



BRIGHTON & HOVE
FOOD
PARTNERSHIP

EMERGENCY FOOD NETWORK REPORT 2025

An annual report into the experiences, impacts and needs of emergency food services and community projects across Brighton and Hove



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Who are we?	1
Report summary	2
Key survey stats	3
The Emergency Food Network	4
Emergency Food Network Members List	5
2025 EMERGENCY FOOD NETWORK SURVEY FINDINGS	
Who uses emergency food services?	6
What are the trends in food provision?	7
Case Study - The Village Food Bank	9
What do food projects provide?	11
Case Study - Whitehawk Foodbank	13
The capacity to provide	15
Case Study - Pankhurst Pantry	17
What do food projects need?	19
APPENDIX	
Types of Food Support	22
Methodology & Contact	25



WHO ARE WE?

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 (food banks, affordable shop and meals) 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, including related work from our Beyond Food Banks project, an extensive investigation into emergency food provision.

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

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

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



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EMERGENCY FOOD NETWORK REPORT SUMMARY 2025

Our annual report finds that **over 5,800 people need food support each week**, with more than half seeking ongoing support. While a small decline on last year, this is still 14% higher than in 2022 and significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels. People continue to rely on this help **because of the costs of living, low income, debt, benefits and health issues**. Food projects are supporting people with increasingly complex needs.

There has been a shift in the proportion of people being supported by different types of food service, with diversification away from food parcels to models that offer **more choice and longer-term support**. Many now also offer **wrap-around support and advice services**.

Our case studies illuminate the human stories behind the numbers, showing how **food projects are spaces of positive change**. We highlight a new food bank for the LGBTQ+ community, how food bank clients are becoming campaigners at a Trussell affiliated food bank, and the importance of inclusive volunteering at a social supermarket. For the **over 650 volunteers** involved, the rewards can be great. But the pressures of meeting high levels of need with limited food supply and funding **stretches their capacity to keep going**.

WHAT'S NEEDED NOW

Nationally:

- We continue to campaign for wages and benefit levels to prevent poverty, and for meals on wheels to be a statutory service.
- For recognition and support for those volunteering at food projects.
- For a new scheme whereby supermarkets forgo their profit margins when selling to food projects by giving them discount cards.

Locally:

- Support with drivers, premises and donations.
- Participation in the [Food SOS Campaign](#).
- BHCC & Health commissioning and funding to focus on the prevention of malnutrition and diet related ill health.
- BHCC to continue support via parking permits for projects delivering food to vulnerable residents.
- Decisions on how the Crisis and Resilience Fund is allocated to recognise the reach and added value that community food projects provide, and invest in ways that support partnership work.

Full detail of these asks on pages 19-21.

KEY SURVEY STATS 2025

50 organisations offer food support

from at least 60 locations across Brighton & Hove

650+ volunteers give 128,400 hours a year.

1/3 of leaders are unpaid volunteers.

PROJECTS TELL US:

1/2 of people use services indefinitely.

There's an increase in clients with:
mental health issues - disabilities - in work

The main driver is the cost of living.

IN ONE WEEK:

Projects spend
£14K on food.

That's £700K per year.

Over 5,800 people
are supported

27% of those are children.
14% of those are pensioners.

810 food parcels provided
470 affordable shops collected
120 food vouchers given

135 people received a delivered meal
1840 people ate in shared meal spaces

THE EMERGENCY FOOD NETWORK

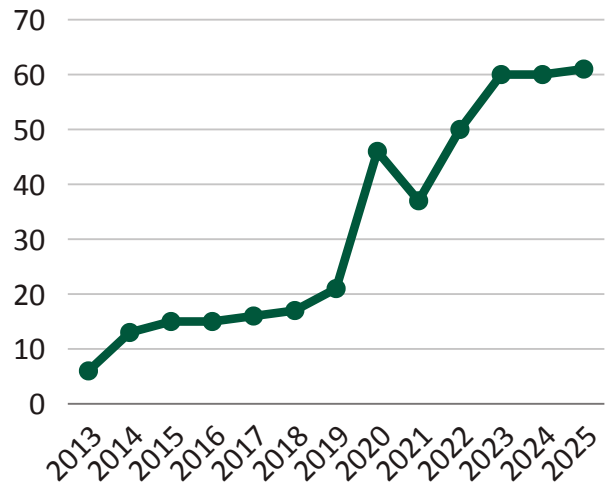
Community based food support is offered at over 60 locations.

Their focus areas:

