighton Food Coop
- Turner Family Hub BHCC
- Moulsecomb Family Hub BHCC
- Whitehawk Family Hub BHCC
- FareShare Sussex & Surrey*
- Sussex Surplus
- Food and Friendship
- Fresh Start Community Association
- Hangleton and West Blatchington Foodbank
- Hollingbury Foodbank at the Gathering Place
- Hollingdean Food Bank
- Impact Initiatives
- Lunch Positive
- Moulsecomb Community Market
- Mutual Aid Vegan Foodbank
- Old Boat Corner Community Association
- One Church Brighton
- Pankhurst Pantry
- Phoenix Food Shop
- Purple People Kitchen Food Bank
- Real Junk Food Project Brighton
- Rottingdean Ovingdean and Saltdean Food Bank
- St John Baptist Church Food Bank
- St Mary Magdalen Church Coldean
- Sussex Homeless Support
- The Crew Club
- The Hangleton and Knoll Project
- The Salvation Army
- The Whitehawk Foodbank
- University of Sussex
- Very Local Food Hubs
- Voices in Exile Food Bank
- We Are Emmanuel
- Weald Allotments Community Fridge
- Woodingdean Community Food Hub
- YMCADLG Youth Advice Centre Brighton

*These member projects responded but were not providing food directly to the community at the time of the survey. At the time of the survey, Brighton Grub Hub was focusing on a volunteer-run growing plot and delivering fresh organic produce to support 3 local foodbanks per week. FareShare Sussex and Surrey provide surplus food redistribution services to food projects in the area. These project responses were included in the report only where relevant.

"We love all of the work that EFN and BHFP do for our communities, keep up the fantastic work."

-Emergency Food Provider



Who Uses Emergency Food Services?

During one week in July 2024, 45 food projects reported supporting 6,297 beneficiaries, including at least 1,400 children and 660 pensioners.

This is a similar figure to the total of 6,441 beneficiaries supported in 2023 but still 18% higher than the 5,159 people supported in 2022.

People access support through emergency helplines, referral, self-referral or walk-in.

There is a small decrease in the reported numbers of children and pensioners being supported. However, this may partly be due to some projects that reported data on these groups last year not providing a detailed breakdown this year.

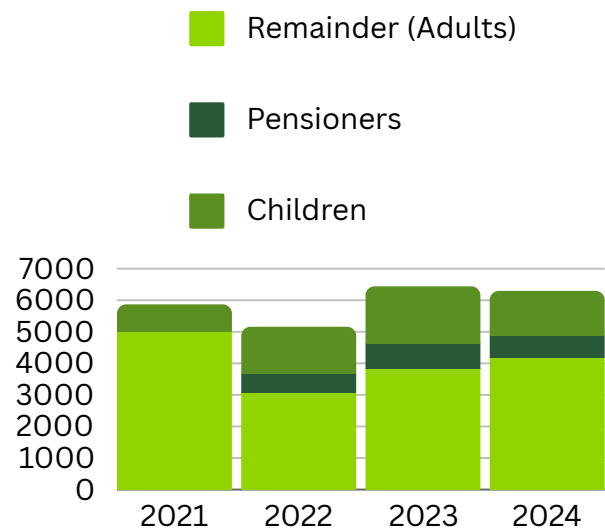


Figure 3. Total number of people supported, and the minimum proportion of those who were children or pensioners (data on pensioners was not collected before 2022).

People needing ongoing support

Overall, projects reported just over half of people using their services were doing so indefinitely, the same level as in 2023.

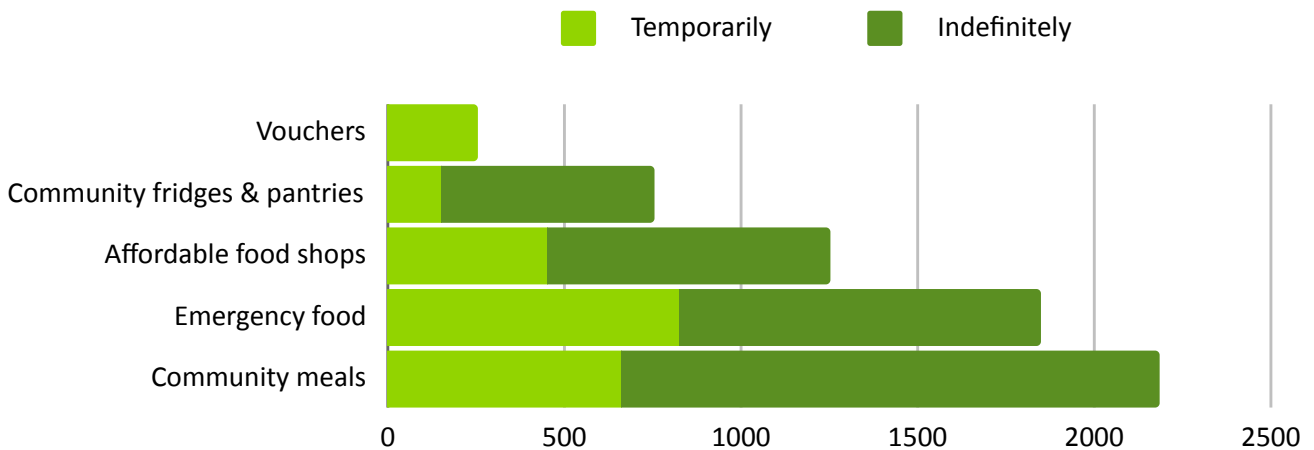


Figure 4. The projects, grouped by the main food support service provided, and the number of beneficiaries supported by them. The number supported is broken down by the proportion that projects estimated were using their service indefinitely to give a suggestion of how each service type is being used.

