BRIGHTON & HOVE FOOD PARTNERSHIP

FOOD SUPPORT NETWORK REPORT 2026

Brighton & Hove Food Partnership's annual state of the sector report looks at the experiences of projects supporting people in poverty in Brighton and Hove, and what we as a city can do to support our community going forward.



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WHY WE DO THIS REPORT

Brighton & Hove Food Partnership (BHFP) is a non-profit organisation working to improve the way people cook, grow and eat, from grassroots to strategic levels.

BHFP have been facilitating the "Emergency Food Network" since 2013. In 2026 by consensus the network was re-named the "Food Support Network" (FSN) to reflect our diverse membership which includes food banks, affordable food projects, pantries, meals-on-wheels, voucher services, community meals and more.

BHFP have been coordinating an annual survey since 2013 to measure how the need for food support, and the projects who support them, have been changing. The survey's data shows a snapshot of one week in July. We do this at what is usually the quietest time of year for projects so that we reduce the risk of over-reporting, and also because our network is highly reliant on volunteers. You can read more about the network and copies of previous reports on our website.

A massive thank you to everyone in this incredible network for the time, care and commitment you give to your communities. We are continually inspired by you and will continue to advocate for you and the people you work with.

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

KEY STATS 2026

51 organisations offer food support
from 61 locations across Brighton & Hove

800+ volunteers
27% of leaders are volunteers

The projects tell us:

½ of people use services indefinitely

There's an increase in those with mental health issues in work, vunerably housed and migrant groups

As in previous years main driver is cost of living

In one week:

Projects spend **£12,859** on food
That's nearly 700k per year

Over **5,800** people are supported
20% of those are children
18% of those are pensioners

622 food parcels provided

770 affordable shops collected

150 food vouchers given

77 people received a delivered meal

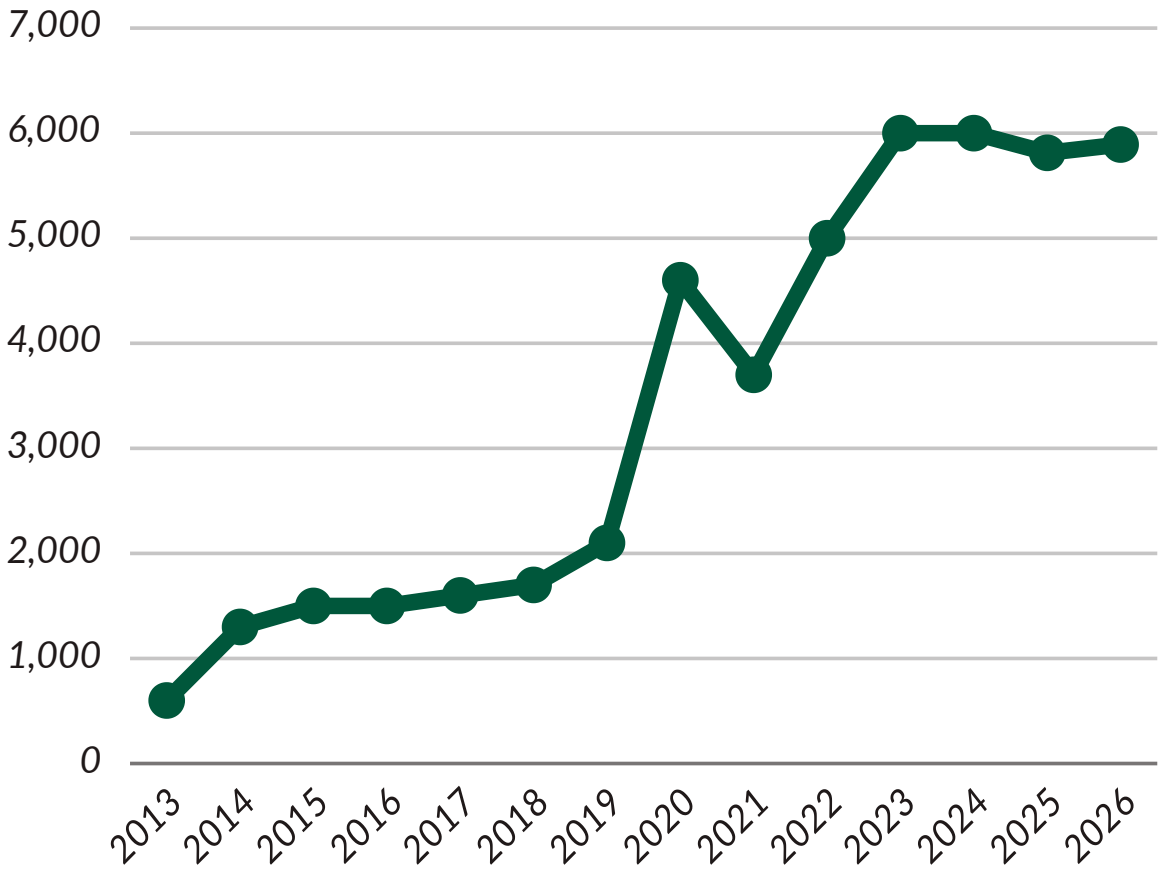
1,991 people ate in shared meal spaces

2026: A SUMMARY

Three findings:

