

Brighton & Hove City Council

Policy and Resources Recovery Sub Committee

Agenda Item 34

Subject: Impacts to Food Access from Cost-of-Living Increase

Date of meeting: 21st April 22

Report of: Executive Director Economy, Environment & Culture

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Ward(s) affected: All

Note: The special circumstances for non-compliance with Council Procedure Rule 3, Access to Information Procedure Rule 5 and Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), (items not considered unless the agenda is open to inspection at least five days in advance of the meeting) were that due to a miscalculation of public holidays the report was not completed when the agenda was published.

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members about the food access concerns presented by the cost of living increases on residents of Brighton & Hove. The report outlines the problems, consequences, and mitigations.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Policy & Resources (Recovery) Sub-Committee notes the work taken toward the ongoing work streams from the [Response & Recovery Update: Food Nov 4th Report](#) and the future mitigations from 3.18 – 3.27

2.2 That the Policy & Resources (Recovery) Sub-committee support Brighton & Hove City Mission's application for a lease of council owned - 5 Preston Circus, subject to the agreement of acceptable terms.

2.3 That the Policy & Resources (Recovery) Sub-committee instructs officers to review risk management procedures for food emergencies and incorporate into city plans and policies.

3. Context and background information

3.1 National reports identify that food insecurity levels have risen to the highest yet ([Jan 22\) Food Foundation](#) See Round 9

3.2 The cost of food has increased. The cost is expected to increase more in future due to fuel price increases, inflation, the war in Ukraine and global

supply chain issues. [Child poverty action group](#) estimates that the cost of food for families will go up by £26 per month for families in poverty.

- 3.3 The cost of living will rise about £20 per week for most family types. Significantly affecting families with children. [New Economics Foundation](#) estimate that 23.4 million people will be unable to afford the cost of living in Spring.

Levels of food insecurity in Brighton

- 3.4 At least 5870 people supported weekly through community emergency food providers (17 % children) in Jul 21. [Emergency Food Network Report 2021 \(bhfood.org.uk\)](#)
- 3.5 Emergency Food Providers report an increase over winter 21/22
- 3.6 There is a cohort of people (such as single parents, people with disabilities or long-term health conditions in household, Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic Communities) who will need ongoing support for food & fuel (not short-term interventions). Despite help with advice services, some people have already received all the support there is available, but still can't be assisted from their situation. Short-term interventions won't be suitable for a proportion of the population.
- 3.7 Estimates suggest that between 6500 – 7000 further people in Brighton & Hove will enter fuel poverty in April. Only a percentage of these will be expected to need emergency food (rather than budgeting, support from other sources etc). With a larger proportion seeking help in the Winter months from October. There is no current accurate estimation for how many people this will be because it is impossible to calculate all the multiple variations that are affecting household budgets and at what point they hit crisis. Estimates vary from 200 – 1000 extra households needing weekly food support, but it could be higher.
- 3.8 The ideal solution to help the new cohort of people in poverty is to provide cash, through discretionary payments. If there is no funding to provide financial assistance, the impact will be that emergency food providers who are already running at capacity will have to turn away people.
- 3.9 Eventually, the impact will be that more people will suffer malnutrition, health consequences of an inadequate diet, will need to seek healthcare services for poor physical and mental health, higher risk of homelessness, addiction problems and increase in crime levels. Already obesity rates in Brighton are higher, which can be a result of people needing to choose cheaper, unhealthy food.
- 3.10 Particularly at risk from April are people with disabilities and long-term health conditions who are housebound. This is because many food banks have stopped delivering due to volunteer shortages, East Brighton Food Coop have started charging for their service and the Household Support Fund is stopping.

