

# Brighton & Hove Cost of Living Action Plan

March 2024

## Foreword

We know many of our residents have been hit hard by the cost of living crisis. With the rising cost of food and energy, high housing costs alongside pockets of entrenched deprivation have meant that not all parts of the city have been hit equally.

We have been lobbying hard on your behalf, and we will continue to call upon national government to do more to support our communities. But we cannot sit back while our residents face stark choices between heating and eating. That's why, even through the toughest budget we have ever faced, we have safeguarded essential support for our most vulnerable residents.

We pledged in our Council Plan to be a listening and responsive council. So, I'm thankful to all those who took time to respond to the consultation on our draft cost of living action plan, who participated in workshops and responded to our surveys to understand the challenges being faced. This feedback has helped us develop and finalise a plan that will help thousands of residents.

Our goal is for Brighton & Hove to be a fair and inclusive city, where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. With your support and input, this action plan will go some way towards achieving that.

**Councillor Bella Sankey**  
**Council Leader**  
**Brighton & Hove City Council**

## Section 1: Introduction

The [cost of living](#), the amount of money people need to pay for everyday necessities, has been increasing across the UK since early 2021<sup>1</sup>. Driven by inflation, this has especially affected the price of energy and commodities such as food, caused by global supply chain bottlenecks and trade barriers. A subsequent impact has been increased interest/mortgage rates as the Bank of England attempts to control inflation through monetary policy. This has had a direct impact on private sector rents and housing pressures as landlords experience higher financing costs.

In Brighton & Hove, the cost of living crisis has been having a significant impact on the living standards of most residents, with disproportionate impacts across certain cohorts, compounded for those with intersectional characteristics:

- Disabled people and people with long-term health conditions (including mental health issues)
- Carers and people receiving informal care
- Families with children, especially single parent families
- Older people
- People in poor quality or unsuitable accommodation
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Black and Racially Minoritised communities
- People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- Young people (aged 16 to 25).

In response to the crisis we published a draft Cost of Living Action Plan for consultation in August 2023. The Cost of Living Plan supports our [Council Plan](#), which sets out our ambition to create a fairer and more inclusive city where everyone can thrive.

Our draft Cost of Living Plan outlined our response to the crisis across:

- Emergency support – providing immediate access to emergency funds, provided by the government, alongside advice and signposting to wider support
- Prevention - joining up and promoting support across the city to address poverty and inequality
- Resilience – what can be done to build longer term resilience.

Responding to the feedback, offers of support and ideas we received, we set out here our plan of action to tackle a challenge that is multifaceted and exacerbated by long standing inequalities.

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<sup>1</sup> House of Commons Library, Rising Cost of Living in the UK 16<sup>th</sup> February 2024

## Section 1.1: Community Engagement and Consultation

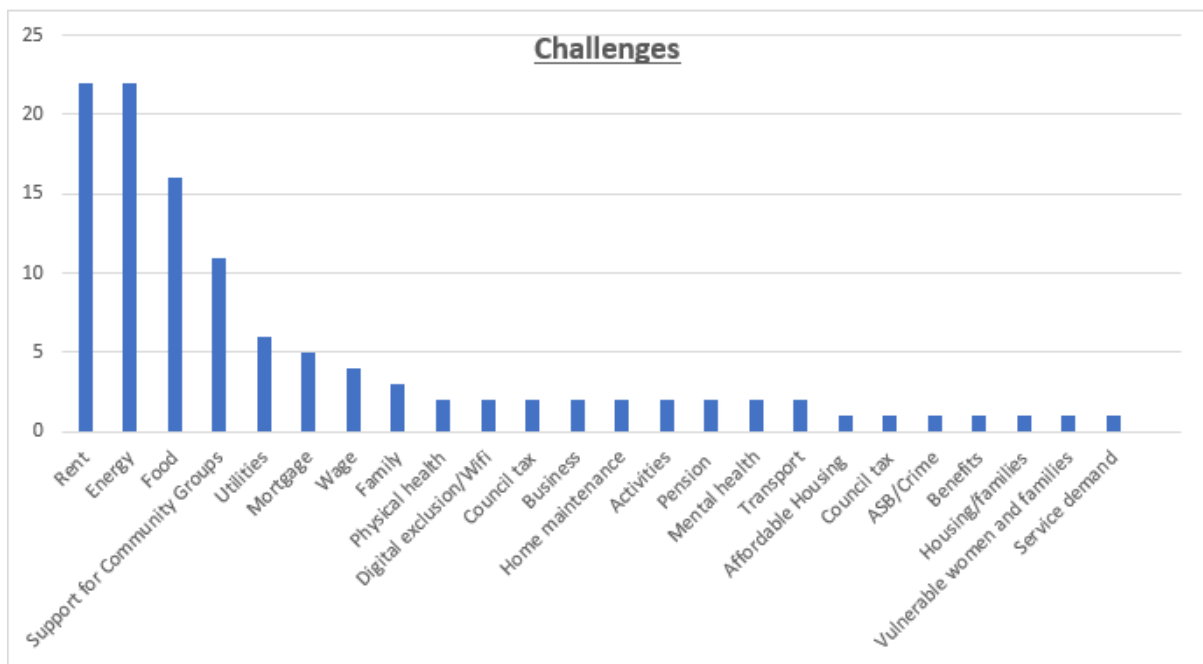
Brighton & Hove City Council is committed to listening to its communities, learning from lived experience, and directly involving residents in helping to shape service delivery. 170 residents and partners responded to the survey, the consultation or attended in person engagement events.