- Demand remains historically high
- But the way food support is delivered is changing
- Mental health needs continue to rise in a fragile network

Number of beneficiaries served by projects part of the Food Support Network

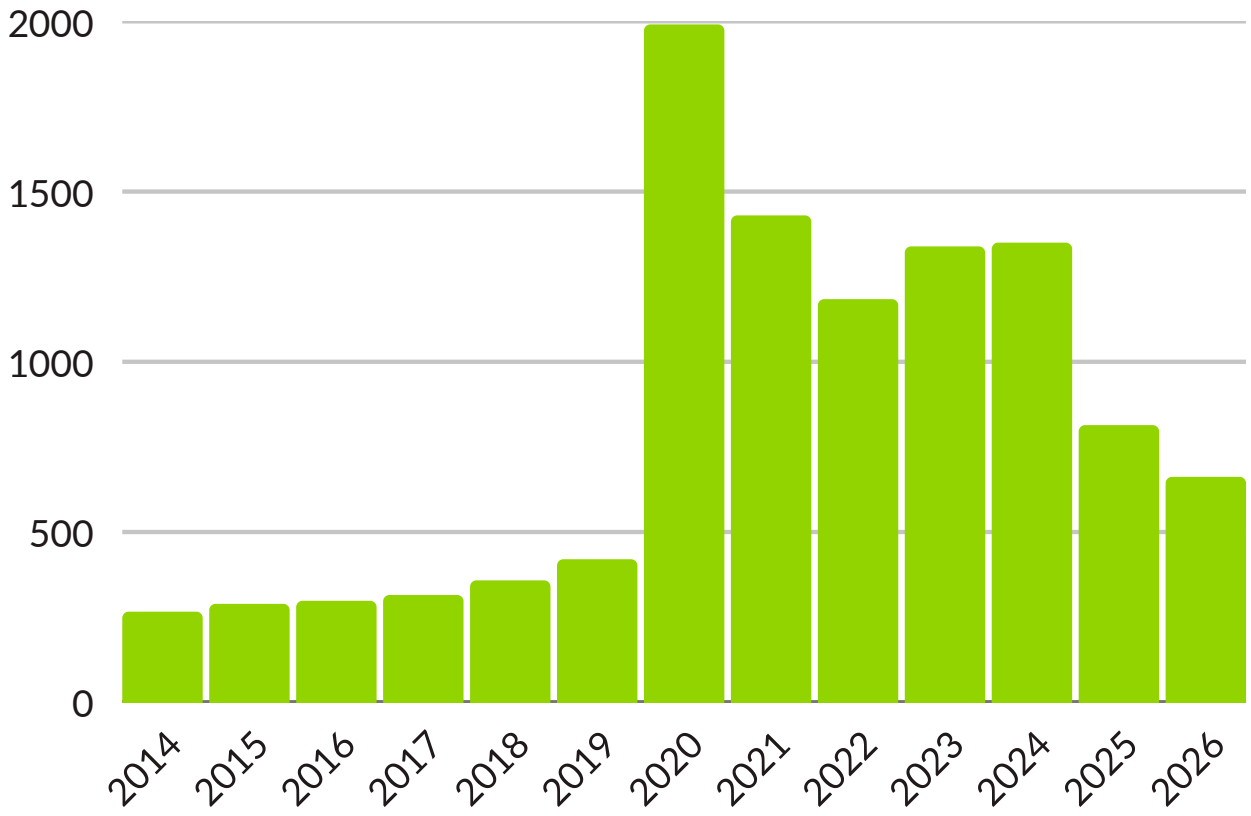


This is the thirteenth year we have reported on this network, and the fourth year running that we've seen a similar high level of need. Looking at one week in July, our network tells us they served **5800 beneficiaries** (the same as last year). These figures indicate that thousands of local residents remain unable to consistently afford the essentials needed for a healthy life.

This is reflective of the poverty situation nationwide, according to Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Nationally, the Food Foundation estimated that around 12% of households experienced food insecurity in early 2026, demonstrating that high levels of need remain a reality across the country despite improvements from the peak of the cost-of-living crisis.