Support trends across project types

When this is broken down by project type, as in figure 4, we can see that this varies predictably between them.

The majority of those receiving emergency vouchers are doing so as a one-off, because they are intended as a stop gap in the most urgent crises. A voucher can help buy a food shop or online delivery. Pensioners made up 1/5th of the people supported by voucher schemes, this may be because this demographic finds it harder to get to a food project.

As expected a larger proportion are using affordable food schemes and community supermarkets on an ongoing basis because they are signed up as members with no time limit. In these models people pay less than they would in a shop and whilst more people could benefit they don't operate in all parts of the city and many are at or near capacity.

“There are no limits to how often or how long someone can use our service. We have some people who have been with us from the start and there is no prospect of their circumstances improving or changing, so they can use the project for as long as they want to.”

- Affordable Food Project Volunteer

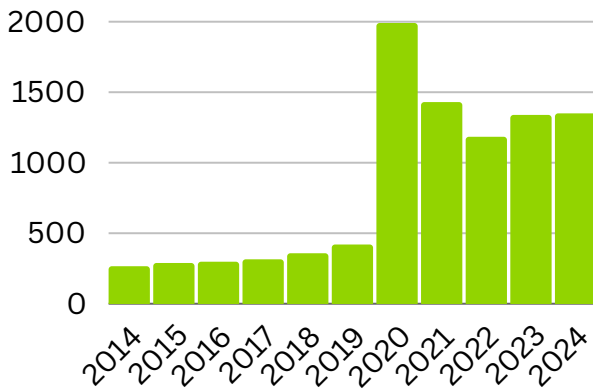


Figure 5. Total number of emergency food parcels provided in one week in July.

The proportion using emergency food services, such as food banks, indefinitely sits at half. This is high considering the food provided in food bank parcels is intended as a crisis service and cannot be relied on to provide a balanced diet.

Figure 5 shows the trend data for the number of emergency food parcels (not meals or shops) that have been provided since 2014 when this survey started

“Food banks are an amazing short term solution, but not the answer!”

- Emergency Food Provider

A preventative model for the future

The Emergency Food Network wants to end the need for food banks through a focus on prevention. They want to help people to move on from emergency or crisis support at a food bank, and towards food security.

The concept of Food Ladders was created by Dr. Megan Blake to visualise how different food support services must be connected, like rungs on a ladder, so that people can progress.

A new model would see food banks able to limit the time that their support was offered because they would be truly a crisis service. It would continue to focus on a cash first approach to enable people to choose their own food that suits their dietary needs.

To prevent people needing food banks in the first place and move them on as quickly as possible people need wrap around support. This will include providing access to mental health support, to financial /debt/ income maximisation advice, with measures to improve home energy efficiency, or referrals to affordable food schemes. But in order for this to happen there needs to be capacity within the advice sector to reach food project clients. There needs to be access to mental health support and affordable food projects need to have sufficient resources to take on new members and expand operations to more parts of the city.

The Emergency Food Network intends to work to cluster geographically and improve referral routes between projects within a catchment area to ensure people don't fall between services. As the network reviews how it operates care will need to be taken that the people who use the projects are supported through any change. Ensuring that the food support offered is appropriate, inclusive and offered with dignity needs to be a golden thread that runs through all provision.

"We have people coming to us who have been turned away from other projects and are out of our area.

"We provide temporary support and advice for them but never turn people away. No waiting list - when people need help we provide it!"

- Affordable Food Project Co-ordinator

FOOD BANK ADVICE SERVICES CASE STUDY

A model to build in money advice alongside food provision

During the first half of 2024, the Trussell Trust affiliated food bank in Hollingdean developed a strategy to work more intentionally to support their clients. Other local providers of support were enlisted to help find routes out of food bank reliance.

Hollingdean and Fiveways Food Bank has been running a community support cafe offering holistic financial, social and debt support to all their clients with the aim to refer them onwards from this crisis service. They aim to contact all their clients in advance of their opening times to reduce anxiety and detail the support available.

One of the aims of this provision is to increase the amount of people's weekly budget that they have available for food, as well as supporting them to find out about local options for more affordable food. This could mean that a previous food bank user will have the budget for membership of affordable community supermarket schemes such as Brightstore Hollingdean.

The café on-site at St. Richard's Church is not just for foodbank users, it is for everyone in the community to access with no referral needed. This means people can still be a part of the community, benefiting from social interaction and ongoing support even when they no longer need the food bank. Numbers of café attendees are going up while food bank numbers are dropping.

Due to the drop in overall attendees, the food bank can now prioritise those in the worst crisis. People in greatest need now receive 7 days' food support with their voucher while using the same amount of resources it previously took to provide everyone with 3 days support.

Future plans involve providing specialised addiction services to benefit this community. Organisers want to see wider changes to enable weekend or evening food provision for those in work, and increase capacity of community supermarkets to support people to move on from foodbank emergency provision.

Contact Hollingdean Food Bank
Email: info@hollingdean.foodbank.org.uk
Website: www.hollingdean.foodbank.org.uk

What are the main reasons people need support?

The main reason projects thought people accessed their food by far, across all project types, was the increase in costs of living.

Other top reasons were employment, housing and benefits related. The Food Foundation's [Election 24 Briefing](#) shows that Universal Credit and The National Living Wage are insufficient to cover the cost of essential, nutritious food for people in the UK.

Another top reason was having refugee, migrant or asylum seeker status, including no recourse to public funds. Recent interviews and focus groups in [Brighton](#) and in [London](#) have found that people seeking asylum can face unique challenges in accessing sufficient and appropriate food, and can suffer significant health outcomes.