We asked:

- What is the greatest challenge facing you due to the cost of living crisis?
- Where should efforts be focused to support the most vulnerable?
- What ideas, resources or expertise can you or others bring?

The consultation revealed the multitude of challenges different communities face with housing affordability, energy and food costs, and access to healthcare amongst the top concerns.

**Chart 1.1: Cost of living challenges facing our communities**



During December 2023 ideation workshops brought forward a wealth of ideas, resources and expertise demonstrating the value of codesigning solutions to meet local need.

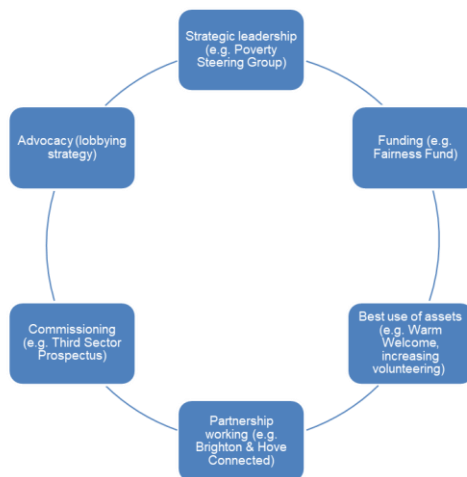
The word cloud below illustrates the key areas of discussion.

**Chart 1.2: Discussion topics during ideation workshops**



The chart below sets out the key policy ideas put forward. These ideas have fed into this plan - informing how we target future support, our approach to advocacy and how we work with our partners.

**Chart 1.3: Key policy recommendations from the consultation**



**Key Action**

- *Continue to engage communities across the city to enable lived experience to shape future policy and delivery.*

## Section 2 Targeting those most in need

### Section 2.1 A data driven approach

The council works with partners to use the latest data and analysis software, such as the Low Income Family Tracker, to prioritise and align emergency support. Much of the support to date has been funded by the government's [Household Support Fund](#).

**Table 2.1: Support provided by the 2023 to 2024 Household Support Fund**

Area of support	Budget allocation
<a href="#">Free School Meals vouchers</a>	£1,485,000
<a href="#">Local Discretionary Social Fund awards</a>	£1,418,000
Community organisations, including support for food banks, food stores and other emergency support items	£280,000
Food clubs and providers of delivered meals	£110,000
<a href="#">Brighton &amp; Hove Food Partnership support initiatives</a>	£100,000
Sustainable energy solutions	£35,000
<a href="#">Money advice and energy grants provided by Citizen's Advice Brighton &amp; Hove and Money Advice Plus, accessible via the Energyworks scheme</a>	£219,000
<a href="#">Discretionary Council Tax Reduction</a>	£140,000
Staffing costs	£213,000
<a href="#">Local Lift Up scheme (for Just About Managing households)</a>	£85,000
<a href="#">Carers' Centre</a>	£20,000
<a href="#">Family Hubs</a>	£70,000
Children's Services	£60,000
Advice	£45,000
<b>Total allocated</b>	<b>£4,280,000</b>

The consultation feedback stressed the criticality of continuing emergency support and the high levels of demand, that continue to outstrip supply. In response we have announced a new £2.969m Brighton & Hove Fairness Fund, which includes the city's anticipated £2.140m Household Support Fund allocation from the Department of Work & Pensions, which has been extended until September 2024. The Brighton & Hove Fairness Fund will provide support for community groups, food banks, help with food vouchers, discretionary payments, and other essential items for residents in need.

#### Key Actions

- *Continue to work with partners to share information, prioritise and align emergency support*
- *Launch the 2024-25 Brighton & Hove Fairness Fund to provide direct financial support targeting residents and community groups who have been hit the hardest.*

## Section 2.2: Collaborative community response

The city's response to the cost of living crisis is a collaborative effort with partners across the voluntary and community sector, alongside wider public and private sector partners. During 2022 and 2023 we brought together our anchor institutions, as part of Brighton & Hove Connected, to leverage our strategic role as convener and leader of change. To date collaboration has focused particularly on priority areas such as welfare, financial assistance, debt management, food and fuel poverty, mental health and wellbeing to share information and align support.

### Case study: Cost of Living Summit

The council has a leadership role to play in co-ordinating support for residents through the cost of living crisis. In autumn 2022, we hosted a Cost of Living Summit bringing together key partners to align and coordinate support, share data and discuss ways of strengthening our collective response.

Each partner was asked: 'What can I/my organisation do differently?' and 'What new relationships can I build?'