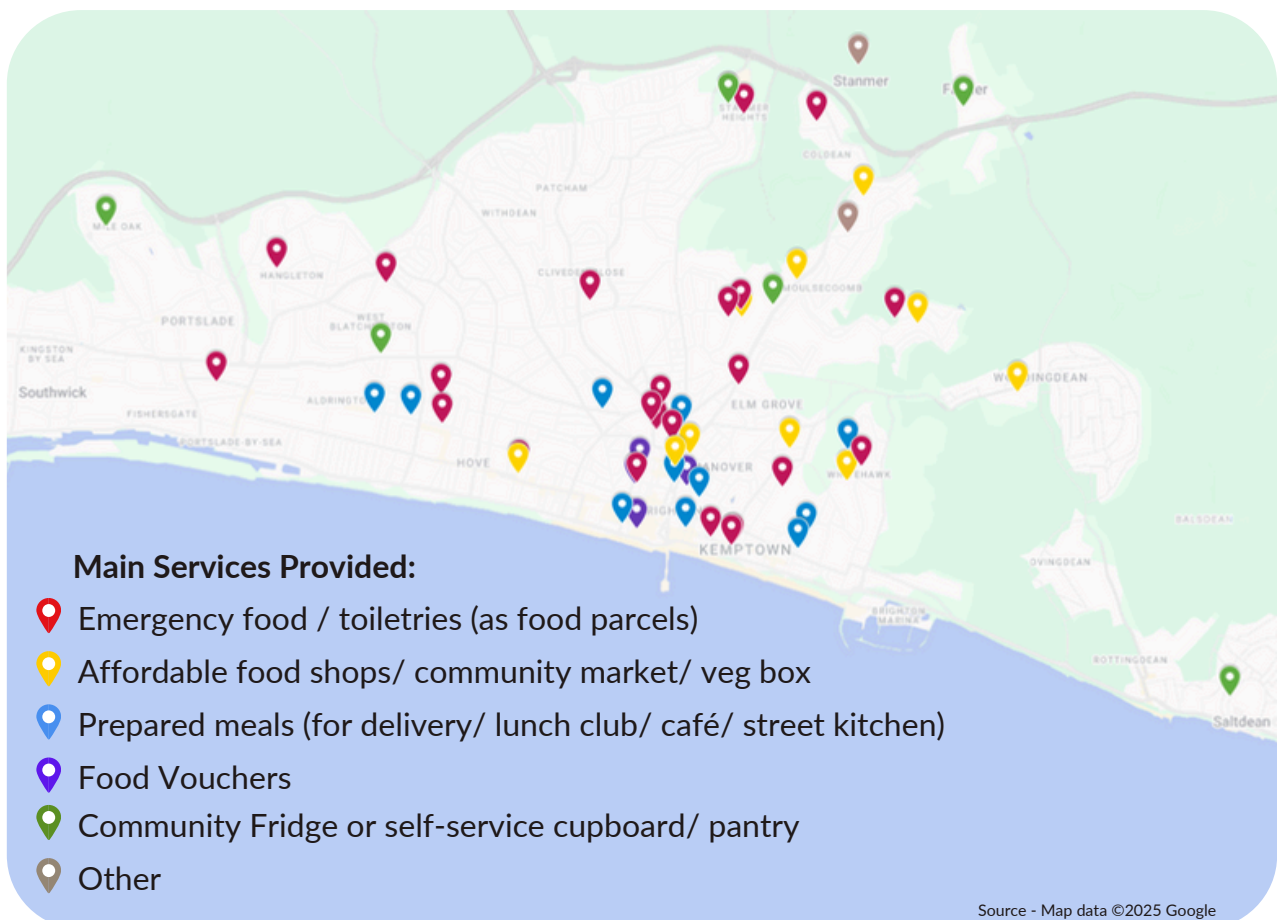
- 24 provide emergency food to those in crisis (via food banks for example)
- 10 affordable food shops or schemes
- 13 provide meals in venues, at street kitchens or delivered to homes
- 7 provided vouchers (a cash first approach to crisis support)
- 5 community fridges and self-service pantries

Projects are often providing a combination of food support services (see appendix), alongside additional advice, support or wrap-around services. Over time the range of support has diversified to address ongoing need and different communities.

This work relies on food redistributed by members of the [Surplus Food Network](#).



The number of locations where food support can be accessed has followed an upward trend. Many opened in 2020 in rapid response to the pandemic. But the network is also fluid and each year project locations continue to open, close and transition to new models.



EMERGENCY FOOD NETWORK MEMBERS

- Age UK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove
- Balfour Mutual Aid Foodbank
- Bevendean Food Bank
- BMECP Food Bank
- Brighton And Hove LGBT Switchboard
- Brighton Food Bank
- Brighton Grub Hub*
- Brighton Light Trust
- Brighton Students' Union
- Brighton Unemployed Centre Families Project
- Brighton Women's Centre Food Bank
- Brightstore Hollingdean
- Brightstore Whitehawk
- CASE Food Bank
- Chomp
- Craven Vale Food Bank
- East Brighton Food Coop
- Emmanuel Clarendon Foodbank
- Emmanuel Oasis Foodbank
- Emmanuel Villas Foodbank
- Fareshare Sussex & Surrey*
- Feedback / Sussex Surplus
- Food and Friendship
- Fresh Start Community Association
- Hangleton And West Blatchington Foodbank
- Hangleton Family Hub
- Holland Road Baptist Church
- Hollingbury Foodbank at The Gathering Place
- Hollingdean Food Bank
- Hove Salvation Army - Care & Share Hub (Foodbank)
- Impact Initiatives Food Access Support Service
- Knight Support
- Lunch Positive
- Macmillan Horizon Centre
- Moulsecoomb Community Market
- Moulsecoomb Family Hub
- Mutual Aid Vegan Foodbank
- Old Boat Corner Community Association
- Pankhurst Pantry
- Phoenix Food Shop
- Purple People Kitchen at Portslade Town Hall
- Real Junk Food Project at St. Luke's
- Real Junk Food Project Brighton at Bevendean Hub
- Real Junk Food Project Brighton at Fitzherbert Hub
- Real Junk Food Project Brighton at Hollingdean Community Centre
- Rottingdean Ovingdean And Saltdean Food Bank
- St John Baptist Church Food Bank
- Sussex Homeless Support
- Tarner Family Hub
- The Crew Club
- The Pantry at St Mary Magdalen Coldean
- The Parish Pantry
- The Village Food Bank
- The Whitehawk Foodbank
- University of Sussex Pantry
- Very Local Food Hubs
- Voices In Exile Food Bank
- Weald Allotments Community Fridge
- Whitehawk Family Hub
- Woodingdean Community Food Hub
- YMCADLG Youth Advice Centre Brighton

*These projects responded but were not directly providing community food support in the city at the time of the 2025 survey. Brighton Grub Hub was focusing on a volunteer run growing plot and delivering fresh organic produce to local foodbanks, with plans to reopen a food support venue later in the year. 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.



WHO USES FOOD SUPPORT SERVICES?

