

# Poverty in West Sussex Insight Report

## September 2025



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## Executive Summary

**'When a person's resources (mainly their material resources) are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs (including social participation).'** Joseph Rowntree Foundation<sup>1</sup>.

This report provides an overview of poverty in West Sussex following research and insight gathering in partnership between the two West Sussex Citizens Advice. Highlighting the socioeconomic challenges faced by its residents with the goal of identifying key areas for intervention. Despite its overall affluence, West Sussex contains pockets of significant deprivation. Drawing on recent data and insights from Citizens Advice, the report reveals a persistent cycle of poverty with many contributing factors that affect housing, employment, education and health and wealth outcomes.

### Key findings:

**Household poverty:** Approximately 49% of households are living in poverty in West Sussex. Some wards fall within 10% of the most deprived areas in England.

**Employment:** Overall West Sussex has a higher percentage of people with no qualifications compared with the South East. Across the county, the area with the highest percentage of adults with no qualifications is Arun, the lowest Mid Sussex. Many residents find themselves in low paid, insecure or seasonal work.

**Housing:** A growing shortage of affordable housing has led to increased housing insecurity, with long waiting lists and rising homelessness cases, particularly in Arun and Worthing.

**Child poverty:** Most Districts and Boroughs in West Sussex report child poverty rates exceeding 10%. There were over 20,000 children living in poverty in 2023.

**Health:** Deprived areas show higher rates of chronic illness, mental health issues and reduced life expectancy, reflecting the broader impact of poverty on health outcomes. The proportion of clients Citizen Advice supported in 2024 that had a disability or health condition was 51%. West Sussex has rates of hospital admissions for intentional self-harm that are above the England average, alongside a rising suicide rate.<sup>2</sup>

**Call to action:** Poverty in West Sussex is a complex, multi-layered issue that causes barriers to opportunities and full participation in society. As more families struggle, the urgency to act has never been greater. Building financial resilience through partnership work allows for greater stability in times of crisis, empowering people and communities to make informed

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jrf.org.uk/deep-poverty-and-destitution/a-definition-of-poverty>

<sup>2</sup> <https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/reports/subject-specific-needs-assessments/suicide-prevention/>

decisions, reduce debt levels and reliance on credit, improve mental health and wellbeing, and help break the cycle of poverty.

## Introduction

Despite the South East’s economic profile as an affluent region, poverty in West Sussex remains a pressing issue, with deprivation varying widely across areas. From employment and education to health and housing, poverty affects key social determinants, with the current cost-of-living pushing those already in poverty further into hardship, according to the latest data from the English Indices of Deprivation (2019)<sup>3</sup>. In West Sussex, there are approximately 375,000 households, of which 183,500 (49%) experience deprivation, including 810 households (0.2%) deprived across all four dimensions. The Office for National Statistics records the dimensions of poverty as employment, education, health and disability and household overcrowding.

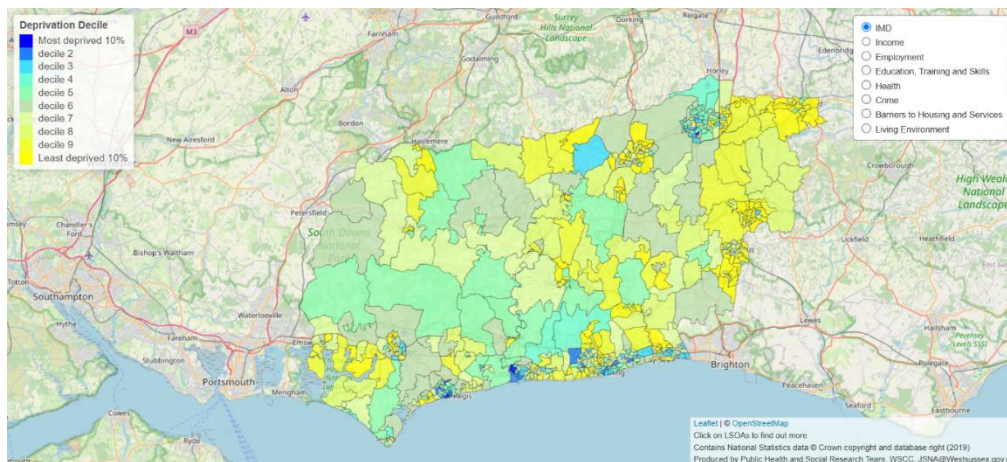
Crawley ranks as the most deprived area in West Sussex, having the highest proportion of deprived households, including 4% experiencing deprivation in at least three dimensions. This is followed by Arun, Adur and Worthing. Mid Sussex remains the least deprived area in West Sussex.