One of the priority ambitions of the city's Food Strategy is Beyond Food Banks. This work aims to shift Brighton & Hove from reliance on emergency food towards a more preventative approach that helps people move towards food security. This means better coordinated and more sustainable food provision, simpler and more consistent referral routes, greater access to wrap around support including money, debt and benefits advice, and developing practical 'ladders' from emergency food into affordable food and greater food independence. Alongside this, the approach seeks to make support more dignified and inclusive, improve collaboration and sharing of resources between community food projects, and ensure limited resources are targeted where need is greatest

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



Despite demand remaining high, the way support is being delivered is changing. We have seen **a reduction in emergency food parcels for a second year running,** demonstrating moves by some projects to transition to affordable food models. With approx half of people receiving food support doing so on an ongoing basis their need cannot be treated as an 'emergency' situation. In order to prevent future diet related health crises provision needs to offer access to healthy/fresh food more suitable for the longer term. Projects continue to evolve their models to offer a wider range of foods and to increase choice.

Our Beyond Food Banks project involved promoting the development of affordable food projects in more areas of the city because as food insecurity becomes a longer term challenge, they offer increased dignity for customers, support longer-term financial resilience for community members and are more financially sustainable for projects. Our case study highlights the benefits of this model, from one of the projects who have done just this. Of course, success is fewer people needing food support at all, rather than just an increase in affordable food.

Beyond Food Banks also positions f**ood projects as a 'way into support'** The 2026 figures show an increase in wider "wrap-around-support" at food projects such as financial, benefits, employability support and more aimed at tackling the causes of food insecurity. In many cases, the most significant outcomes reported by projects were not food-related. Respondents described people receiving help to reduce debts, maximise income, access benefits, improve housing security and avoid future crises.

As well as the numbers showing consistency in support, notable is the consistency of the sector itself, given a third of projects continue to be led by volunteers.

But this sector is still highly precarious because of the resources and the nature of this work, and one specific finding this year has been an second-year increase in people with mental health needs using services. The complexity of the people using services can be difficult for volunteers. Food projects, as shown in our case study, can be spaces of community and healing, but the nature of using and working and volunteering in food projects can be deeply damaging, as found by the Alliance for Dignified Food Support (AFDS). We are calling on national and local government to listen to the ADFS's demands, which include taking responsibility for people in crisis.



FOOD SUPPORT NETWORK MEMBERS

51 members across 61 locations.

- Age UK West Sussex, Brighton & Hove
- Balfour Mutual Aid Foodbank
- Bevendean Food bank
- Black and Minority Ethnic Community partnership
- Brighton and Hove Foodbank
- Brighton and Hove LGBT Switchboard
- Brighton Light Trust
- Brighton Students' Union
- Brighton Unemployed Centre Families Project
- Brighton Women's Centre
- BrightStore CIC
- CASE Food Bank
- Chomp
- Craven Vale Food Bank
- East Brighton Food Coop
- Emmanuel Food Projects
- FareShare Sussex & Surrey
- Feedback / Sussex Surplus
- Food and Friendship
- Fresh Start Community Association
- Grub Hub (back in this year)
- Hangleton and West Blatchington Foodbank
- Hollingbury Foodbank at the Gathering Place
- Hove Food Hub
- Impact Initiatives
- Knight Support
- Lunch Positive
- Macmillan cancer support
- Moulsecoomb Community Market
- Mutual Aid Vegan Foodbank
- Old Boat Corner Community Association
- Pankhurst Pantry
- Phoenix Food Shop
- Purple People Kitchen Food Bank
- Real Junk Food Project Brighton
- Rottingdean Ovingdean and Saltdean Foodbank
- St John Baptist Church Foodbank
- St Mary Magdalens
- St Richards Community Cafe
- Sussex Homeless Support
- The Crew Club
- The Parish Pantry
- The Salvation Army
- The Village Foodbank
- The Whitehawk Foodbank
- University of Sussex Pantry
- Very Local Food Hubs
- Voices in Exile Foodbank
- Weald Allotments Community fridge
- Woodingdean Community Food Hub
- YMCADLG Youth Advice Centre Brighton



CHANGES TO THE NETWORK

A few services were temporarily closed when we contacted them, Fresh Start Community Association and St Mary Magdalens Coldean. Grub Hub have reopened this year. Very Local Food Hubs have closed their veg box service, are only operating a community fridge.

Needs remain high

We're going to start this year's report by looking at the communities our network support, as this helps us to understand the needs the network is working to address.

In this year's reported beneficiaries there are slightly more people than in 2025 (5,892, versus 5,813 last year). However, we know some projects round the numbers reported therefore it is reasonable to assume that overall number of people supported remains broadly the same.

Looking at the numbers over a longer timespan, if we want to get back to 2022 levels we would need to support over 700 people to lift themselves out of poverty and no longer need any sort of food support.