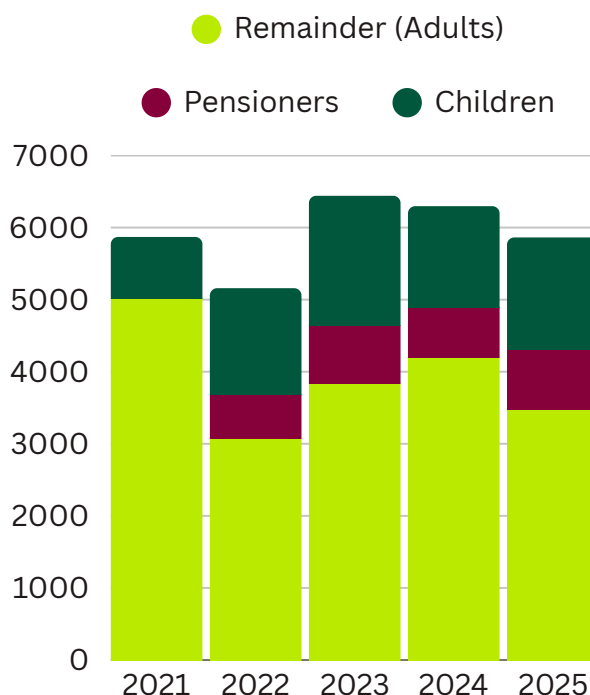
During one week in July 2025, food projects reported supporting over 5,800 beneficiaries a week. People access support through emergency helplines, referral, self-referral and walking in.

The 2025 figures show a drop of 500 people per week being supported when compared to 2024 (6,300 beneficiaries).

This remains 13.6% higher than in 2022 (5,200), and significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels.

This figure includes around 1,500 children and 800 pensioners. The numbers of people under 18 and over 65 reported this year is a higher proportion of the total than in 2024.

Comparison	2024	2025
Pensioners	10.50%	14%
Children	22%	27%



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

WHAT ARE THE MAIN REASONS PEOPLE NEED SUPPORT?

The main reason EFN members thought people accessed their food, across all project types, was the increase in costs of living and household income not covering essentials. Other top reasons were debt, benefits, disability and health-related.

WHICH GROUPS ARE INCREASINGLY SEEKING SUPPORT?

Overall, EFN members noticed an increase in clients with mental health issues. There were also noticeable increases in disabled people, people in work, refugees, migrants and asylum seekers and the vulnerably housed. This may mean that these groups are in increasing need, or that minoritised groups are finding it easier to access support.

WHAT ARE THE TRENDS IN FOOD PROVISION?

FOOD SERVICES

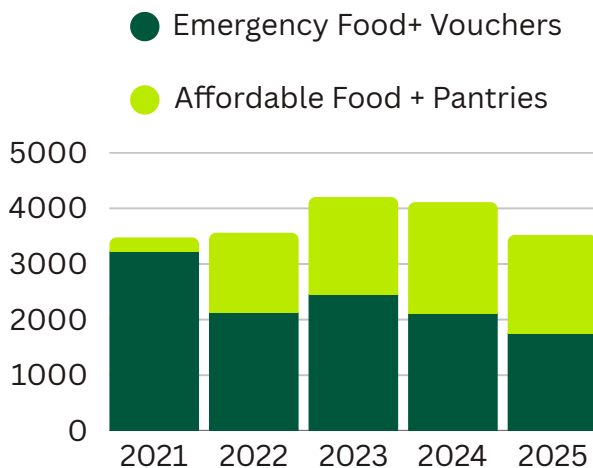
In one week in July 2025:

- 814 Food parcels provided
- 466 Affordable shops collected
- 116 Food vouchers given
- 1,840 people ate meals served on site.
- 135 had meals delivered to their door

CHANGING PATTERNS OF SUPPORT

There has been a shift in the proportion of people being supported by different types of food service over the last two years, with diversification away from food parcels to models that offer more choice and support on a longer-term basis.

Several services have started providing digital groceries vouchers. A growing proportion of people are supported by affordable food schemes, pantries and community supermarket models. This reflects a cross-network strategy to offer more holistic solutions.



Total number of people supported by each project type, not including meals

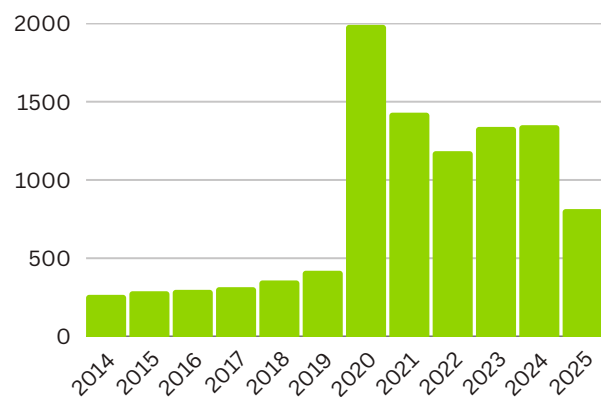
Unlike parcels, vouchers and affordable food shops, which are issued weekly or fortnightly, meals can be provided on a daily basis.

Comparison	2023	2025
Food parcels	66%	58%
Affordable Shops	30%	34%
Vouchers	4%	8%

LONG-TERM TRENDS

BHFP have collected longitudinal data on the number of food parcels given going back to 2014. Whilst the data for 2025 shows a 40% drop in the number of food parcels from 23/24 this is still double what it was in 2019.

This drop in numbers of food parcels demonstrates a shift to other models of support.



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

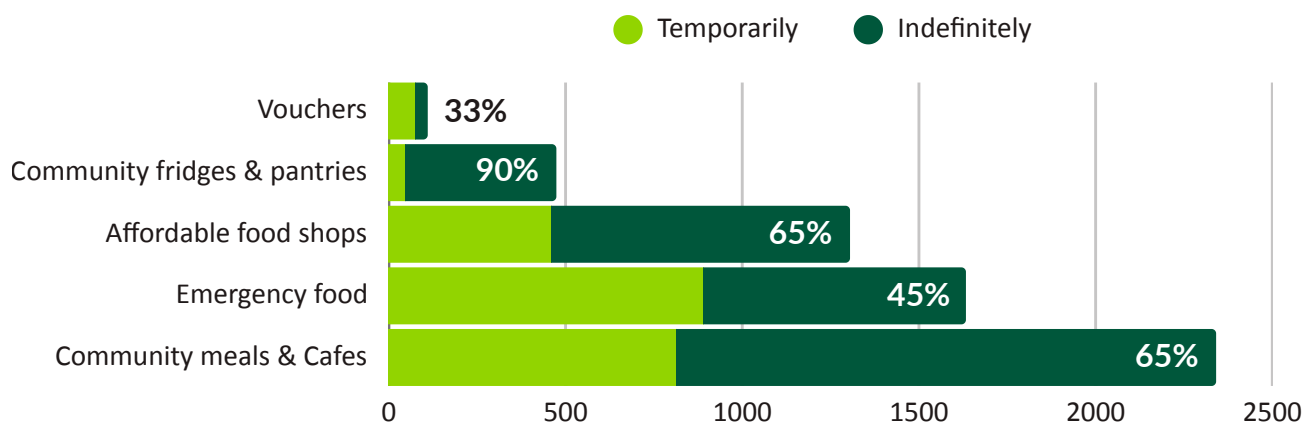
Stigma and hunger trauma often impact people accessing support.