The summit revealed high levels of motivation from partners to work collectively across the city.

Brighton & Hove has a strong and diverse third Sector. Benefitting from the reach and understanding of the city's communities, our voluntary and community organisations are often best placed to provide support directly to communities. We support the sector through the [Third Sector Commissioning](#) Prospectus, a four year strategic programme to commission third sector partners to provide support services.

During 2024, we will continue to work with our voluntary and community sector partners and do everything in our control to support the sector's future resilience, including minimising any future cuts to supporting budgets as we work together in an extremely challenging financial context. The sector is under significant strain, facing unprecedented demand from clients and uncertain future budgets.

### Case study: Support for grassroots community organisations

Most of the city's emergency food work is done by small independent projects run at a neighbourhood level. The [Trust for Developing Communities](#) is funded through the council's Third Sector Commission to provide support to grassroots community organisations across the areas of highest deprivation to build community resilience and enable self-help. The Trust is currently working with 13 food projects supporting over 1,700 households experiencing cost of living pressures.

With the Trust's support five projects have been recognised as Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIO) or Community Interest Companies (CIC) - essential for opening bank accounts, for fundraising and to manage assets. Two projects have been successful in securing over £30k of National Lottery funding:

1. TDC has supported Phoenix Community Market to become a registered CIC, so it can secure a license to use their premises and secure funding from the Hyde Foundation; and to create a new 'pay as you feel café' in partnership with Sussex Surplus

2. TDC supported Moulsecoomb Community Market to offer money and energy savings advice; and health interventions in partnership with Public Health and the NHS, such as the 'Know Your Numbers' blood pressure campaign.

Brighton & Hove also benefits from a rich history of volunteering. The consultation responses revealed strong demand to leverage this to make better use of resources, skills and expertise across the city. We will work with partners to explore opportunities for channelling our city's volunteers towards opportunities that will help our more vulnerable residents.

## Key Actions

*In 2024-2025 we will:*

- *Open a multiyear grant programme providing community and voluntary sector organisations with the opportunity of four years of funding to support communities through the cost of living crisis*
- *Work with community partners and anchor institutions to explore the most effective ways of connecting residents, students, employers and staff with volunteering opportunities across the city.*

## Section 2.3: Coordination and signposting support

Brighton & Hove City Council's [Cost of Living Support Hub](#) has been a crucial repository of information on advice and support across food, energy, financial management, access to warm spaces, health and wellbeing. There have been almost 30,000 visits to the hub to date and over 50 participating partners.

Many residents across the city continue to experience hardship. The 2023 Brighton and Hove Emergency Food Network<sup>2</sup> Annual Survey revealed 6,441 residents rely on emergency food services every week – up 25% from 2022. One in three of the recipients of emergency food are children.

In 2023 the city ran a successful crowdfunding campaign, led by Brighton and Hove Citizens Advice, the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership and partners, raising £76,000 to help residents struggling to meet food, fuel and other essential costs. Building on this goodwill, a new Cost of Living Crisis appeal has been launched, aiming to raise £35,000 to pay for utilities and food parcels.

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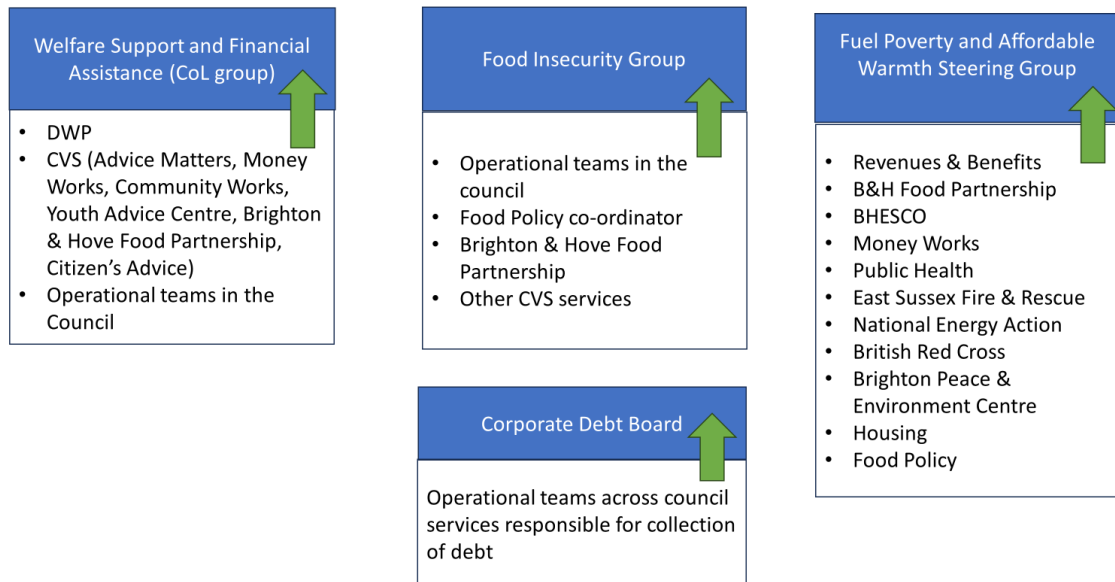
<sup>2</sup> [Emergency Food Network Annual Report 2023 \(bhfood.org.uk\)](https://www.bhfood.org.uk)