Children and pensioners

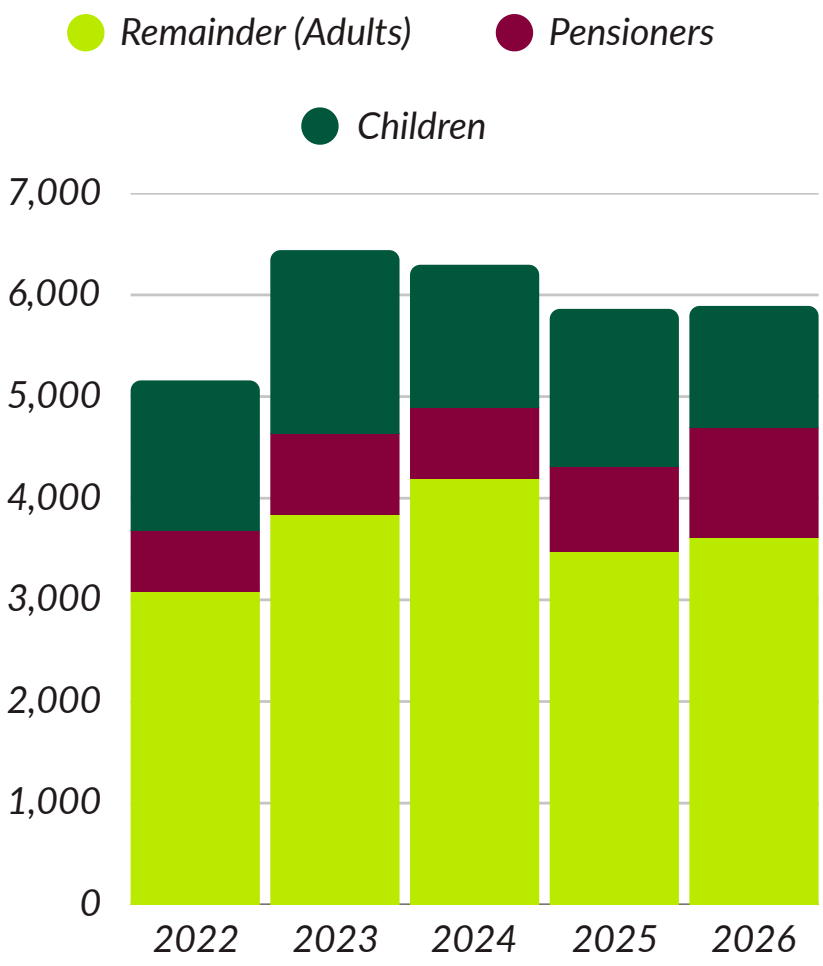
The numbers of children supported is slightly lower than last year, but this is likely due to service changes. It is too early to determine whether recent welfare policy changes have contributed to this trend, but it will be an area to monitor in future reports. Because this report does not include any food support provided by schools it is likely to be an under-reporting of numbers of children.

Changes include this year's removal of the two-child benefit limit, and the expansion in eligibility for free school meals to all households receiving universal credit (however, we encourage readers to sign the petition to ensure free school meals continue to be linked to the Holiday Activities and Food programme).

Although this survey was undertaken before the summer holiday period we know that the ending of holiday food vouchers for families on free school meals did result in extra demand over the summer holiday period for Impact Initiatives' Food Support Service.

There has been a rise in the number of pensioners being supported, although this partly reflects changes in service provision. National evidence continues to show that older people living on fixed incomes can be particularly exposed to rising living costs, especially food and energy prices.

A graph to show the number of children and pensioners accessing food support



Who is seeking support

An “increase in cost of living, food, rent, bills” continues to be the main contributing factor projects tell us brings people through their doors. This mirrors national findings which show in April 2026, 92% of people who reported increasing living costs attributed this partly to rising food prices.

The other top reasons cited were benefits related issues, debt related issues, unemployment or job loss and ill health and disability.

Projects also highlighted housing pressures as an ongoing factor driving food insecurity. With high private rents, rising housing costs and increasing numbers of people living in temporary or insecure accommodation, many households are making impossible choices between food and other essentials. Brighton and Hove’s Citizens Advice argues housing is the single most important cost pressure in people’s lives in our city, with rent 10% more than the national average, and local and national interventions on housing are vital.

Reasons for support

Notable is that 20 projects told us that they have seen an upsurge in the number of people with mental health issues needing support, reinforcing the complexity of the work these projects do. Financial hardship, debt, insecure work and housing pressures can all contribute to poor mental wellbeing, whilst poor mental health can make it harder to increase income or access support. This creates a cycle which many food projects are increasingly helping people to navigate.