Update on work over Autumn 21 and Winter

- 3.11 Previous [BHCC committee report Nov 4th](#) updated members on the work that is being done, in terms of emergency provision and consideration of a longer-term strategic approach to food. All recommendations approved. However, due to budget constraints, there is still a funding need of £242,058, to be able to deliver all aspects outlined in the previous report. There is a potential £200,000 outlined in the [24th Budget Council](#) to go towards this need, however this also covers discretionary funds and free school meals in holidays, so would not fund all the items outlined in the [Nov 4th Food report \(Table 3.51\)](#).
- 3.12 Regarding the recommendation 2.5.2 to find storage and processing space for Emergency Food: Brighton & Hove Food Partnership employed a Premises Co-Ordinator for 3 days a week from November to March, using Downs View School in Hollingdean as a base to store and distribute supplies. They undertook extensive research which has not led to finding any suitable properties, for future emergency food storage and distribution. Properties coming onto the market are let quickly. Accessing an empty property e.g., Downs View School the very short-term nature of the meanwhile arrangement means that it is not suitable for longer term planning. If an empty property is being made available, it would need at least 6 months access to be viable.
- 3.13 In conclusion, locating a suitable premises for storage and processing for food, is not viable right now, unless a suitable property became available.
- 3.14 Regarding the recommendation 2.6, to help increase donations through the council, agreement has been made to put in food donation points at Hove and Brighton Town Hall.
- 3.15 Regarding the recommendation 2.7. A Food access commission has been advertised to appoint an organisation to carry out research and recommendations for supporting the food access needs of Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic Communities, Refugees & Asylum Seekers.
- 3.16 Regarding the recommendation 2.8, to research the need for financial help with meal delivery services. East Brighton Food Coop who offer the only city-wide 7 day a week meal delivery service have changed from a free service, to a paid for service. This means that there are around 28 clients currently who cannot afford to pay for this service and there is no alternative viable solution. Impact Initiatives and Brighton & Hove Food Partnership have been trialing direct payments to East Brighton Food Coop, when clients are referred from Impact Initiatives (via LDSF team or Community Hub) using the Household Support Fund. There is no funding for this from April.
- 3.17 Trust for Developing Communities employed a Food Development Worker, who has been supporting emergency food providers with funding, training, volunteer advice etc. £24,000 was given out through the Contain Outbreak Management Fund to support 11 community organisations with their

capacity and resilience such as complying with Natasha's Law. The need for funding for food was met by using the Household Support Fund.

- 3.18 COMF funding has been found (£74,000) to do the following activities in April 22 – March 23, highlighted in the Nov 4th report.
- Brighton & Hove Food Partnership's strategic support to the Emergency Food Network
 - Impact Initiatives food access work e.g., shopping for families who are isolating, digital access for older people, supporting people who are housebound to access food
 - Children's Centres city-wide food bank and affordable food project at Whitehawk
 - Food Policy Coordinator – Emergency Food (7.5 hours per week)
 - Food Access commission for supporting Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities and Refugee & Asylum seekers
 - Parking vouchers provided for emergency food organisations
 - Promotion of the Healthy Start voucher scheme, when suitable
 - Support to new and existing emergency food providers

Future Actions - The work streams that we are now focusing on:

- 3.19 Support cash-first (or vouchers where cash isn't possible) approaches, if budget can be identified e.g., discretionary payments, free school meal holiday vouchers, to stop people needing to access Emergency Food
- 3.20 Work strategically across Food/Fuel/Money Advice via officer meetings to share schemes and work out where we can add value or reduce duplication
- 3.21 Communicate money support schemes through the Emergency Food Network via meetings and email.
- 3.22 Creation/distribution of materials about where to seek help e.g., cash-first leaflets, which can get distributed via food parcels or in areas of the city.
- 3.23 Continue to look for premises to use as a shared storage/processing space for emergency food
- 3.24 Advance ways of moving beyond crisis to local food system transformation, via Food Policy Officer's long-term strategic city & region plans.
- 3.25 Current global situations mean that food insecurity and disruptions in the supply chain are likely. The city needs a robust mechanism to future proof any shocks to supply or have plans in place which can be launched if certain conditions are met. We need to review food crisis/risk management to feed into city strategies & plans and ensure any risks with food access are identified quickly and actioned upon within council systems & management.
- 3.26 Therefore, we recommend that the Policy & Resources (Recovery) Subcommittee instructs officers to review risk management procedures for food emergencies and incorporate into city plans and policies.

- 3.27 Brighton & Hove City Mission who operate Brighton Food Bank are looking to expand their current offer by moving to a new premises. They would like to negotiate a 10 yr. lease on 5 Preston Circus (Council owned), when the existing lease to Lloyd's bank is terminated. The Brighton Food Bank, has been in existence for 22yrs, employs 5 staff and 25 volunteers, covers the largest geographical area in Brighton & Hove including the centre, currently open 3 full days a week, has over 70 organisations who refer clients for support. Therefore, they are well-trusted and established in the city. The new premises would incorporate a café and advice services. Supporting this proposal would bring much needed extra central capacity for the emergency food needs of residents, whilst also offering viable solutions to help people out of poverty rather than just providing food.
- 3.28 Therefore, we recommend that the Policy & Resources (Recovery) Subcommittee support Brighton & Hove City Mission's application for a lease of 5 Preston Circus, subject to the agreement of acceptable terms.
- 3.29 Council officers met Brighton City Mission on the 16th March. Since this point, we have been made aware of other interest in the Lloyds Bank building, by a group hoping to use it for a Climate Hub. These plans are less well-developed than the City Missions.