## Case Study: Brighton & Hove Cost of Living Crowdfund

In December 2023 a [new fundraising appeal](#) was launched to support Brighton & Hove residents struggling to meet food and energy costs through the ongoing cost of living crisis. The Brighton & Hove Cost of Living Action Appeal is being run jointly by Brighton & Hove Citizens Advice and Brighton & Hove Food Partnership, with support from Brighton & Hove City Council. The appeal aims to raise £35,000. All donations will be split equally, with 50% going to provide help with fuel poverty and 50% going to pay for emergency food.

The consultation responses revealed continuing high demand for emergency support, and informed our lobbying activity to call for continued central government funding. The responses also called for more to be done to join up wider support across the city. During 2024, we will work with partners to explore setting up a Strategic Steering Group to strengthen our coordinated multiagency response. Our current collaborations include:



## Key Actions

*In 2024-2025 we will:*

- *Continue to collaborate with partners to ensure the cost of living support hub effectively signposts to support across the city*
- *Explore setting up a Strategic Steering Group to strengthen our coordinated multiagency response.*

## Section 2.4: Advocacy to drive wider change

With access to local knowledge and proximity to communities, local government is well positioned to lead a targeted and coordinated response to the crisis. Councils, however, often have limited discretion over how funds are spent, curbing their ability to tailor policy approaches to the complexity of local need and join-up local spend.

Over the last decade local authority funding has fallen in real terms by 15.5%<sup>3</sup>. Unprecedented budget cuts and short-term local government funding settlements have stymied local government. Fiscal devolution and greater powers across transport, housing, employment and skills support are essential if councils are to effectively tackle the underpinning drivers of inequality.

Our engagement with partners locally and nationally has reinforced our call for:

- An overhaul of the welfare system to ensure it provides a fair safety net for all who need it, with benefits that rise in line with inflation (including Local Housing Allowance and Housing Benefit brought back in line with rents)
- An overhaul of local government finance to provide a funding system that adequately reflects the pressures faced and properly funds support such as Local Council Tax Reduction schemes
- Fiscal devolution – such as 100% business rates retention, devolution of stamp duty, retention of a share of income tax and VAT generated locally, and/or introduction of a sales tax on mail order distribution companies, alongside the ability to set new levies
- Revaluation and reform of council tax to ensure the tax is more progressive
- Continued commitment to the Household Support Fund to enable local authorities to meet the high demand for emergency support.

### Case study: LGA white paper response

In response to the growing challenges posed by the cost of living crisis, Brighton & Hove City Council submitted a response to the LGA white paper highlighting the urgent need for fiscal devolution and local government finance reform. We called for increased decision-making autonomy and new powers over transport, economy, housing and planning to empower local government to create the right conditions for more inclusive growth, including:

- Housing: powers to compulsorily purchase property empty for two years; regulatory power to improve housing standards across Housing Associations and the private rented sector (e.g. landlord licensing), and to regulate and impose local taxation on short-term lets (e.g. through change of use)
- Planning: powers to implement a principal residence policy to curb the proliferation of second homes, helping us to meet local housing need
- Transport: powers to enable a franchised model of bus service, including greater control of prices and routes
- Skills: devolution of Adult Education Budget to better align skills supply with demand; devolve all apprenticeship funding alongside full retention of apprenticeship levy and flexibility on how funds are used (e.g. on pre-apprenticeship training); with levy underspend returned to local areas.

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<sup>3</sup> [The government is right to rebalance funding towards disadvantaged councils | Institute for Government](#)

**Key Action**

- *Continue to work with partners nationally and locally to make the case for the sustainable funding solutions.*

## Section 3: An integrated approach to support and prevention

The Council is committed to taking an integrated approach to tackling the impacts of the cost of living crisis through joining up support and focusing on prevention, where we have the right policy levers. We highlight some of our key activity below – from enabling inclusive growth to supporting vulnerable families and investing in the right infrastructure.

### 3.1: Supporting a fair and inclusive economy

Our forthcoming 2024-27 Economic Strategy will set out our strategic approach to enabling fairer and more inclusive growth, alongside our City Plan, which will set the planning framework for new housing, employment, regeneration and opportunities across the built environment.

#### Case study: Ending in-work Poverty

The Brighton & Hove Living Wage campaign was started in 2012, led by the Brighton Chamber with support from the city council and Unison. The Living Wage campaign encourages local businesses to voluntarily pay all employees the real Living Wage - currently £12 per hour.

The Living Wage is set independently by the Resolution Foundation and is reviewed annually. It is based on the amount a person needs to live a reasonable standard of life.