Projects this year saw an increase in demand for support from people in work, again indicative of the disproportionate costs-of-living versus wages in Brighton & Hove (as confirmed by last year’s CABH cost of living report). This finding reflects wider national concerns. The Independent Food Aid Network has argued that food banks increasingly support people experiencing multiple and overlapping pressures including ill health, insecure work and high housing costs, rather than short-term financial crises alone.



Long term poverty

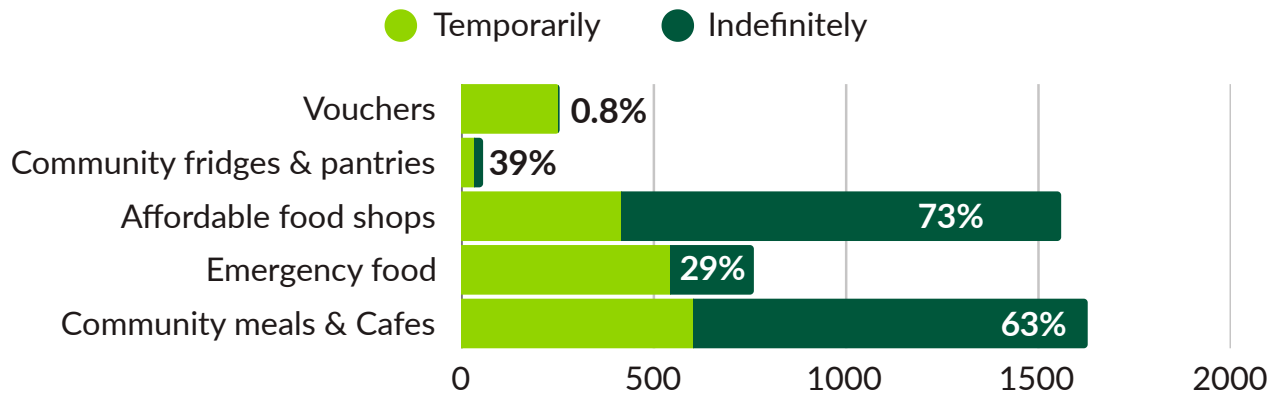
Around half of the people turning up at food projects across the whole network are using them indefinitely, but this varies hugely depending on the type of support projects give. Our local picture reflects what national organisations including IFAN have increasingly argued that continued reliance on food support reflects wider shortcomings in income adequacy and social security rather than a lack of community generosity.

Affordable food shops are designed to be longer-term, embedded community assets. Unlike emergency food provision, they allow people to choose food that suits their household, contribute towards the cost , and access support without the stigma often associated with crisis services.

Three quarters of people use affordable food shop services indefinitely. Long-term use is not necessarily a concern, as these services are intentionally designed to provide ongoing support and reduce the need for crisis intervention. But they still rely on grants, surplus food and donations and are not fully financially sustainable so need support if they are to continue to prevent food crisis for people.

In the emergency food (food banks) category, only a third of people are collecting emergency food parcels indefinitely, down from nearly half last year.

This is a really positive change, as a stated intention of the Beyond the Foodbank work is moving more people about of crisis / emergency support and into longer term options such as community meals and affordable food shops.



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.

OASIS COMMUNITY SHOP: CASE STUDY

At Emmanuel Church in Hangleton, Oasis Community Shop has spent the past year demonstrating how affordable food projects can provide much more than food. We spoke to Community Shop Coordinator Lauren and member "Flossie" about the project's transition from a food bank to a community shop.

This transition reflects a growing movement towards more dignified and preventative approaches to food insecurity. The Alliance for Dignified Food Support's Food Bank Free Britain campaign argues that whilst emergency food has an important role in times of crisis, long-term solutions should provide choice, build resilience and strengthen financial security.

Reducing barriers

After leaving work due to the combined pressures of a long commute and caring for her neurodivergent grandson, Flossie found herself under financial strain. Having previously used a food bank, she describes Oasis as something different: a "healing place", where a sense of dignity and community made a remarkable difference during difficult times.

> “We just saw a bit of a gap because we felt like people needed longer-term support. And actually, everyone's struggling with the cost of living, not just an isolated portion of people. We wanted to remove the barriers of the referral process and open the doors to the wider community.”

By removing referrals and introducing a membership system, the project helps reach people who might otherwise avoid seeking support because of stigma or uncertainty about eligibility. Research suggests affordable food schemes can reduce these barriers and create more inclusive forms of support. Since making the transition, Oasis has doubled the number of people engaging with the project each week.

Lauren admits she was initially concerned about introducing a membership system:

> “I was a bit nervous about the monetary side because I was like, “are people going to find this too much?” But we genuinely haven't had a huge amount of kickback. In fact, some people, they've said we should up the prices! Because they get a lot for their money.”

For members, the shop creates breathing space within household budgets. Flossie describes how regular access to affordable groceries has helped her manage unexpected expenses and reduce debt.