- Community fridge or self service pantries and meal projects reported one of the main reasons for access was people being unable to cook for themselves.
- Having ill health, a disability or having been recently discharged from hospital was another significant reason projects thought people were accessing their service, particularly for delivered meals, at affordable food projects or community fridges and self-service pantries.

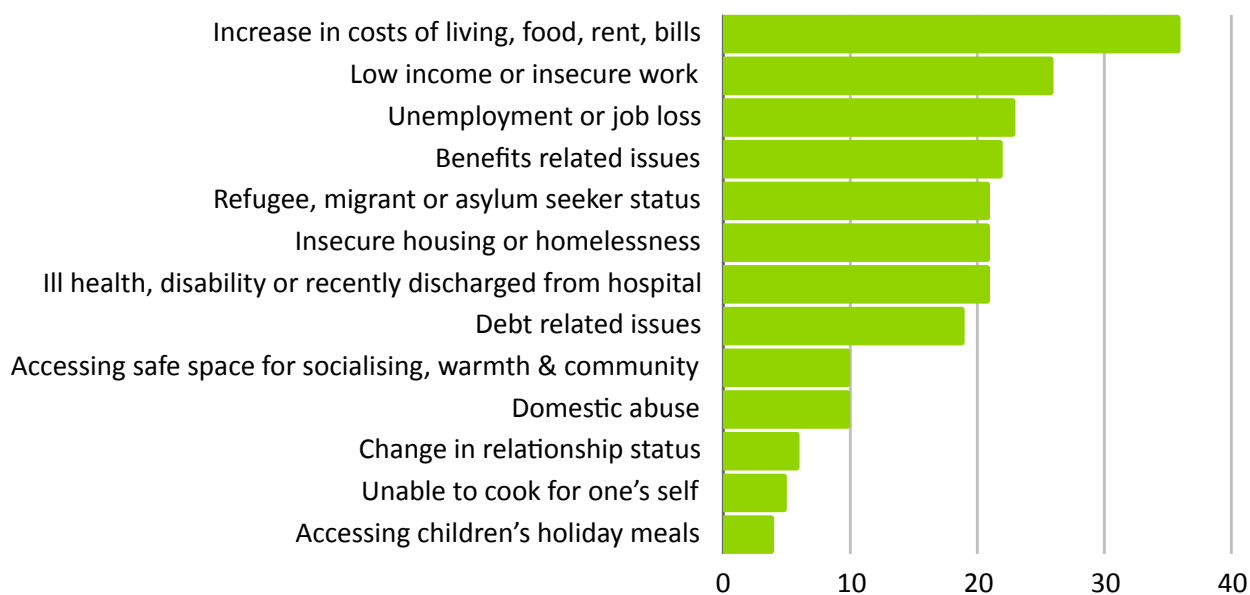


Figure 6. The number of projects which identified these factors as the main reasons people accessed support.

“When we began the project at the start of the pandemic, we had no inkling that it would need to be continued to an even higher need years later. It is heartbreaking to look at the people each week and see the hopelessness in their eyes.

“Poverty was here before Covid. It changes and even ends lives. How can Britain let this happen?”

-Food Bank Co-ordinator

Which groups are in increasing need?

Overall, projects noticed an increase in people with mental health issues, Black, Asian & Minoritised Ethnic people, and people in work.

Breaking this down by project type:

- The most frequently reported demographic with a noted increase for emergency food providers was Black, Asian & Minoritised Ethnic people. Other frequently reported demographics with a noted increase for emergency food providers were people over 60, people with mental health issues, and people in work.
- The most frequently reported demographics with a noted increase for affordable food schemes was people in work and Black, Asian & Minoritised Ethnic people.
- Vouchers noticed an increase in lone-parent families, people who have experienced domestic abuse, refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, unemployed people, street homeless people, and people with mental health issues.
- The most frequently reported demographics with a noted increase for meal projects was people with mental health issues and vulnerably housed people.