To date, more than 900 city employers have signed-up to the Living Wage, raising the salaries of more than 4,500 individuals. As well as being beneficial to employees, the Living Wage provides benefits to employers, including easier recruitment and better retention, enhanced staff morale, productivity and reputational benefits.

The evidence shows that, for those who can work, supporting people to gain the skills and capabilities to find a job and progress once in work is the most effective route out of poverty. During 2024 we will continue our work supporting residents into good quality work, enabling in-work progression, access to training and apprenticeship opportunities, and integrating our support with help to address wider health and disability challenges. This is set out in our forthcoming 2024 City Employment and Skills Plan, including how we are preparing communities for our future economy and supporting residents to access digital skills.

#### Case study: Youth Employment Hub

Following a successful bid for government funding, a Youth Employment Hub was created in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions to get the city's young people into good quality work. The Hub provides a no wrong door approach, triaging relevant support and addressing intersectional barriers facing the city's NEET – not in education, employment or training. Partners work together to provide wraparound support across health, welfare, housing and wider social issues alongside skills, employability training and mentoring. The physical hub in Kemp Town can be accessed as a drop in five days a week, alongside a virtual support offer.

To date the Youth Employment Hub have supported more than 1,500 young people, with 500 of those securing employment, 115 moving on to an apprenticeship or traineeship, and 450 gaining a positive outcome of an employer engagement or AQA Education Unit Awards.

Most (99.7%) of the city's businesses are small, medium and micro firms (c. 14,000 firms<sup>4</sup>). We understand the pressures facing these small businesses. We will tailor our support, which ranges from providing free business support and affordable workspace, to flexible lettings policies for vacant property and relieving fees and charges (such as waiving fines for small businesses whose premises get graffitied).

As a member of the Greater Brighton Economic Board, along with six other local authorities; Adur, Arun, Crawley, Lewes, Mid Sussex and Worthing, we have been collaborating across key lobbying areas including:

- Sending letters to Government to demand adequate support measures, particularly to assist small businesses with the spiralling costs of energy
- Supporting the #BusinessSOS campaign, founded by Business Improvement Districts representing over 150,000 retail, leisure, hospitality and tourism businesses, calling on Government to support businesses by making interventions including reducing VAT, granting business rate relief and granting energy relief
- Commissioning the Institute of Employment Studies to conduct an impact analysis of the cost of living crisis on the city region's residents and businesses
- Commissioning an Economic Dashboard for the regional economy to track economic performance statistics and trends.

We will continue to leverage the purchasing power of the council through using public procurement to support smaller firms, charities and social enterprises and generate social value from contracts to secure wider community benefits. This will be set out in our forthcoming 2024 Social Value Toolkit.

## Key Actions

*In 2024 include:*

- *Helping working residents to be paid a real living wage through promoting [the Brighton & Hove Living Wage campaign](#)*
- *Ensuring our [Adult Education Hub](#) and [Youth Employability Service](#) work with education and training providers to meet the skill needs of residents and businesses*
- *Developing our [Business & IP Centre Sussex](#) to provide free support to start-ups, small and medium sized businesses to grow and create well paid high quality jobs*
- *Working with trade unions to ensure we are a [fair and inclusive](#) place to work, including our approach to recruitment, retention and progression as well as staff pay.*

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<sup>4</sup> [UK business: activity, size and location - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#) Table 1 on 2023 Excel spreadsheet

### 3.2 Welfare support

Despite facing the toughest budget ever, we remain committed to supporting households on low incomes as much as we can. We have uplifted earnings thresholds to ensure that support for low-income households through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme has been maintained in real terms. We have also created a Brighton & Hove Fairness Fund to provide direct financial support for residents most in need.

#### Case study: Council Tax Reduction Schemes

We are maintaining our Council Tax Reduction Scheme from April 2024. This includes uplifting earnings thresholds in line with the changes to the National Living Wage to ensure that the level of support the scheme offers is maintained in real terms. The scheme helps low-income households with their Council Tax, supporting 19,200 claimants and provides discounts of over £22 million to low income households across Brighton & Hove.

As part of our commitment to supporting the most vulnerable, the Discretionary Care Leaver Relief scheme will also be protected. The scheme provides Council Tax discounts totalling £204,000 to approximately 170 care leavers across the city. The scheme aims to support care leavers with their council tax until they turn 25 to ensure our care leavers have the best start to their life once they start living independently.

Our consultation and engagement feedback stressed the importance of continuing to support residents to navigate the welfare benefit system to ensure they receive the benefits they are entitled to. We will continue to use our data analysis to identify vulnerable households and work with partners to target joint support where it is needed most. We will ensure that the debt collection functions of the council recognise vulnerability and respond accordingly, such as allowing extra time for payment, connecting residents with health services, debt collection and debt advice.