> “It's helped free up a little bit of money to save towards emergency things in the home, or a pair of shoes for school. Whereas we would have just gone deeper and deeper into debt, and so coming here, I gradually got myself back up out of the debt.”

The model helps Oasis remain sustainable at a time when many food banks are facing rising demand and increasing pressure on donations. Lauren reflected on the limits of relying on donated food and how switching to an affordable model enables them to meet community needs in the long term.

> "I just think it's a more viable option. I think people are donating less food to food banks. People are donating less money, and it's just quite hard to fund those projects."

Today, membership income now covers around half of the shop's costs, helping to reduce reliance on grants and donations alone.



From crisis to resilience

Alongside affordable food, Oasis provides wraparound support designed to address some of the underlying causes of food insecurity. Once a month, an adviser from Money Advice Plus visits the shop to provide guidance on debt, benefits, and household finances. For Flossie, a conversation at Oasis proved transformative.

> “Yeah, I didn't lose my house! If I didn't have [the advisor}, I don't know. I would probably have had to put it on the market.”

Yet, both Lauren and Flossie emphasise that Oasis is much more than a place to shop. The project has become a space where people build relationships, find encouragement, and feel part of a community. **These connections can be especially important during periods of poor mental wellbeing. Experiences of financial hardship, food insecurity and the stress of needing food support can take a significant emotional toll, making supportive community spaces even more valuable.**

At the heart of Oasis is a committed team of volunteers carrying out a wide range of roles, from arranging stock and setting up tables to welcoming visitors and serving refreshments. Whilst the work often involves heavy lifting, Lauren emphasises the importance of people with all strengths and abilities.

> “There's a real blend of lots of different skills, really, even if you just want to serve tea and coffee, that's okay.”

For Lauren, the community shop model has helped create more opportunities for volunteers and members to interact, strengthening relationships and reducing barriers between those providing and accessing support.

> “Ultimately, they really love engaging with our clients and speaking with people and helping them, and they love doing that here.”

For Flossie, the volunteers have been a vital source of consistency and reassurance.

> "You can definitely bounce back, you can. Especially when people come together. I call it your team, your tribe."

Through affordable food, practical advice and a strong sense of community, Oasis Community Shop has evolved into much more than a place to access groceries. Flossie's experience shows how affordable food projects can help people improve their financial stability, build connections, and access support in a way that feels dignified, welcoming, and sustainable.

AN ADAPTING NETWORK

Oasis is not the only project evolving in this way. Across Brighton & Hove, food projects are increasingly combining food provision with practical support designed to tackle the causes of food insecurity.

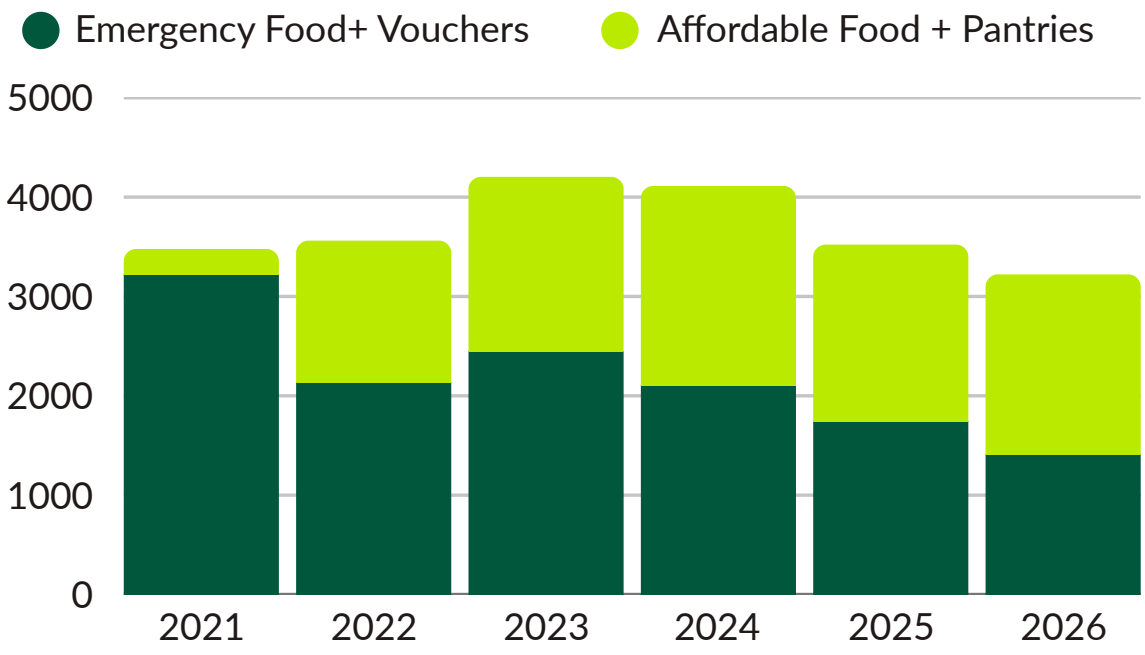
Our network spans 51 organisations across 61 locations, and many of them offer a range of support for their communities. Looking at the main focus of their work, though, we can see a picture of a changing network.