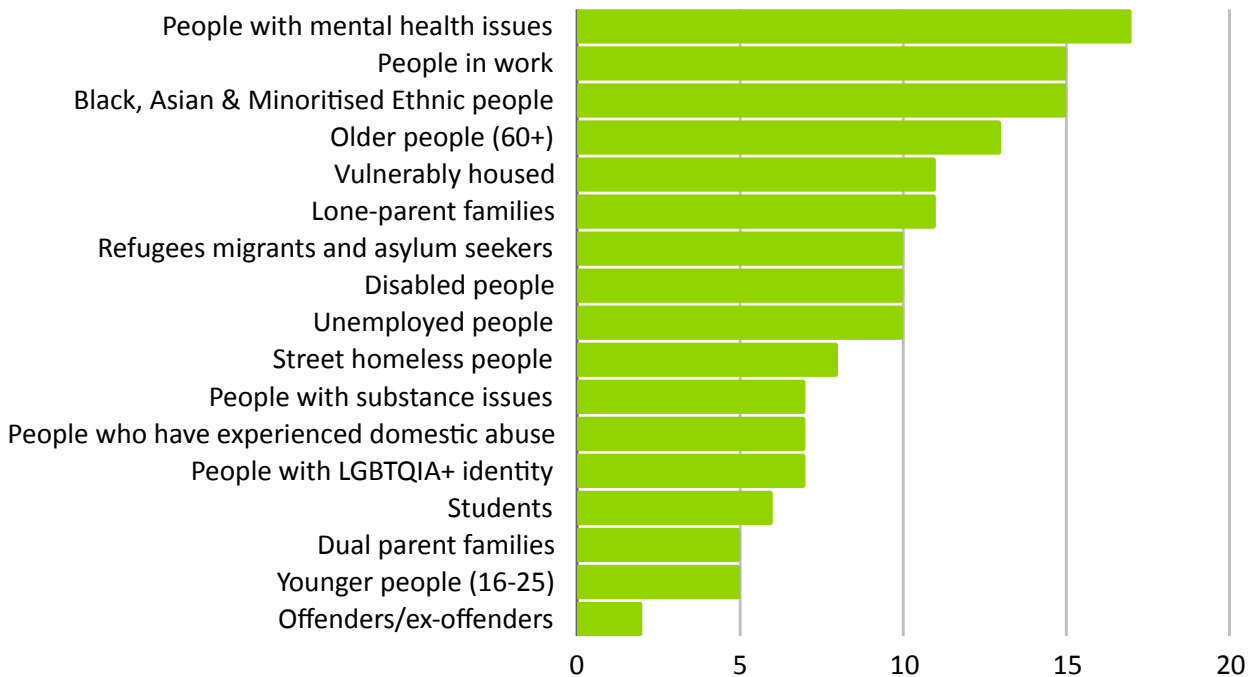


Figure 7. The overall number of projects which noted an increase in particular groups of beneficiaries.

“We have some of the most vulnerable in our city and many are suffering due to lack of tailored support, getting help can be a minefield. I believe we should have a 24 x 7 open door somewhere in the city to provide safety and support. A triage center where problems can be assessed and solved, turning the tap off on poverty, homelessness and domestic abuse.”

- Community Meal Provider

UNIVERSITY STUDENT CASE STUDY

Students in continued need

Save The Student's '[National Student Money Survey 2024](#)' found the number of students using a food bank has halved compared to 2023. However, the proportion who skip meals at least some of the time has risen to 67%. Costs of living are still high and the average maintenance loans for students fall short of covering essential needs by around £504 per month. When comparing UK universities, those in Sussex rank highly on cost of rent and other spending.

Last year [we interviewed a university student](#) who sought food help from the Food Partnership and other organisations while struggling with the cost of living and insecure work in Brighton.

"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.

You can't live like I was, on bread, for a very long time. When you're really hungry, nothing really makes sense."

- Student Beneficiary, 2023

In 2024 these financial pressures on students in Brighton remain, particularly for international students who can make up 85% of the clients accessing support in university settings.

International students often aren't fully aware of the costs of living in Brighton before moving here. They are not eligible for student finance or hardship funding from the government. Some can be persuaded by practices where agents loan them money for universities' proof of funds checks, meaning they arrive in debt.

There is food support available for students at [Brighton Students' Union Essentials \(BSU\)](#) and [University of Sussex Meeting House Pantry](#).

What Do Food Projects Provide?

Many provide additional support, referred to as ‘wrap-around-services’.

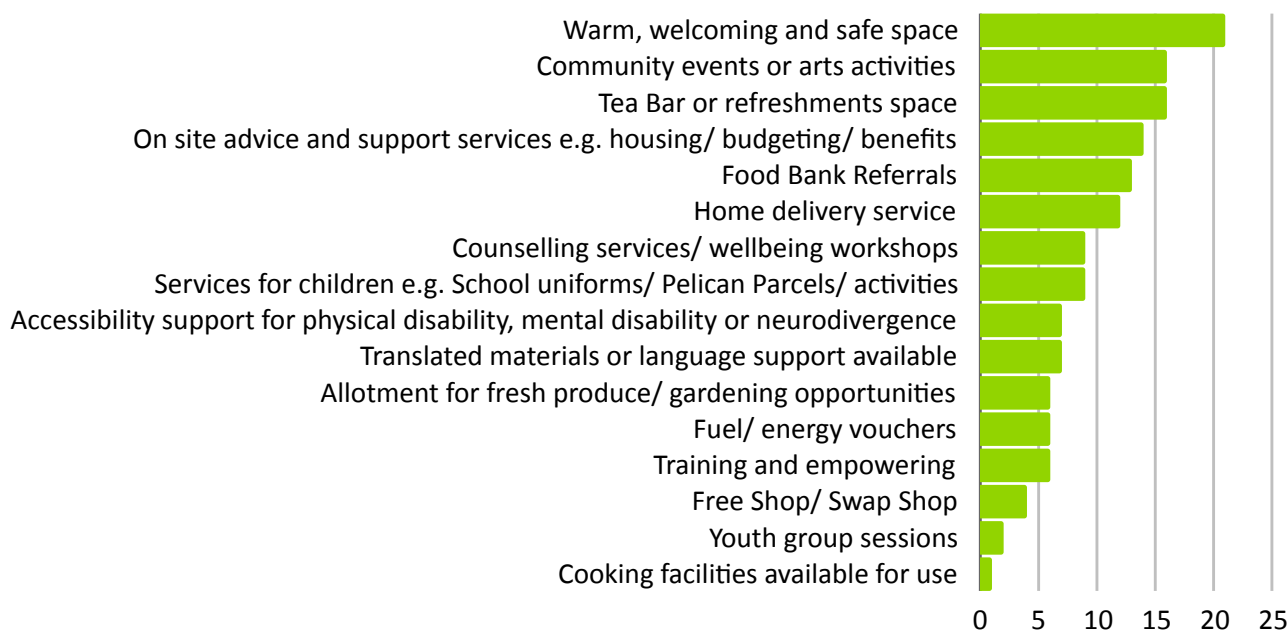


Figure 8. The number of food projects who reported providing services alongside food. The services provided the least often are of interest because they can indicate gaps in provision.

It makes sense for food projects to be a welcoming hub for additional support because food insecurity often occurs alongside other factors. For example, mental and physical ill-health can be both a cause of food insecurity, and can be exacerbated by it. Notably, people at the intersection of several minoritized identities can face additional barriers to accessing food, such as LGBTQIA+ people seeking asylum and BME children from low income backgrounds. Figure 7 on page 13 demonstrates the local need for specialised support for these particular groups.