#### Key Actions

*In 2024-25 we will:*

- *Support people with different needs to access and navigate welfare benefits, for example those affected by the benefit cap*
- *Work with the [Wave Community Bank](#) and partners to support families without bank accounts to access funding and provide financial advice through our continued funding and support for third sector money advice and citizens advice services*
- *Work with the [Brighton and Hove Food Partnership](#) and community food projects across the city to deliver the recommendations of 2023 review into the emergency food needs of Black and Racially Minoritised communities, refugees and asylum seekers.*

### 3.3: Improving outcomes for families

The consultation responses told us that childcare costs are one of the most significant expenses working families are struggling with. From April 2024, we will roll out expansion of affordable childcare under the government scheme, which will eventually see working parents with children over the age of nine months entitled to 30 hours a week of childcare support. We will also continue to raise awareness of free or subsidised activities across the city, such as free admission across our museum sites, free [holiday activities](#) for children and a [Holidays, Activities and Food Programme](#).

Child poverty rates in working households are on the rise in almost all areas of the UK. Brighton & Hove has seen a significant increase in the percentage of children living in relative poverty within working households, elevating the city into the top 15 cities nationally.<sup>5</sup>

Evidence shows that education is the primary determinant of where children fall on the income distribution relative to their parents<sup>6</sup>. We are working to tackle these disparities through enabling young people eligible for free school meals priority access to the best secondary school places available.

#### **Case Study: Tackling inequality through secondary school places**

In January 2024, Brighton & Hove Council agreed to include eligibility for free school meals as one of the considerations in allocating secondary school places. This will mean that young people who are eligible for free school meals will be given priority when applying for secondary school places. This is the first time that an English Education Authority has included this in its allocations policy, and represents a significant step in ensuring that young people living in our more deprived communities have choice and access to the best educational opportunities the city offers.

Evidence also shows that poor mental health is a key barrier to learning<sup>7</sup>. This is why we are piloting school-based counselling to give pupils the professional support they need.

#### **Case study: School-based counselling pilot**

The Public Health JSNA identified the growing level of mental health need in children and young people in Brighton & Hove. The Safe & Well at School Survey of pupils in primary and secondary schools in the city confirmed the findings of this national data. The most recent survey in November 2021 shows that young people's emotional wellbeing has seen a significant deterioration compared with previous years, particularly for secondary school pupils, including an increase in self-harm and suicidal thoughts. The council have committed £200,000 to support a pilot schools counselling project, to be part of the current mental health offer which is being scoped and planned to commence in September 2024.

Although the gap has closed, dropping from around 19% in 2015/16 to 13% in 2019/20, disadvantaged pupils attending Brighton & Hove state schools continue to fall behind their advantaged peers in staying in jobs and education after graduation (cite refs). We are working in partnership with schools to improve educational and employment outcomes for disadvantaged pupils – as set out in our strategy for tackling [educational disadvantage](#).

A key tenet of our approach has been the redesign of our Early Help offer to ensure vulnerable and disadvantaged families get the help and support they need through our new [Family Hub](#) model. This brings all our services together to provide integrated, accessible, and seamless support to improve outcomes across wellbeing, education, employment, poverty, mental health and other measures. The support offer has been co-produced with

<sup>5</sup> [besides those in the East of England] [How places have fared since 2010 | Centre for Cities](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Education Inequalities \(ifs.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Education Inequalities \(ifs.org.uk\)](#)

families, communities, and partners, with a focus on working with under-served communities.

### Key Action

- *Develop a city wide family help strategy to provide holistic support to vulnerable or disadvantaged families facing multiple barriers due to intersecting identities and circumstances.*

### 3.4: Tackling fuel poverty and enabling energy efficiency

Fuel poverty is a national crisis, which affects the lives of over 14,000 households in the city.<sup>8</sup> Demand for help and support with energy bills has grown exponentially over the last two years<sup>9</sup>. Our approach has been to provide support and advice to increase home energy efficiency and reduce energy bills, as well as money advice and emergency fuel vouchers. The Fuel Poverty & Affordable Warmth Steering Group coordinates our collaborative approach working with partners across public health, housing, food, welfare, and the community and voluntary sector.

Our programmes to support energy efficiency and tackle fuel poverty include:

- Supporting low-income households with energy efficiency measures through our [Shared Prosperity Fund](#) and [Warmer Homes](#) programmes
- Improving the energy performance of council homes - focusing on our most energy inefficient homes in our most deprived areas, including installing solar panels on over 800 council homes in areas of higher levels of fuel poverty, saving households up to £250 per year on their energy bills
- Supporting energy efficiency improvements in non-council owned properties, including through the [Disabled Facilities Grant funded Warm Safe Homes Grant](#), and enforcing minimum energy standards in the private rented sector
- Supporting community partnership [Energyworks](#) to provide energy advice, home energy checks, money advice and fuel vouchers for vulnerable residents in urgent need
- Local partnership working with the nationally funded [Local Energy Advice Partnership \(LEAP\)](#) to provide home visits with advice and energy efficiency measures to help residents keep warm and reduce their bills
- Supplementing support available through community partners as part of our Warmth for Wellbeing public health programme, providing money advice, small grants and home energy visits
- [Help with energy bills webpages](#) providing information and advice, and an online '[Warm Welcome Directory](#)' with information on free indoor activities and places residents can go to keep warm across the city.