Last year we had 24 projects offering emergency food as their main output, this year it's down to just 17 as projects have developed and adapted their models . This shift is not simply about changing how food is distributed. Many projects have deliberately redesigned services so that people can access earlier, before they reach crisis point and others have integrated access to wrap around support such as advice and health support.

The table below shows the steady decline in emergency food parcels. This is a useful picture as some projects choose to offer a hybrid model, giving emergency food to those most in need and supporting community members to move to paying low sums of money for their food. There has been a 65% increase in affordable food shops, as well as a small rise in food vouchers.

Looking back to our 2025 Beyond Food Banks report, we have 4 new affordable food projects, including important provision in the west of the city allowing people to access a wider range of support in their area. You can see these changes in the graph below, and the map of food support in the city which is colour coded according to the main type of food support they give.

A graph to show changes in how food support is delivered



These developments in the network may be contributing to the reduction in indefinite use of food banks; people now have sustainable, low-cost and long-term projects they can access . While the survey cannot tell us whether one caused the other, the two trends are occurring at the same time.



Beyond food

Another recommendation of the Beyond Food Banks report was about being more preventative and collaborative both within the network and with other sources of support.

In this report we can see a continued increase in wraparound support offered within food projects.

We know food insecurity does not stem from a lack of food alone. People may also need support with debt, benefits, housing, employment or wellbeing. National organisations including IFAN have argued that households experiencing food insecurity often require cash-first support, debt advice and welfare support alongside food provision.



Food projects are increasingly becoming community support hubs rather than places that only provide food. Twenty-nine services reported offering some form of wraparound support alongside food provision, whilst eight more said they would like support to develop this area of their work. Across the network, projects described providing or hosting support with debt, benefits, housing, energy costs, mental health, social prescribing and financial capability. More than 30 different support services and partner organisations were mentioned by respondents, including Money Advice Plus, Citizens Advice, BHESCO, Together Co, Staying Well and housing providers.

The impact of this support can be significant. Projects reported helping people access previously unclaimed benefits, reduce priority debts, improve housing security and build long-term financial resilience. Others described helping people avoid repeat food bank use by addressing the underlying financial issues that brought them to food support in the first place. In the words of Hangleton & West Blatchington Food Bank when asked about who gives advice in their foodbank *'Citizens Advice and Southern Water and BHESCo. Clients have received great advice and support with managing priority debts and have not needed to return to the foodbank in several cases.'*

The funding of the Food Support Network run by BHFP from Brighton and Hove City Council comes via the Advice and Financial Inclusion partnership and being part of this network has created better links and brought in additional funding for the work.

For example it has enabled Citizens Advice Brighton & Hove to expand Advice First Aid training across the network. The programme trained 94 people over the last year, across 13 projects and Money Advice Plus and the Community Kitchen to secure funding for a Get Smart Food and Money course.

Volunteer numbers



In one week in July nearly 1,000 people were working and volunteering to provide food support, over 800 of them volunteers. Volunteers come from many backgrounds inlcuding people who have benefited from projects.

If these volunteers were paid UK Living Wage Foundation rate it would cost the city **£1.81 million for the year**.

A third of projects are entirely run /led by volunteers, demonstrating commitment, compassion, but also an area of risk. **We must look after them or they won't be able to continue.**

Food supply, buying and surplus

Projects spent £12,859 on food and vouchers in a week in July, or an average of nearly £700,000 for the year.

Although this is down from £14,000 in 2025 this mostly reflects service changes, for example the Whitehawk Foodbank have significantly reduced spending as they have been transitioning to an advice café, following the same model as Hollindean Foodbank in 2024 (featured in the case study) and Very Local Food Hubs (who were among the higher spenders on food in 2025) ended their veg box scheme to focus on their community fridge

The figure is still staggeringly high and with global uncertainties impacting food prices is likely to only increase.

We were pleased to successfully run a bulk buying pilot with the network, buying from Sheffield-based food-project-specific suppliers the Food and Community Trust. However the bulk buying project couldn't be hosted at the same location beyond the pilot, and we've been unable to find another location to store bulk goods (see below for our 'big asks').