“LGBTQ+ people are less likely to have large community networks who can support them in crisis, more likely to be insecurely housed, be wary of accessing food projects because of stigma, shame and fear, and require longer term solutions to food poverty.”

- Emergency Food Provider

There is no one best way to provide support. Some projects, especially those integrated into community centres, can provide a broad range of advice, counselling and support services. Food projects in temporary premises or lacking funding may only be able to provide limited services at restricted times, but through good connections with other services in their area form a vital part in a package of support. Some projects may specialise in services for a minoritized demographic, but may be inaccessible for many to travel to. Others may take a neighbourhood approach to be welcoming to everyone locally, but may not have the resources to cater to specialist needs.

Another important thing on offer is volunteering opportunities. For clients, this can create pathways to employment, encourage agency and deconstruct hierarchies within food projects. The case study on the following pages demonstrates how the boundary between beneficiary and volunteer can be fluid, with local people becoming active members of a food sharing community.



Community Shop Member Case Study

The Phoenix Food Shop is a volunteer-run project providing low-cost food options to the Phoenix Estate, Hanover and Tarnor communities. It was set up in 2020 with support from Brighton & Hove Food Partnership, and now operates out of the Phoenix Community Centre. It is run by and for a neighbourhood with levels of deprivation far higher than the country's average, where nearly one-third of people are living with a limiting illness.

We spoke to David, who has been an active member of the food hub from the start. During COVID-19 lockdowns, he used his free time to join his sister and founders Sarah and Simon to set up the initiative. David is one of the many volunteers who also receives groceries as a community shop member. Being a resident of the community being served makes volunteering especially meaningful.

“I love doing it. It's obviously nice to help out, and we like to have a laugh at the same time as getting everything done. We are all there to help the community I was raised in. That's the only motivation needed.”

On Thursdays from 12pm, members are welcomed in to choose tinned goods, sanitary products, meat, cheese, vegetables and harvests from the community centre's gardens. With the soaring price of essentials, especially fresh produce, the bumper weekly food bags priced at just £7.50 help families like David's make ends meet.



Simon & volunteers grow produce at two nearby spaces, including fruit, vegetables & nuts.

“I know it helps my mum a lot because it is one less thing to have to worry about money wise. You can get four or five meals out of it for big families. I know a lot of people look forward to it. They struggle the night before for dinner, and then they come here and can have a really nice dinner the next night.”



Members can choose tins, meat, cheese, toiletries, vegetables & fruit.

Coming forward for food support for the first time can feel difficult, so the volunteers do what they can to reduce any tension or stigma. The fact that many volunteers are also members makes the whole experience more relatable.

“That open environment is important because we're inviting to everyone. If you feel that you need help, we don't ask questions. There's no shame to be felt. In my childhood I was very stubborn about asking for help, my mum was too, so I know what it's like. We do have difficulties every now and then, but you don't get a lot of hostility because it's quite a nice environment. I think it's because everyone's on the same page, there's an understanding.”

Removing other barriers to accessing the food shop is an important part of the offering. A ramp is available for buggies or wheelchair users and other adjustments are made where possible. “If someone can't carry the bag home, me or someone else will carry it for them. For some people it is too far and the hills are absolutely horrible!”

Overall, David has noticed the food hub improves cohesion in the neighbourhood. “We bring a lot of people together, different genders, different races, different religions. All people who probably wouldn't be together in one area. People have friendships they wouldn't have made otherwise. It just makes an overall close-knit community.”

David feels that if more local services came to the Phoenix Community Shop they would get better engagement with this community. “We've done the hard part and got everyone from the area into one room. Their part would just be talking to them in person, it's not the biggest ask.”

Despite the quantifiable benefits being provided, keeping the project running at capacity is a challenge. Members who can, take the initiative to come fortnightly instead of weekly, meaning an extra bag can help someone else. The need in their community is not diminishing, and reliable long-term funding would help them keep their doors open. “I hope we're able to keep running,” David says. “It gets increasingly hard not to make cuts to what we give. Food prices are doubling, tripling. I'm sure other food projects have the same problem. We're all trying to get the same kind of funding for the same kind of people.”

Businesses and organisations who can provide funding and donations are asked give generously, which they can do through our [Food SOS programme which runs until Christmas](#).

Contact Phoenix Food Shop

Email: info@phoenixfood.org

Website: www.phoenixfood.org



What Do Food Projects Need?

Staff and volunteers

Supporting this food provision and surplus food distribution are a huge team of volunteers. Volunteers give a total of 3,412 hours each week across 40 of the projects. Although volunteering is about so much more than monetary value, if this was calculated at the Real Living Wage Foundation Rate for 2024 of £12ph it would be worth £40,944 per week. 38 of the projects also have paid staff, working a total of 1,036 hours per. Put together that is a full time equivalent of a team of 118 people per week working across the network.

“Giving back was always something I personally wanted to do. Obviously I've seen my parents struggle, I've seen my friends' parents struggle back in the days. We have something for those local kids now thanks to the project.”

- Affordable Food Project Volunteer

Volunteers and staff are on the frontline in responding to food insecurity and are often highly motivated to support their local community. They have experienced increased demand, reduced resources and a heightened state of urgency which has not lessened for many years now. Teams need help preparing for or recovering from difficult situations experienced at the project. This can include organisational stress, confrontational behaviour or clients taking their own lives. Where feasible, projects work to address mental health and wellness within their teams to ensure volunteer retention and avoid staff burnout. More training for staff and volunteers is wanted by the network. Whilst previously some of this was offered to the EFN by the Food Partnership, this has had to be scaled back due to funding constraints.