#### Case study: Energyworks support for residents struggling with high bills

Energyworks is a partnership project between Citizens Advice Brighton & Hove and Brighton & Hove Energy Services Coop (BHESCO). It provides energy advice and grants to residents experiencing fuel poverty.

<sup>8</sup> [Sub-regional fuel poverty data 2023 \(2021 data\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Cost of Living Update Brighton & Hove Update Report Feb 2023 \(cabrightonhove.org\)](#)



This is a case study of 'N', a young, Arabic mother of two who is the registered carer for her husband. Both 'N' and her husband have complex medical needs.

'N' was referred to Brighton & Hove Energy Services Co-op (BHESCo) for an EnergyWorks home visit by her neighbour who was concerned that she was not coping well. Her husband was bed-bound and the room temperature had to be a certain level to maintain his health.

During BHESCo's visit, 'N' was given an interpreter, energy advice, and switched to a cheaper tariff. BHESCo also provided her husband with an electric fleece blanket to maintain a healthy body temperature at a lower cost and draught-proofed the home. A referral was made for an EnergyWorks Grant to help manage 'N's' debt. 'N's' electricity bills are now £68 lower per month.

### **Key Actions**

*During 2024-25 we will:*

- *Work with our partners to develop a refreshed Fuel Poverty and Affordable Warmth Strategy for Brighton & Hove*
- *Continue to work collaboratively through the Fuel Poverty and Affordable Warmth Steering Group to support a coordinated approach*
- *Continue to seek and coordinate available funding for greatest impact for those who are most vulnerable.*

### **3.5 Affordable housing**

Our engagement and consultation results revealed housing affordability to be the top concern of residents. Brighton & Hove is one of the UK's most expensive housing markets, with a significant proportion (almost one third) in rented accommodation<sup>10</sup>. Reflecting this, over 2019-2023 the case load for housing advice more than doubled, with particularly large increases in the need for advice from clients with a disability, long-term health condition and single parents<sup>11</sup>. The council's approach is focused on:

- Increasing the supply of affordable housing: for example, through actively acquiring new land and properties to build more council homes. We are also working with housing associations to deliver 352 new affordable homes this financial year.
- Improving the quality of private rented housing: through cracking down on rogue landlords who fail to maintain their properties. We license larger Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) and hope to expand this to smaller HMO's and other private rented homes this year. These measures will help to ensure that all tenants have access to safe and habitable homes.
- Making council housing more sustainable: we are building new council homes with energy efficiency measures as standard to reduce tenants' bills and contribute to the city's net zero ambition.

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<sup>10</sup> 2021 Census data <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E06000>

<sup>11</sup> [Cost of Living Update Brighton & Hove Update Report Feb 2023 \(cabrightonhove.org\)](https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/cabrightonhove.org)

### **Case study: Progress on affordable housing**

The council is accelerating the provision of much needed affordable homes. This includes:

- Recent acquisition of Kubic apartments, a block of 38 flats in Whitehawk, to be let at social rent
- 91 new council homes in Portslade have now been completed - including 42 council flats in Victoria Road and 49 council flats at Quay View in Wellington Road. The Quay View homes are part of a Homes for Brighton & Hove development of 104 one, 2 and 3 bedroom flats, with the other flats available as shared ownership through Hyde.
- Through our partnership with Hyde we are building 242 low-cost homes in Coldean, which includes a further 127 council-rented homes. The Coldean Lane development is due to be completed this winter.
- Other developments currently in the city's pipeline will provide at least 400 affordable homes.

### **Key Actions**

*In 2024-25 we will:*

- *Prioritise support for the most vulnerable households to help them manage their tenancy, prevent debt and remain in their homes*
- *Work with partners to explore opportunities for wrap around support to respond to complex, multifaceted needs*
- *Review our housing development targets through the refresh of the City Plan and increase the number of new affordable homes*
- *Develop a protocol setting out how the council will work with developers to maximise the provision of affordable housing*
- *Buy back council homes lost through the right to buy or where economically viable*
- *Apply local criteria for access to affordable housing provided through Build to Rent schemes to ensure prioritisation of local people on lower incomes, essential worker roles that are hard to recruit or retain and disabled people.*

## **3.6 Transport**

Connectivity challenges have meant that some parts of the city lack affordable access to employment and essential services such as leisure, health and education. Our priority for 2024-25 will be providing supported bus services to outlying parts of the city, lowering public transport costs and encouraging healthier, sustainable ways to travel.

### **Case study: Affordable and sustainable travel**

The council successfully bid and has been awarded £28m for its Bus Service Improvement Plan by the Department for Transport. The plan seeks to build bus patronage following the reduction during the pandemic, and boosts access for residents on low incomes.

Key themes include -

1. Simplifying and reducing fares
2. Speeding up buses and improving reliability

3. Providing a zero emission bus fleet
4. Funding concessionary travel
5. Enhancing socially necessary bus services – services that provide vital links for communities, but which wouldn't be economically viable for a bus company to run without additional support.