Additional welfare provision from TBM improvement

- 3.30 The 24th of Feb Budget Council agreed in Item 83 that up to £0.200m of any improvement to the council's year-end financial position (TBM) be ring-fenced to provide immediately available support during 2022/23 for:
- Food support (including food for children on free school meals in holidays)
 - Discretionary funds, e.g., Housing and council tax support

If this is identified, it needs to be prioritised to reach the groups most at risk of malnutrition in the city.

- 3.31 Free School Meal provision costs £135,000 per week to administer over each week of school holiday. Therefore, this budget would only cover one week of summer half-term with little left to spend on other priorities. Therefore, we are not recommending using this budget to cover free school meals over Summer half-term or over the Summer holidays.
- 3.32 These are the priorities that we need to spend money on for food:

What	How much?
Emergency 'on the day' budget for buying in food. Where the person has had no food and is unable to get to a food bank that day. Administered through Community Hub/LDSF & Impact Initiatives.	£6,000
Support to housebound residents who cannot afford to pay for food. Referrals with funding, to meal delivery services (10 people per month for 2 months referral @ £150 = £18,000) or deliveries from food banks (8	£20,000

people per month = £2,000). Administered through Community Hub, LDSF & Impact Initiatives.	
Top-up food budget for discretionary use e.g. emergency food providers in crisis (those that might need to close due to funding shortfalls, putting pressure on other services) or lack of surplus	£17,000
Cash-first leaflet	£2,000
TOTAL	£45,000

3.33 The remaining £155,000 would we best spend via the Local Discretionary Grant Scheme to stop people needing to access emergency food, instead being able to buy the food they need themselves.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

4.1 The risks involved if B & H City Council is unable to support this system are set out below:

Risk	Potential consequence
Brighton & Hove residents go hungry (most likely to affect vulnerable residents, those with long-term health conditions or disabilities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased levels of malnutrition (leading to serious health consequences) • Increase in hospitalisations • Malnourished people more likely to stay in hospital for longer
Brighton & Hove residents forced to choose cheaper unhealthier food to fulfil calorie intake	Increased levels of obesity in the city
Emergency Food Providers need to close due to shortfalls in funding, returning to previous activities or lack of space in community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beneficiaries would need to find another source of food, putting increased pressure on other food banks • Resident's food needs not being met
Disruptions in supply chain mean we have food shortages	Brighton & Hove Residents suffering hunger and greater food insecurity

5. Community engagement and consultation

5.1 The information provided in this report has been devised in partnership with Brighton & Hove Food Partnership (BHFP). BHFP hold monthly Emergency Food Network meetings (usually attended by between 15 - 28 people) and monthly affordable food pilot meetings (usually attended by between 8 - 16 people) where organisations bring ideas, issues, and concerns to the attention of the group. This information is fed back into the monthly Food Cell meetings, who aim to address some of the issues and feedback to the networks.