“We just had someone move into secure work after about a year from when they first came to us. They have volunteered for us and discussed their situation, seeking support and advice. We've seen them grow in confidence and improve their situation, but it's taken over a year of hard work and determination on their part. A lot of our regulars just don't have those opportunities or possibilities!”

- Affordable Food Project Co-ordinator

Resources and Food Supply

Across the city a total of £15,770 was spent on food and vouchers by 44 projects in a week - that's £820,040 per year.

On top of this, projects rely on food donated by members of the public and surplus food redistributed by organisations like Fareshare Sussex Surrey. The value of this donated and surplus food is not included in this spend figure. This also does not include costs such as premises, utilities and staff or volunteer costs.

Food projects report that food and/ or financial donations have dropped, surplus food supply has dropped, and they are spending more money for the same size of parcel or meal. Out of 23 food providers who responded to the question about their funding status, 13 projects said they did not have sufficient funding to cover the rest of 2024, and 3 were unsure.

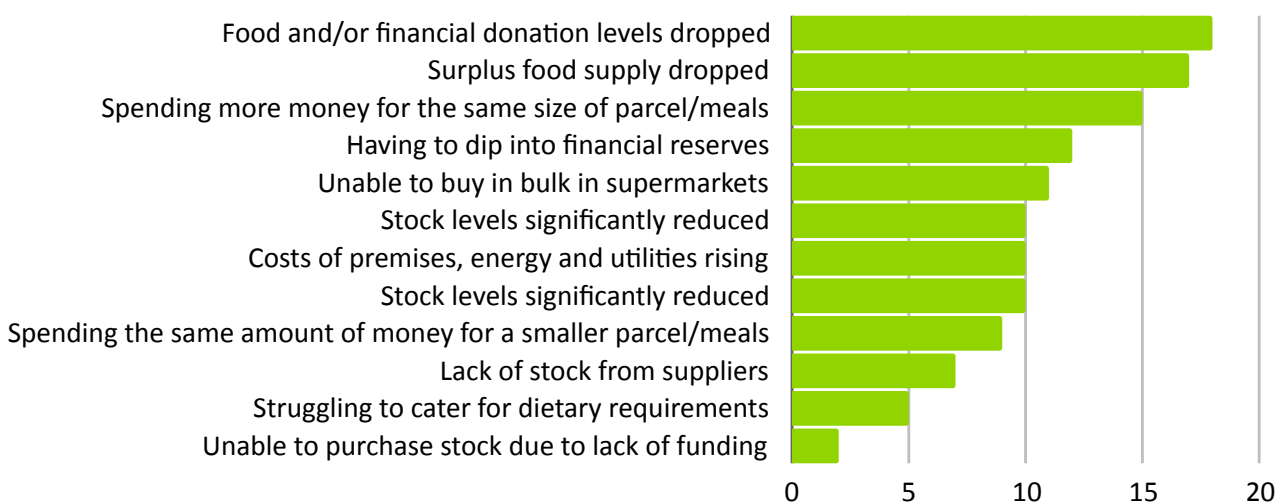


Figure 9. The number of food projects who reported experiencing food supply issues.

Funding

Projects receive financial donations from members of the public, faith organisations and local businesses. A large proportion of the food/ vouchers is paid for with the Household Support Fund. They also apply for grants from the local authority, from the National Lottery and other trusts and foundations. They fundraise both individually and in partnerships. For example, the collaborative crowdfund in Winter 2023 raised £12K for 6 nominated EFN projects and £12K to address Fuel Poverty via [Citizens Advice Brighton & Hove](#). A clear message from the survey is that long term investment and funding is preferable because it allows for future planning.

"We rely entirely on grants and donations to run our emergency food and support projects; this means we cannot sustainably plan for the future as it is all short term grant based - the Household Support Fund made available to us has been life saving but we know that there will always be people in crisis who need this help."

- Emergency food and voucher provider

The Household Support Fund (HSF)

First announced by the Government in September 2021, HSF has recently been extended by six months from Oct 2024 - March 2025. It provides local authorities with the means to support people struggling with the cost of essentials. There is flexibility in how a local area spends HSF. In Brighton & Hove it is distributed as vouchers via the Local Social Discretionary Fund, used to pay for holiday meal vouchers for children on Free School Meals and passed onto the community and voluntary sector to use to provide vouchers, food, fuel and other essentials. During 2024/25 the city's allocation of HSF was £4.28 million

"HSF means we can run, without it we would probably close."

"HSF has been a vital tool for us. We have been able to provide special requirements for those who need it, we have helped with fuel, phone, travel. It has been a lifesaver."

- Food Banks

HSF funding is essential if projects are to be able to offer support to the high numbers of people in need and to ensure that the food offered is nutritionally balanced.

"HSF made a HUGE difference at a time when donations from supermarkets had dropped dramatically. It covered all the cost of the food - fresh and ambient - that we need to now buy in every week. Now that it is all spent we are starting to eat into our reserves."

"With HSF we are able to buy in additional supplies for our members such as toiletries, sanitary products and buy basic food as needed to make up deficits in what FareShare can provide."

- Affordable Food Projects

Food projects have expressed concern around the short notice provided on updates to the fund and the uncertainty around the continuation of HSF. They argue that appropriate funding and support would acknowledge that food projects are delivering an essential service in unstable and demanding times.

"Whilst more funding in total would always be welcome – even if it was at the same level knowing that you had funding in place for 2 years for example would allow you to plan, which would be more efficient and less stressful for the volunteers"

- Community Meal Provider

The Network

Respondents also shared their thoughts on the network itself and its facilitation by BHFP.