Recommendations for best practice to improve access, wellbeing and choice in food support have been co-created with food projects and organisations such as the Alliance for Dignified Food Support and Bridging Change.

ONGOING RELIANCE ON FOOD SUPPORT

Overall, projects reported just over half of people using their services were doing so indefinitely. This has been the case for the last 4 years.

Our survey indicates that over 700 people are relying on long-term emergency food each week. Only 4 projects providing emergency food said no one relied on their service indefinitely. A [University of Brighton report on 'Hunger Trauma'](#) demonstrates the lasting impacts on mental and physical health of long term reliance on food support. But there are more options available than just emergency food via a food bank, and the logistics of using a food service will differ depending on the project type.



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.

SUPPORT TRENDS ACROSS PROJECT TYPES

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 food in a supermarket or for delivery. Pensioners continued to make up 1/5th of people supported by voucher schemes this year. This may be because this demographic finds it harder to get to a food project. Another factor could be the established referral pathway for emergency vouchers from the city's Ageing Well Partnership into Impact Initiatives Food Access.

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 supermarket, but their small membership fee contributes to the financial sustainability of the project. Whilst more people could benefit, they don't operate in all parts of the city. Two affordable food projects reported being at full capacity, while managing high numbers is tricky for others.

The proportion using emergency food services (like food banks) indefinitely sits at around 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 healthy, balanced diet. Feedback from EFN members indicates more people could move on from food banks or be prevented from needing them if there was increased capacity across the area for other types of provision.

CASE STUDY - THE VILLAGE FOOD BANK

Ask food project founders for the origin story, and most will tell you that their motivation was to address unmet needs in their community. In his work as a Social Prescriber for Brighton & Hove LGBT Switchboard, Reuben Davidson noticed a lack of inclusive food spaces which welcomed LGBTQ+ identities. This was at odds with the fact that people within this group are statistically more vulnerable to food insecurity. He opened The Village Food Bank in November 2024.

Twice a month, the food bank provides food, toiletries, household essentials, pet food, clothing and more to low-income LGBTQ+ people that live in Brighton & Hove. Visitors can browse the market stall tables, choose what they would like, and stay for a cup of tea and biscuits, or to read the children's books. Their client base is growing each time, with young people, parents and children regularly attending.

“We have actually a really diverse base within the LGBT community, which is also reflected in our volunteer crew, which is I think really important. It just helps people feel reflected in the space. More than half of our clients are trans and non-binary, 70% have a disability or long-term health condition, 75% are neurodivergent. And 20% of them are refugees or asylum seekers. 30% are people of colour.”

There were several challenges and setbacks along the way to creating this service. Finding a reliable, accessible, inclusive venue that was within their small budget was a barrier, but they have been successfully running The food bank from the Brighthelm Centre this year. The team are still searching for the perfect food bank venue, with a storeroom they can access 24/7 to make the most of surplus food offers that can come in at any time.

Volunteer recruitment is the first hurdle for all projects, especially ones like the Village Food Bank where no one is paid. The initial volunteer drive on social media invited people to an info evening detailing what the project would look like and the roles involved. This resulted in a committed volunteer base and board of directors. While limited by volunteers fitting it in around busy lives, Reuben says that “people have really put their heart and soul and time into seeing us get to where we are.”

“The community vibes that we create, that's not just for the clients themselves. That is also for the volunteers, so they want to spend time in that space and enjoy chatting with each other and hanging out and believe in what we're doing. And I think that again, the diversity aspect is important. It's not just like, you know, the one person of colour in a room full of white people. I think that has led to more diversity and people feeling more included.”

KEY PRINCIPLES AT THE VILLAGE FOOD BANK:

Community atmosphere – Community table where clients are welcome to sit, have refreshments and chat for as long as they like, with music.

Encouraging collaboration – Allowing volunteers to give feedback on decisions, a briefing session before and debriefing after to discuss operations and concerns, allowing input into running the space.

Diversity of volunteer base – Encourages people from varied backgrounds and spoken language to attend, feel included and represented in the space.

Gender inclusivity - Encouraging volunteers to use gender-neutral language, wear name badges with pronouns, take feedback to improve.

Embracing community supermarket model – Allowing customers some choice over what they would like, including fresh produce from FareShare.

Catering to diverse needs – Dietary requirements, multilingual volunteers, kids clothes/toys for families, toiletries, clothing, pet food, opening from 4-6pm to accommodate those at work or on school run.

Reuben explains that diverse funding sources and enthusiastic supporters make all the difference. Asking carefully chosen equalities questions when clients register has helped build a base of data to support funding bids. On top of grants from the local authority and Brighton Soup, artists and events organisers have made the project their cause of choice.

If the food bank is able to secure sources of long-term, stable funding, the hope would be to make lasting improvements to the service. A bigger and more accessible venue with greater storage space is the main ask. If money was available for volunteers to become staff with a salary then more time could be dedicated to the project, particularly in applying for more funding. Adding a delivery service offer would cater for those who cannot reach the project due to health conditions, ideally by electric cargo bike.