The programme will fund approximately 42,500 Concessionary Travel passes and maintain concessionary travel for disabled residents and older people. This will boost access to public transport for those who have lower incomes and support affordable access to employment.

## Key Actions

*We will:*

- *Review parking charges (we have cancelled the former 300% increase in parking charges in parts of the city)*
- *Explore virtual parking permits to introduce direct debit payment, helping people manage a more reasonable cost over time*
- *Fund concessionary travel in the city and maintain the extended statutory concessionary travel time for disabled residents and older people*
- *Provide supported bus services to outlying parts of the city to provide access to work, leisure, health centres and education*
- *Continue to commit to our [Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan](#) (LCWIP) as well as encourage and support sustainable travel options, and deliver our £28m [Bus Service Improvement Plan](#) by 2025.*

## 3.7 Health and wellbeing

Our consultation and engagement revealed the criticality of putting the mental and physical health of our communities at the heart of our approach to tackle the cost of living crisis.

People often think of health as highly individualistic; it's the food we eat and how much we exercise as well as the health and care we receive. Our wider economic, physical and social environment however has the largest impact. Almost every aspect of our lives impacts our health and ultimately how long we will live – our jobs and homes, access to education and public transport and whether we experience poverty or discrimination.

Brighton & Hove is one of the most deprived local authorities in the South East:

- Before accounting for housing costs, 1 in 6 children live in relative poverty
- After housing costs this increases 1 in 4 children (12,800 children aged 0-15 years)
- More older people live in poverty - 1 in 5 residents 60 and over (9,500 people) – for England this is 1 in 7.

In parts of Brighton & Hove, people are dying 8-9 years earlier than they should. The gap in healthy life expectancy is wider still – at 14 years for men and 12.5 years for women between those living in the most and least deprived areas of the city. People are living longer

in ill-health. This, alongside the rising retirement age, means increasing numbers of people of working age are living in ill-health<sup>12</sup>.

The cost of living crisis has raised particular health concerns for our more vulnerable communities, such as the elderly and the disabled, and those exposed to long standing health inequalities.

### **Case study: Community Health Inequalities programme**

Community Health Inequalities programme (CHIP) is a year-long, £300,000 project co-producing solutions to tackling health inequalities in Brighton & Hove. Using community development principles, CHIP creates partnerships with primary care and communities experiencing the greatest health inequalities.

Over 50,000 people have been reached with information, 8,000 have attended events and 3,000 people have been referred to clinical or preventative activities. Key projects include blood pressure checks, NHS and lung health checks, digital inclusion, and health events.

CHIP is a joint programme bringing together NHS Sussex, the city council and local community and voluntary sector groups including the Hangleton & Knoll Project, the Trust for Developing Communities and Switchboard..

### **Key Actions**

*During 2024-25 we will:*

- *Work with NHS and community and voluntary sector partners to provide befriending support to reduce loneliness and social prescribing to connect people with activities to enhance and protect their wellbeing, including financial advice and support*
- *Help children with special educational needs and disabilities to access childcare provision and activities through the [Childcare Inclusion Fund](#), which pays for necessary changes for the child to access the service*
- *Promote the [NHS Healthy Start scheme](#) to help parents buy milk, healthy food and vitamins during pregnancy and until their child is 4 years*
- *Provide high quality health visiting and school nursing services to all families in the city with enhanced support for the most vulnerable families*
- *Provide health and wellbeing information support and advice to schools and colleges through the Public Health Schools programme*
- *Promote the [Leisure Card](#) which provides discounts to Brighton & Hove residents who receive benefits, the [Compass Card](#) which offers leisure discounts for disabled children and young people, the [which provides carers with discounts](#), and the [Free Swimming Scheme](#) which offers free swimming opportunities for children and young people.*
- *Promote Let's Get Moving Brighton & Hove via our free physical activity programme, which helps people across the city of all ages and abilities to get more active, and our [Healthy Lifestyle Team](#) which provides free advice on making changes to get healthier*
- *Promote our [Ageing Well](#) service - a partnership of 10 community and voluntary sector providers, funded jointly by the council and NHS, delivering a range of activities to reduce loneliness and social isolation, and support people to remain healthy and independent, including financial advice delivered by [Citizens Advice Brighton & Hove](#).*

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<sup>12</sup> [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment \(JSNA\) \(brighton-hove.gov.uk\)](#)

## Section 4: Concluding remarks

This plan has set out our approach to providing emergency support to our most vulnerable residents struggling with the cost of living crisis alongside how we will use our policy levers to tackle some of the underlying drivers of poverty and inequality. Our approach will evolve in response to the changing needs of our communities, with a strong emphasis on joining up support across the city.

The city council and our partners across public, private and especially the third sector are currently operating under immense financial strain. Although local government and our partners are well placed to respond to the cost of living challenge, only national government holds the policy levers to address many of the structural drivers of inequality.

We call on national government to enter a more strategic relationship with local government – one focused on empowerment to provide the freedom, flexibility and sustainable funding streams that will enable councils to improve and join up local service provision and raise living standards for all.