"I know the networks are the best in the country. Nowhere does it like Brighton & Hove. We share and support and that makes a huge difference.

- Community Meal Provider

Network members particularly valued mutual support, feeling connected to other people and projects, and sharing ideas and surplus food. In terms of support from BHFP, they appreciated campaigning efforts, the support they receive in developing their organisations, and measuring community need which facilitates planning.

"We have really valued the increased collaboration and sharing with other projects... We have a lot of fridge and freezer capacity meaning we could potentially store produce for other projects with no capacity. We are already receiving produce to distribute to other projects and with a larger space could operate a hub for at least one part of Brighton & Hove."

- Emergency Food Provider

BHFP acts as a liaison between the volunteer-led food projects and statutory services including via a quarterly Food Insecurity Group co-hosted with Brighton & Hove City Council. Collectively we have worked to increase take up of [Healthy Start Vouchers](#) and to raise awareness of fuel poverty support. Issues raised by BHFP on behalf of the EFN include:

- The importance of lived experience in policy making and providing opportunities for this.
- The additional value offered when food groups are involved in spending HSF money
- The food needs of people seeking asylum who have been placed by the Home Office in hotels in the city.
- The storage requirements of food projects.
- The need for parking permits from BHCC for those delivering food to people in need.

"I'd like to see campaigning for more trust, consultation and backing of grassroots projects who understand needs on the ground by larger orgs and policy makers."

- Affordable Food Project

Members suggested developments to the network, including:

- Proactive support for the smaller organisations who may not have time to attend meetings.
- Work with BHCC to understand the support and information given to people around food when they are put into emergency accommodation.
- Support with funding.
- More collaboration and connection e.g. bulk buying, collaborating over opening days.
- Developing into localised clusters to improve sharing of surplus, collaboration and support.
- Developing a hub for bulk buying and storage.
- Support around volunteer recruitment.
- Better links to advice work and mental health support
- More training for staff and volunteers involved in the network

“I’d like to see campaigning for financial support and infrastructure to help give security to affordable food projects, e.g. 3-5 year funding rather than 3-6 months.

“Short term funding means loss of capacity, organisational insecurity and difficulty providing consistency year to year - working against the odds to survive even though need is increasing. We have to periodically reduce our outputs and we lose trained, skilled people who need guaranteed work.”

-Affordable Food Project

Campaigns

The survey asked if there was anything projects would like BHFP to campaign about. The overarching themes identified will inform the areas for BHFP campaigning focus going forward. Network members were particularly interested in any campaigns which would end the need for food banks, by solving issues like the cost of living crisis which make their provision so essential.

“We recognise the importance of continually harassing government bodies to put us out of business by being more generous to those living in poverty!”

-Emergency Food Provider

The network members would like to see more:

- Food education at schools.
- Access to growing spaces or growers for food banks and affordable food projects.
- Council support for food projects, especially smaller grassroots projects who understand the needs of their communities.
- Community supermarkets to support the move on from food bank emergency provision.
- Longer term funding so projects can plan for the future, mitigating uncertainty around the Household Support Fund.

2024 Campaign Areas

On behalf of the Emergency Food Network, during 2023/24 the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership contributed to national and local policy work including providing evidence to the Department of Work and Pensions on the impact of and need to extend the Household Support Fund. We provided evidence for campaigns about extending the eligibility threshold for free school meals and healthy start vouchers to reach more families in poverty. The network also provided detailed information to Brighton and Hove City Council about priorities for their Cost-of-Living Action Plan.

National Government

Our over-arching campaign message is that we want to end the need for emergency food projects and stop the normalisation of food insecurity. We want everyone in the UK to have adequate incomes so they can afford to buy nutritious food. This would allow volunteer led community food projects to focus on becoming spaces for food sharing. Spaces that prevent isolation and improve health and wellbeing. Not a fragile safety net that is being called on to prevent thousands of people being hungry.

We ask for the national Government to commit to a strategic approach to implementing policies that tackle inequality and prevent household food insecurity. But until this time people will need short or medium term support. We ask for

- an expansion of eligibility for free school meals and healthy start vouchers
- legislation to make community meals on wheels a statutory service for housebound and vulnerable people.
- the continuation of Household Support Fund (or similar locally decided scheme) but that this is guaranteed over 3+yrs stopping the cycle of 6 monthly extensions. The short-term nature of this fund prevents proper planning and uses up precious resources in statutory and community organisations in designing contingency arrangements only to have the fund extended again.

Local Government and the Integrated Care Board

At a local level, we ask Brighton & Hove City Council and the Integrated Care Board to prioritise tackling food insecurity, making this a focus across policy / funding decisions. We ask them to

- adopt the updated food strategy action plan that sets out a systemic approach to a healthier, more sustainable food system
- support in our work to transform the current crisis-based food bank model to a new approach. One that uses food hubs with access to advice, helps to maximise incomes, and other support that prevents the need for food banks.
- use their resources and knowledge to help produce a spatial food map of the city that identifies communities with poor / limited access to healthy food, potential spaces for community food growing, areas where community food projects could be linked, replicated or scaled up and areas that would benefit from food hubs, pantries etc.
- looks across departments to consider what can be done to prevent and address food poverty including where its own activities (for example recovery of a debt to the local authority) may push people into food crisis.
- to present this report to members of the Poverty Reduction Steering Group and Health and Wellbeing Board.

Local Organisations

Educational Settings

Schools, universities and colleges we ask you to:

- train your staff in food poverty awareness and ensure that information about sources of support is obvious for students and their families.
- Join the Food SOS campaign and collect donations of ambient food and toiletries for your local food project.