On a broader scale, Reuben aims for their work to not continue in isolation but for knowledge gained here to be shared amongst the EFN. The client data they gather adds a local context to wider statistics on poverty within the LGBTQ+ community, as well as how best to address that need. The Village Food Bank sprung up to address a lack of awareness in some other community settings, but now aims to offer training resources back to the wider network, to better support marginalised people across the city together.

Contact The Village Food Bank

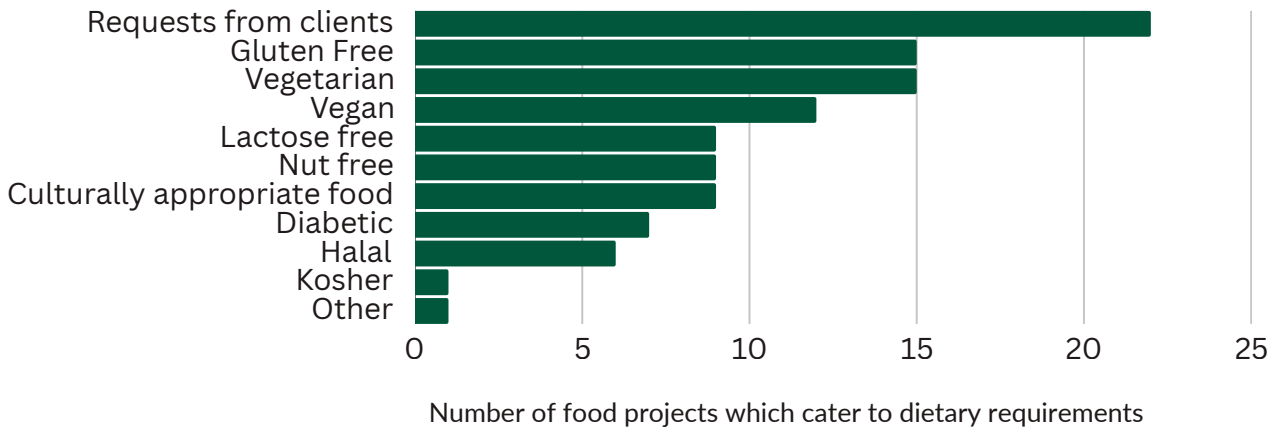
Email: thevillagefoodbank@gmail.com

Website: thevillagefoodbank.org

WHAT DO FOOD PROJECTS PROVIDE?

CATERING TO DIETARY REQUIREMENTS

Of the 40 projects who responded about the dietary requirements they cater for, 22 ask their clients directly what they need. Dietary requirements such as Gluten Free and Vegetarian were more often able to be catered for than Halal or Kosher. What projects can provide depends on food supply available to them via donations, surplus or funding.



Vouchers and cash first approach:

“Families are able to use vouchers to purchase food to meet their own dietary requirements”

Signposting:

“We try to cater to any dietary needs as best we can and provide support and signposting to people where needed for additional food or services.”

Food for companion animals:

“More people ask for food for their pets as they can't afford it.”

“A big part of our service is signposting clients to other organisations that may be able to address the root causes of their poverty or food insecurity.

We do not think that simply giving out food is enough to address the needs of our clients.”

- Food Bank Co-ordinator

ADVICE SERVICES

Under a new funding agreement with Brighton and Hove City Council (from 1st April 2025) BHFP’s work supporting the EFN is now included in the city’s Advice and Financial Inclusion Partnership. The aim of this integration is to ensure better links between food support and advice, helping address the support needs of people in poverty and increasing access to advice via the reach of food projects.

- 23 projects have advice worker sessions at their food service, and 5 are aspiring to.
- 12 projects have someone on the team who has attended the Citizens Advice Brighton & Hove Advice First Aider training, and 5 are aspiring to.
- 8 projects offer financial capability support, and 8 are aspiring to.

WRAP AROUND SUPPORT

Over the last few years more work has been done by EFN members to provide additional support, referred to as 'wrap-around-services'.

What projects offer alongside their food service is broad ranging:

- Financial advice and help with utility bills, budgeting and debt. This advice is provided in house or by from visiting organisations like BHESCo and Southern Water.
- Housing advice, preventative support around homelessness, and practical support for those in temporary or emergency accommodation.
- Health advice, community counselling, family mediation, safeguarding, and support for animal welfare through the RSPCA. Advocacy services are available, for example for those with learning disabilities and for women.
- Employability support, volunteering opportunities, building work-readiness skills, and social prescribing.
- A wide variety of physical, artistic or social activities for different ages and groups, including practical workshops in cooking or food growing.
- Befriending services to combat isolation and a welcoming social space with refreshments. For meal projects and affordable food projects answering our survey, accessing a space for warmth and community was a key reason people attended.
- Community action, such as supporting local neighbourhood action plans, engaging in art collaborations, and hosting MP surgeries.
- Providing other essential items, like school uniforms, shoes, and hygiene products.

What these results show is the ways in which food projects are about so much more than providing food - they are places for strengthening community and catalysing change.

"We try really hard to create a good atmosphere. Because there's so much shame and stigma around using a food bank.

But if we present it more so as a community space where you can also get food, it kind of reduces some of that feeling I'm hoping. It is a social space, and we don't rush people out the door. You can stay for two hours and drink tea and eat biscuits to your heart's content. And we always have music playing."

- Food Bank Volunteer

CASE STUDY - WHITEHAWK FOODBANK

As part of the Trussell network, the Whitehawk Foodbank strives to achieve the organisation's wider strategy of ending the need for food banks in the UK. Operating out of St. Cuthman's Church on the Whitehawk estate in East Brighton, they have sought to embed local advice services alongside emergency food provision (accessible via referral) to help clients find ways out of food-bank reliance.

Whilst they are looking to move beyond the foodbank model, Foodbank Manager Saz Fury told us "actually just closing the doors of our Foodbank wouldn't help our community. There's a whole lot of what we call 'upstream work' that needs to be done to help someone be ready to move on."