There were a significant number of projects indicating receiving reduced surplus this year, although the main surplus food supplier Fareshare reported a small (3%) increase in the amount they received on last year. Fareshare Go, which distributes end-of-the-day surplus, was noticeably down in our region. It is now consistently more difficult to access supplies of ambient food that lasts longer. **Overall there was 795 tonnes of surplus food redistributed by members of the city's surplus food network in 2025 (figures are collected annually) which is down from the 2024 figure of 810 tonnes.** This reduction is due to availabilty not capacity to collect.

While surplus food remains an important resource for many projects we have always cautioned against viewing surplus redistribution as a long-term solution to food insecurity as household income and financial security remain the key drivers of need.



LONG TERM CHANGE

In April central government introduced a new funding stream to replace the Household Support Fund, which has been the main funder for our networks since the pandemic. The new Crisis and Resilience Fund has felt like a natural continuation of the work we've all been doing locally (and even name-drops Advice First Aid in its guidance).

Although the new funding has caused quite a bit of confusion, the focus on creating longer-term resilience is welcomed, and we are already seeing projects thinking creatively about how they can support their communities in new ways. Looking to years 2 and 3 of the fund, we at the Food Partnership have welcomed working with the Brighton and Hove City Council to co-design how the fund might be spent.

There were significant delays this year to the funding which caused considerable stress for groups, and we have raised concerns with Brighton & Hove City Council about the capacity of the teams administering the fund.

Locally we are also asking BHCC to support volunteers more – recognising the £1.81 million they would need to spend to fund this city's network of volunteers, if they were paid at UK living wage. As a network we have to wait each year to find out if BHCC will cover the the simple cost of parking permits for projects moving surplus food and supporting vulnerable residents; this needs ongoing funding to remove uncertainty.

How our work links to national work

The Food Support Network is also our connection between what is happening on the ground in Brighton & Hove and national work on food insecurity and poverty. Our annual survey, which we have run for more than a decade, gives us a valuable picture of how need and provision are changing across a whole city. We use that evidence, alongside case studies and the experience of network members, to inform policy and campaigning, sharing what we learn with national organisations including Feeding Britain, the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) and the Food Foundation. We also use our voice locally to amplify national campaigns for the changes that can prevent people reaching food crisis in the first place.

We have seen why that national advocacy matters. Previous Emergency Food Network reports have repeatedly highlighted the number of children relying on food support and the importance of strengthening household incomes and the nutritional safety net. We have supported national calls for better access to Free School Meals, and in 2025 the Government announced that eligibility would be extended to all children in households receiving Universal Credit from September 2026, a change BHFP publicly welcomed. We are now supporting calls to protect the link between Free School Meals and the Holiday Activities and Food programme, while also welcoming plans to update School Food Standards. These are national decisions, but our local evidence helps show why they matter: lasting reductions in food poverty will depend not just on supporting food projects, but on tackling the underlying reasons people cannot afford enough healthy food.

What food projects say about this network

"We have benefitted massively from the shared knowledge and experience of the EFN [now FSN]. It has directly fed into our remodel."

""I guess there's always a sense of every project being different, and everyone's priorities are slightly different, so it's not easy to instigate 'city wide' systems or protocols - despite much discussion! So being realistic about what the network can and can't do would be good."

"The connections we have with each other through the Food Partnership are invaluable, and the strength of the communication that exists in the network enables us to anticipate what's needed, respond quickly and plan ahead."

OUR 5 ASKS

We want the expertise of this network to be at the heart of decisions about how CRF funding is allocated. We also want the city to build on what we learnt through Covid: that civil food resilience relies on both strong networks and infrastructure.

We have five key asks of BHCC and will report back to the network on progress.

1. That in creating a new single point of contact for the new crisis payment service it does not lose the expertise and approach currently provided via Impact's Food Access service.
2. That the infrastructure required (storage and management systems) to enable bulk buying and preparedness for future food shocks is resourced in the longer term. Essential as thousands of residents simply cannot afford the recommended three day stockpile of food.
3. That it is recognised that without volunteers none of this food would reach people the consequences of which would be pressure on overstretched statutory services. BHCC to fund training, support and parking permits to enable this work.
4. That food projects should continue to be involved in the design of the new CRF scheme.
5. Finally, the team within BHCC working on CRF needs more resource (particularly in the coming months) so they are able to deliver this important programme of change

In a single week in July, Food Support Network members supported 5800 people whilst spending almost £13,000 on food and vouchers. Even modest savings through bulk buying could allow projects to redirect scarce resources into additional food, advice and support. A bulk-buying hub would not simply reduce costs for projects it would help food support organisations save valuable time, stretch limited funding further and improve access to nutritious food. Further it will strengthen resilience during future food supply disruptions and ultimately support thousands of residents experiencing food insecurity.

BRIGHTON & HOVE FOOD PARTNERSHIP

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