Community and Voluntary sector

- If you work in areas of debt and financial advice, mental health support and fuel poverty we invite you to engage with the Emergency Food Network to identify opportunities to deliver outreach sessions in food projects
- We ask the sector as a whole to ensure that your staff and volunteers know where people can get food support locally and help the campaign this winter to sign eligible older people up for Pension Credit as this is the passport to a winter fuel payment.

Local Business

- Sign up to the Brighton & Hove Real Living Wage and pay this rate to all employees and contractors.
- We encourage you to assess your workforce – are there people who may be at risk of food and fuel poverty (for example younger workers, those in rented accommodation or those on uncertain hours/ lower pay / reduced hours). How can you improve their work conditions and help ensure they are aware of support available to them, e.g. energy efficiency home improvement measures and info on how to sign up to benefits such as Healthy Start Vouchers and Universal Credit.
- Storage is a big challenge for many projects – do you have space that groups could use for low/no cost?
- Join the Food SOS campaign and collect donations of ambient food and toiletries for your local food project.

Residents

Thank you to the thousands of people who already support this work. Find out about where to donate time, food and money to support your local project [on our website](#).



Tel: 01273 234 810

Email: info@bhfood.org.uk

Visit: www.bhfood.org.uk

Follow: @btnhovefood

Appendix 1: Types of Food Support

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.

Emergency Food & Food Banks

Food banks are there to help with food in a crisis. You will need a referral for most food banks, this can be arranged by a care professional or agency worker. 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. Most food banks can give support for up to 6 weeks.

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. The remaining food banks are independently run, predominantly by volunteers.

Affordable Food Projects

Affordable food schemes operate a membership model, where members pay a small fee to regularly access affordable groceries. There is often a choice of food, including fresh fruit and vegetables, like a market or supermarket. Some deliver a veg box to your door. Projects have a model that moves beyond emergency food provision and aims 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 joins together affordable food providers to ensure an effective, coordinated approach.

Food Vouchers

Vouchers are a cash first approach to crisis support and often take the form of digital groceries vouchers that can be redeemed at supermarkets. These can be provided on a case-by-case basis by projects such as Impact Initiatives and family hubs (formerly children's centres). Alexandra Rose vouchers, while proving successful in some areas of the UK, are not available in Brighton.

Community Fridge or Self Service Pantry

Anyone can pop in to choose from the donations stored in community fridges and pantries. The Community Fridge Network is made up of publicly accessible fridges funded by Hubbub. Pantries have been opened in community centres, schools and students unions by staff or PTAs in response to the need in their communities. What is on offer varies depending on what has been donated, so what is taken also often helps to save food from going to waste.

Community Meals

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.

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. Partnerships forged with organisations such as UK Harvest mean that food project organisers from East Brighton Food Co-operative regularly use their own vans to transport fresh surplus produce into Brighton from Chichester.

Community Growing Projects

Community gardens and allotment plots grow produce for food projects on an ad-hoc or dedicated basis. In 2024 this includes Brighton Grub Hub at Stanmer Organics, Nature Through Nurture in Moulsecomb, and other plot holders local to food projects.

Community Kitchen

Our [cookery school](#) in central Brighton does not give out food to the public, but is a hub for learning and connection around food. This includes courses for people with learning disabilities, those living on low incomes or people with physical and mental health issues.

Types of Food Support

Food Service Type	Cost	Referral needed	Delivery or collection	User base	Food provided
Food Banks	Free	Different across projects. Referral by professional or self-referral	Collection. Delivery limited, some provision to the household or during festive holidays.	People in financial crisis.	Some provide a choice of food items. May be able to cater for dietary requirements if asked. Aim to provide several days nutritionally-balanced food, normally based around store cupboard essentials.
Affordable food schemes	Affordable membership fee	Different across projects. Referral by professional or self-referral	Collection. Some may deliver or operate a veg box.	People needing regular support to get affordable and healthy groceries	Provide a choice of food items and may be laid out like a shop to allow browsing. Many cater for dietary requirements if asked. Often provide bread, fresh vegetables or fruit.
Community fridges, cupboards and pantries	Free to take or donate food	No, walk in	Collection only	Anyone wanting to save food from going to waste, or anyone in need using the setting, such as community centre, school or students union	Choice of the items available that day. May vary depending on what has been donated.
Community cafes and meals	Free, or 'pay-as-you-can'	No, walk in	Collection or eat-in. Delivery limited, some provision to the household or during festive holidays.	Some are for anyone to pay-as-they-can, or for particular groups such as older people or homeless people	Choice of the dishes available that day. May be plant based or have options for different dietary requirements.
Meals-on-wheels	Often charge a membership fee	Different across projects. Referral by professional or self-referral	Delivery on specific days of the week.	For those household or unable to cook for themselves	Aim to provide nutritionally-balanced meals, pre-packed to be kept in the fridge and reheated. Many cater for dietary requirements if asked.

Appendix 2: Methodology

Outline

The Brighton & Hove Food Partnership Emergency Food Network Survey 2024 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 2024 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 online survey was distributed via email and BHFP mailing lists. It was promoted via email and in-person during meetings with food projects and networks. Projects providing emergency food support who completed the survey were entered into a prize draw for a chance to win one £400 groceries voucher. An additional optional survey allowing for longer 'interview style' answers was also sent to participating projects and was answered by 8 EFN members.

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. Where 3 active projects did not provide data, their data from 2023 was used as an estimate.

One semi-structured interview was carried out for the Community Shop Member Case Study. Quotes throughout this report come directly from various qualitative survey responses and interview transcriptions carried out in 2024 unless otherwise stated. Text from original quotes 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

Visit: www.bhfood.org.uk

Follow: @btnhovefood



Report and photographs by the Community Food Team, BHFP