INDICES OF DEPRIVATION 2019

"Along with parts of Queens Park ward, the Whitehawk estate is the city's most deprived area with six LSOAs that cover the estate among the 7% most deprived LSOAs in England"

HEALTH COUNTS 2024

The Whitehawk and Marina ward has the lowest % of adults in Brighton & Hove whose general health is good/very good/excellent at 57.7% compared with the city's average of 69%.

EAST BRIGHTON NEIGHBOURHOOD ACTION PLAN (NAP) 2023-2026 REFRESH

- 27% of children are in low-income families (England avg. 20%)
- 30% have no educational qualifications (England avg. 8%)
- 25% are in full-time employment (England avg. 34%)

This is where the Advice Café comes in. Available to everyone within the community (not just foodbank users) the project offers holistic support, including budgeting and housing advice, counselling, and pet care. The open church hall where the food bank is based provides the setting for visiting local service providers to offer face-to-face advice.

This is especially important in an area where services are located a lengthy bus ride away, as outlined by Daisy, the Neighbourhood Engagement Coordinator, "it's so helpful when you can go 'Oh, you need help with that? There's someone on the table just there who can talk to you about that exact thing. We've made this as accessible as possible, so people who might struggle to seek out advice in town have it quite literally on their doorstep".

Of course, there is no guarantee that those who may benefit from the service will actually take the opportunity on their first visit. As a third staff member we spoke to pointed out, "what we've identified working and being in the Whitehawk community is you have to do things slowly. You have to build relationships first. You cannot do things for people, it really has to be with the community and alongside them".

This is where the Foodbank's volunteer 'befrienders' play a crucial role. They do more than simply go around and take people's dietary preferences, they provide a welcoming space and can have quiet conversations where clients feel comfortable to open up.

From having one-to-one support sessions with clients, liaising with local Neighbourhood Associations, establishing pilot schemes like Wednesday Night Dinners, to engaging with community members whilst on their way to the local supermarket, the foodbank staff and volunteers are working tirelessly to build trust and bridge relationships across the estate.

These efforts go beyond trying to understand client's needs and pitch their services, it also links to their national campaign efforts. In July this year, as part of Trussell's 'Guarantee our Essentials' Campaign, Daisy's team including a client from the Whitehawk community went up to Westminster for a lobby day to demand that Universal Credit (UC) cover people's basic needs.

This is a pressing issue for a community where levels of deprivation and incapacity benefits claims remain high, and was made more urgent by proposed cuts to Personal Independence Payment (PIP). The day at Westminster was a powerful experience and, according to staff, had a lasting impact on both themselves and the community at-large.

"Being able to take her and show her this is what goes on and that actually you're just as much a part of this as any of these people in suits are. I just love to think of the knock-on effect that will have, that people from this area realise that it's for them as much as it is for anyone else; if anything, that they're the voices that are really needed. To take the exact things they've said to me and take it to Parliament, where things are changed, its so magical".

Reliance on foodbanks as places of emergency food provision can't solve the root causes of poverty. But their role as sites of community bonding, knowledge sharing and relationship building can bring people together to mobilise for change, with the potential for lasting impacts across the country.

"Being part of the change is really exciting, to be able to offer a level of stability and a listening ear, and to have a brilliant team of volunteers who know how to do all that stuff. Yeah, its a real honour for sure."

Contact The Whitehawk Food Bank

Email: info@thewhitehawk.foodbank.org.uk

Website: thewhitehawk.foodbank.org.uk

THE CAPACITY TO PROVIDE

The number of those receiving food support during one week in July 2025 shows an overall decline on last year. There are several considerations when interpreting this:

- Whether client numbers are increasing, stable or decreasing varies between projects.
- For consistency we ask projects to report at the same time of year - a some of the largest projects reported figures for July that they said were surprisingly low.
- It is unclear if demand is dropping, or if projects' capacity to provide is dropping.
- Much of demand goes unrecorded. Trussell find that over half of people experiencing food insecurity do not go to a food project and instead go without essentials.
- Fluctuations are seasonal. Heating bills reduced during the long hot summer of 2025, but forecasted food and fuel price increases are a concern for winter 2026.

Pressure of sustained demand amid cuts and closure of public services has an eroding effect over time. What projects are able to provide clients depends on their capacity, whether that be in terms of their team, finances, resources, or physical space.

HUMAN CAPACITY

With no end to UK Poverty in sight, maintaining volunteer and staff wellbeing and capacity to continue this challenging work is a complex task. People in this area of work may not be paid for their contribution, are currently unable to unionise, and recent research suggests food banks volunteers are at risk of moral injury and distress.

In one week in July 2025, over 900 people are involved in providing food support:

- 653 volunteers give 2,470 hours to emergency and affordable food projects.
- Paid at UK living wage (£12.60), that's £31K a week, or £1.61 million a year.
- 70 Paid Staff worked 743 hours.
- 240 people volunteer at one of the surplus food redistribution projects that deliver food to the EFN members.

A third of the lead contacts for food projects are volunteers. Even with good delegation skills, they often take on the most responsibility and 'hold it all' for their team.

"A completely non-hierarchical system can be difficult to maintain... So ultimately I do end up making decisions and doing things because it's just more efficient. But I always try and make it collaborative."

-Food Bank Volunteer

Our case studies show being a part of these teams can be incredibly rewarding. But the overall message from food project workers is that their capacity is stretched like never before by the high level and complexity of need. EFN members want the resources to do their jobs well, without the pressure of propping up a flawed social security system.

INDIVIDUAL PROJECT CAPACITY

Four projects answered that they are at full capacity, operating a waiting list or closed to new referrals in July 2025. Two of these are affordable food projects (AFPs), a model which can be a preventative or progression step on from reliance on emergency food services. AFPs have been innovative in implementing measures to take on more clients but have reached the limit of what they can offer. They are calling for investment and business support to allow them to open their doors to the people waiting for access.

At the same time, several emergency food projects are making the strategic decision to shift into new models of provision. This includes food banks shifting more towards advice and others moving to a community supermarket membership model.