- 5.2 Brighton & Hove Food Partnership undertook an annual survey of the Emergency Food Providers, this was completed in August 2021. They held a focus group of 16 Emergency food providers.
- 5.3 There have been several meetings about the cost-of-living crisis between council officers and partners working on advice, fuel, and food.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The cost of living will increase for Brighton & Hove residents, and this will mean that people who were 'just about managing' will be pushed into food poverty, increasing the numbers seeking support for emergency food. There is current capacity within emergency food providers, but this could be exceeded depending on the numbers seeking the support.
- 6.2 The most effective way of stopping people from needing to seek support for food is to provide adequate household income. Where this is not possible, due to funding shortfalls. We must try to provide support for the people who are most vulnerable to malnutrition.
- 6.3 Emergency food and crisis responses need to be incorporated into long-term strategic planning within the Council, to feed into food system transformation.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The report builds on the progress report of 4 November 2021 that identified several work streams to tackle food poverty in the city. This report identifies the projected impact on demand for support as a result of the cost of living, the cost of food and food insecurity influenced by international events. The report identifies a funding need of over £242,000 to be able to deliver all aspects of the 4 November 2021 report.
- 7.2 The report references several sources of finance that have supported food initiatives to date. The Household Support Fund provided £2.140m in 2021-22 and in the recent Spring Statement, the Chancellor announced a further £500m across the UK from April. The council's allocation has yet to be announced. In 2021-22 the £2.140m was distributed through school meal vouchers and discretionary hardship related funds and could do so again.
- 7.3 The report also refers to Contain Outbreak Management Funding (COMF) of £74,000 that has been allocated in order to satisfy the approvals made by the Policy & Resources Recovery-Sub Committee on 4 November 2021 which allocated £68,542 from one-off resources. Since the report, the costs have increased to £74,000 which can be accommodated from COMF.
- 7.4 The report also references the agreement by Council as part of the 2022-23 revenue budget that £200,000 of underspend in the 2021/22 financial year be ringfenced for hardship support. The report identifies how £45,000 of the

total £200,000 could be applied as an emergency response, with the remainder being distributed through local discretionary funds. The year-end outturn position is as yet unknown, and the final position will not be confirmed for some weeks.

- 7.5 Recommendation 2.2 proposes that the Committee support Brighton and Hove City Mission's application for a 10-year lease of the council-owned property at 5 Preston Circus, subject to an agreement on acceptable terms. The Mission is well-established and keen to expand its offering. The Committee will want to ensure that such an agreement would not compromise any other strategic opportunities that are under consideration for the site: should the Committee agree to the 10-year lease, the financial implications and obligations upon the council as landlord would need to be clear, detail of which is not yet available. Such an arrangement would however be a step towards the longer-term strategic approach to food provision that may ultimately reduce overall costs that was highlighted in the previous report of 4 November 2021.
- 7.6 Recommendation 2.3 proposes a review of risk management procedures for food emergencies and incorporation into city plans and policies. Such a move would ensure increased visibility of food security risks that could place additional demands upon council finances if these are not supported by additional sources of funding. In this respect, any underspending of COMF schemes in 2021/22 may provide a source of funds, as could the new 2022/23 Household Support Fund, but both will be subject to competing priorities.

Name of finance officer consulted: Jill Scarfield Date consulted (06/03/2022):

8. Legal implications

- 8.1 Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 enables a local authority to dispose of land in any manner it sees fit subject to the condition that, except in the case of leases for less than 7 years, disposal must be for the best consideration reasonably obtainable. The General Disposal Consent (England) 2003 permits a disposal at an undervalue provided that the amount foregone is less than £2 million and there would be economic, social or environmental benefits to be gained as a result of the disposal. The latter points should be considered when granting a lease of 5 Preston Circus.

Name of lawyer consulted: Joanne Dunnyaglo Date consulted (29/03/22):

9. Equalities implications

- 9.1 Food cell has an Equality Impact Assessment.
- 9.2 All people should have access to food that provides sufficient calories and nutrients to promote good health. Food poverty is a key symptom of inequality and key groups affected are those in low-income work, single parent households.

- 9.3 The Food Access commission for supporting Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities and Refugee & Asylum seekers will be gathering research and recommendations over 22/23 to feed into future policy.

10. Sustainability implications

- 10.1 The Emergency food network already shares lots of information from the Healthy Lifestyles team about active travel and Surplus Food Network have invested in electric vehicles and cargo bikes. Emergency food providers are also reducing food waste by linking to Surplus Food Network redistribution and cooking surplus, supporting local farmers, carbon reduction, packaging reduction.

11. Other Implications

Crime & disorder implications:

- 11.1 There are implications for crime and disorder if residents do not have enough money to cover their basic living needs and may resort to crime to provide for their needs.

Public health implications:

- 11.2 There are significant public health implications if residents in the city become malnourished. Food insecurity affects physical and mental health, and social and emotional wellbeing. For children experiencing food insecurity, there are potentially negative developmental consequences.
- 11.3 There are risks of increases in obesity levels as people choose cheaper, unhealthier foods.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 11.4 Food is one of the Critical National Infrastructure sectors. Local Authorities, Local Resilience Forums and Local Enterprise Partnerships should work closely with local food partnerships where they exist on food resilience planning.