Voucher focused projects such as Impact Initiatives had to request extra funds to cover their highest ever period of demand at the start of 2025. Whilst these services experienced a summer lull in July, trends across the year indicate rising need for the flexible support offered by a voucher. Vouchers are useful for people who don't have the time or money to travel to a food bank appointment, people who need a specialist diet and for those who are housebound due to physical or mental ill health, age or disability.

"We are experiencing rising numbers again, people of varying ages and backgrounds who are often in dire situations. It is so difficult to signpost as services are so stretched that even serious safe guarding reports go unanswered for days on end."

- Community cafe staff member

NETWORK CAPACITY

Changes in individual project capacity have a knock on effect. Project closures or changes to referral criteria can mean an influx of clients into other projects with less strict criteria.

Part of BHFP's role is to work with the EFN members to make sure capacity is shared and optimised between projects. Our city-based research Beyond Food Banks consulted food projects on areas where collaboration could be improved. BHFP continue to search for a food hub storage space to allow for bulk buying and food sharing within the network.

Long wait times for services such as advice or housing support mean that people need food support for longer, putting more demand on food projects. Another upcoming work stream will involve refining referral processes within the network to make it easier for clients, referrers and food project staff to address need across the city.

Business sector influences also have an impact on the capacity of the whole network. FoodRise's report Used by criticises supermarkets for effectively "dumping" their food waste onto the voluntary and community sector, placing an unacceptable burden on these already stretched organisations. But with good working relationships at a local level it doesn't have to be this way. Local food projects are keen to work with businesses to tackle these issues that impact them all.

CASE STUDY - PANKHURST PANTRY

One day a week, at the top of a steep hill in East Brighton, the Edge Community Centre becomes a vibrant social supermarket. We spoke to Amanda who runs this remarkable pantry and regular volunteer Damien.

The project started life as a food bank during the lockdowns, in close collaboration with other local food projects. But Amanda observed “when the COVID restrictions lifted, people started not to turn up. People were saying they didn't want to be seen coming to pick up a bag of food for a charity handout.” This led to remodelling to the horseshoe shaped arrangement of market-stall-like tables which welcome customers today.

After paying their £5 fee, visitors browse and choose items at their own pace. Many clients are in insecure work and struggle to make ends meet. Some pay it forward when they can afford to, giving £10 to cover their fee and pay for someone else's shopping. Volunteers like Damien are aware seeking support can still be nerve wracking for some.

“I'd say don't worry. There's no stigma. Anybody can come, it's an open door. We're here to welcome you.”

Providing a choice of healthy, appealing and culturally appropriate food is key. Yet this can be a challenge for food projects which rely heavily on donations and surplus. The cost of their food shop has doubled since 2022, with Amanda now spending £200 at the supermarket each week to top up stock.

Despite this uncertainty, the project has become a space to share food, knowledge and culture. Well known staples such as pasta or rice are always stocked. But when something more unusual comes in, the volunteers explain how to cook it. “We will also exchange information” Amanda explains, “I've learned so much. Customers will tell us how to preserve or prepare a food. It works both ways.” Some visitors take produce home, then bring back meals they've made to share, including Greek pastries and stuffed peppers.

With a userbase that has grown from 20 to up to 70 a week, allowing the freedom of choice from the table has also reduced the admin load on volunteers. No longer packing bags from a list of orders, they now have more opportunities for public interaction.

“We don't just do food, we do community. Some of our volunteers are customers too. I encourage people to ‘cross the table’.”

The variety extends to the tasks volunteers can choose, from decanting bulk stock into portions, making refreshments and greeting visitors. “We try and make everyone feel comfortable and let them do what fits their skill set.” says Amanda.

For some volunteers this is an opportunity to build confidence and relationships. It's helped some people from homelessness into secure work, while others have become keystones of their community.

As a wheelchair user, Damien had experienced unfair barriers to getting involved in volunteering in other settings. Now, Damien not only volunteers his time at the project, but takes leftover produce home to share via Olio and Social Media, after realising that some people who don't feel able to come to Pankurst Pantry do come to his front door. "What's a few hours of my time for the difference I make to people? And those people are helping us grow personally as well. I would like to say thank you to everyone, because not only is it brought together a community. It's providing a much-needed service."

"I'm grateful to Amanda and the team because they gave me a chance. This is the first project where I felt welcomed. I wasn't mollycoddled or treated differently. I immediately felt part of the team".

The process of volunteer management is something Amanda considers very carefully, particularly around delegation, succession planning and not holding all the responsibility herself. In the light of recent reports of wellbeing challenges for volunteers in food support settings, reciprocity and mutual support within a strong team goes a long way. "We've been really lucky having a couple of quite senior health professionals as volunteers. They've all had trauma informed training, very aware of boundaries".

Through the ups and downs of supporting people in tough times, Amanda and the team find the people make it all worthwhile. Amanda reflects that "all life is here, and it balances out and it keeps me going."

The project advertises their needs with help of social media and the Food Partnership comms, but they are grateful for the people who show up to donate things as if by magic just when they are needed. One Christmas was saved by a person who donated take away cups and cutlery just as they planned to serve their winter soup. What it amounts to is trust in a community of mutual support. "I just keep having to remind myself to try and be a bit more relaxed. Something will work out" says Amanda.

Thinking about long term sustainability, Damien notes that "funding is needed for projects like this because at the end of the day we can give as much time. But if we don't have resources to give out, there's no way we can do what we are all trying to do. It's clear that it's still needed". MPs, change makers and funders are encouraged to visit Pankhurst Pantry to see them in action and take the time to speak to their community of customers. The value of the project's work spreads far beyond the doors of the community room.

Contact Pankhurst Pantry

Email: pankhurstpantry@gmail.com

Facebook: [Pankhurst Pantry](#)

WHAT DO FOOD PROJECTS NEED?

Projects told us what would best support their work and what priorities to campaign on.

FUNDING AND POLICIES THAT ENABLE PREVENTATIVE WORK

The current Government was elected on the commitment to end the need for food banks. [Trussell](#) finds that most of the public support this aim regardless of political leaning, and highlights benefits to the national economy. Our [Beyond Food Banks](#) work explores preventative local actions. But success of local solutions relies entirely on change makers addressing the root cause of the issue - rising poverty and inequality in the UK.

“Until the Cost of Living is solved, we are only fixing the symptoms, not the cause... people are getting used to living in a way that we would never have been accepted a few years ago. The stats are horrific, and we are getting numbed to them. I would like this not be something that we are accepting.”

- Community centre food project staff

This year saw some welcome policy changes. The Household Support Fund was awarded for a full year. While details are still uncertain, the new multi-year Crisis & Resilience Fund has potential to balance the need for crisis support alongside prevention. Extension to [Free School Meals eligibility](#) and continuation of the [Holiday Activities Food Fund](#) are welcome preventative policy developments for children. However, with half of the people supported needing help on an ongoing basis, much more needs to be done to prevent long term health impacts of malnutrition brought about through food poverty.

WHAT'S NEEDED NOW

Nationally:

- We back the '[Guarantee our Essentials](#)' campaign and believe that all employers should pay the [Real Living Wage Foundation](#) Living Wage rate.
- We call for statutory funding for meals on wheels services for people in food poverty who are housebound or being discharged from hospital.

Locally:

- Decisions on how the Crisis and Resilience Fund is allocated to build on the learning from HSF and invested in supporting partnership work. Allocation of funding via this route to recognise the reach and added value that community food projects provide.
- Investment in schemes that address the public health consequences of poor nutrition, for example fruit and veg on prescription.
- Health commissioning plans to include action to prevent malnutrition and diet related ill health. Use the opportunity presented via integrated community teams to support Affordable Food Projects

SUPPORT FROM THEIR COMMUNITY, NETWORKS AND LOCAL FOOD PARTNERSHIP

As is evident from the statistics and from the case studies, staff and volunteers going above and beyond is what keeps this local food support system going. The support of their peers in the network is valued, as is the ally ship offered by local groups and businesses.

“It is nice to be reminded of how many people are working towards the same end goal as us. Thank you for the support!”

- Emergency Food Network Member

This year BHFP ran an engagement session with EFN members to find out what they needed from us. Recommendations echo those from our [Beyond Food Banks project](#).

Based on what projects tell us they need, BHFP intend to:

- Explore bulk-buying and find donated premises to host a storage and distribution hub.
- Pilot a joint buying group so projects can pool their money to get the best value and highest quality food stock.
- Facilitate changes which are bottom up. Support projects to co-operate with each other and local support services, such as advice and mental health support
- Run themed sessions in response to EFN needs, for example a session on referral processes to co-create a referral form that all projects can use.
- Host a dedicated webpage where we can list, create and share training resources.
- Advocate for wider support to be co-located in food projects eg mental health, fuel poverty and housing advice.

WHAT'S NEEDED NOW

Nationally:

- Work with the [Alliance for Dignified Food Support](#) to collectively represent food project workers and their needs.

Locally:

- Projects need people in their community who are reliably able to donate money, food and time.
- Support the BHFP annual [Food SOS Campaign](#), where schools and businesses host a donation basket in their spaces and run a donation drive.
- A single point of contact at BHCC to liaise with BHFP on food insecurity issues, so that issues and challenges can be addressed quickly.
- BHCC to continue to support the network with parking permits for those projects delivering food to vulnerable residents.

RELIABLE AND AFFORDABLE SOURCES OF FOOD

Food supply via donations and retail surplus currently does not meet demand. Despite a huge quantity, **1,081 tonnes of surplus** being redistributed by the [Surplus Food Network](#) in 2024, this does not meet the EFN's food needs. Retailer surplus, often handled by dedicated redistributors, is down by as much as 15% due to new waste reduction strategies further upstream.

The surplus that projects do receive can be unusable due to spoilage or not meeting their clients cultural or health needs. Whilst there is more surplus still available at farm or wholesale level, the pack sizes or volumes these are distributed in make them unsuitable for small projects to decant or distribute. Grassroots efforts to share local surplus via communication channels and use local growing spaces are providing impressive benefits but not solving the issue at large.

"In more positive news, the surplus food whatsapp group has been great and it is really wonderful to see so many food projects try hard to work together for the good of our communities. I hope the next year will bring more collaboration which should in turn create opportunities to creatively address some of the biggest issues that face us all."

- Community cafe staff member

The shortfall between supply and need forces projects to purchase significant quantities of food, particularly fresh fruit and vegetables. Survey respondents reported **spending £13,619 a week to stock their shelves**. That is £708,118 per year in Brighton & Hove.

WHAT'S NEEDED NOW

Nationally:

- For supermarkets to forgo their profit margins when selling to food projects by giving discount cards. This would mean public money provided to food projects would be spent on people not profit.

Locally:

- For companies to support [FareShare Sussex & Surrey](#) and [the Community Kitchen](#) to run bulk food repacking events which provide multiple benefits (£500 per event to cover venue, packaging and transport).
- For farms and food producers to support [the Gleaning Network](#).
- For businesses to [offer volunteer drivers](#) to help move food around the city.
- Any premises in the local area to [donate their space](#) to help the local food network build a centralised bulk buying and distribution hub.

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 service types.

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 Trussell, 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. This 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 currently 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-operative (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 EBFC 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 2025 this includes Brighton Grub Hub at Stanmer Organics, Nature Through Nurture in Moulsecoomb, Woodingdean CIC, and other plot holders local to food projects.

COMMUNITY KITCHEN

Our cooking 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 BHFP Emergency Food Network Survey 2025 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 July-August 2025 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 BHFP's communication to decision makers. This includes quantifying the overall scale of the problem of food insecurity, details about who is most impacted, and what EFN members 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 of five £50 groceries vouchers.

SURVEY & INTERVIEW METHODS

One survey was completed per food support project location 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. Where 7 active projects did not provide data, their data from 2024 was used as an estimate.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with six people who volunteered their time for the three case studies. Quotes throughout this report come directly from various qualitative survey responses and interview transcriptions carried out in 2025 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:

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Report and photographs by the Community Food Team, BHFP