Local Authority	Rank 2010	Rank 2015	Rank 2019
<b>Adur</b>	145	159	164
<b>Arun</b>	154	173	149
<b>Chichester</b>	222	242	213
<b>Crawley</b>	170	171	136
<b>Horsham</b>	304	299	290
<b>Mid Sussex</b>	315	321	311
<b>Worthing</b>	160	174	174

\*Ranking of 317 lower tier authorities (1 being most deprived, 317 being least)

Three wards in Arun (Courtwick with Toddington, Marine and Bersted) and one ward in Crawley (Broadfield South) fall within the 10% most deprived areas in England.

<sup>3</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d8e26f6ed915d5570c6cc55/loD2019\\_Statistical\\_Release.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d8e26f6ed915d5570c6cc55/loD2019_Statistical_Release.pdf)



Key factors contributing to poverty in the county include:

- Poor policies
- Low income
- Unemployment rates
- Lack of funding
- Education
- Housing
- Health inequalities

Recognising and understanding poverty is the first step towards developing an effective strategy that coordinates activity across sectors to promote financial security, confidence and wellbeing, and supports an outcomes-based approach to future policy and decision making.

## Child poverty

Childhood poverty is a growing issue in the UK. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) 'UK Poverty 2025' report states that more than 1 in 5 individuals in the UK were in poverty throughout 2022/23; of 14.3 million people, 4.3 million of them were children. <sup>4</sup> Within West Sussex, 14.3% of children were categorised as being in relative poverty in 2022/23.

The two-child benefit cap, introduced by the Government in 2017, restricts parents with more than two children from claiming child tax credit or the child element of universal credit, resulting in larger families being excluded from essential financial support. Data from the End Child Poverty Coalition indicates that removing the two-child benefit cap would lift 350,000 children across the UK out of poverty and reduce the depth of poverty for a further 700,000 children.<sup>5</sup>

The Household Support Fund (HSF) typically provides financial support for energy costs. However, in some cases, the grant has been used to cover essential household items, including children's beds, clothing and other basic goods. Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice (ACCA) and Citizens Advice in West Sussex (North, South, East) (CAWS), play an important role in distributing the HSF and by doing so contribute to activity addressing child poverty. Of the 2,089 unique households supported in 2024, 32% of those were households with children.

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) data records the number of children living in poverty 2023:

Local Authority	Number of children, count	Percentage of district population
<b>Adur</b>	1,555	13.3%
<b>Arun</b>	4,085	16%
<b>Chichester</b>	2,605	13.3%
<b>Crawley</b>	4,795	18.8%
<b>Horsham</b>	2,435	9.2%
<b>Mid Sussex</b>	2,285	7.6%
<b>Worthing</b>	2,530	13.4%

Using the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) data, in 2022/2023 in West Sussex there were:

- 20,290 children in relative low-income families

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2025-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk>

<sup>5</sup> [https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/two\\_child\\_limit/](https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/two_child_limit/)

- 16,10 children in absolute low-income families

**Relative poverty** refers to a situation where individuals may have access to basic needs like food and housing but lack the financial resources necessary to fully engage in everyday social and economic activities. This often leads to what is known as 'social exclusion'.

**Absolute poverty** is a condition in which individuals lack the basic necessities required for survival, including adequate food, shelter, sanitation, and access to healthcare.

Poverty affects child development, impacting health, social and emotional wellbeing, and educational outcomes. Children living in poverty face increased risks of poor nutrition and mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety and behavioural difficulties.

Furthermore, qualitative evidence indicates that children are directly affected by the stress associated with poverty, which is compounded by its impact on family dynamics and parental wellbeing.

Research shows that children from low-income families are more likely to underperform academically. They often face barriers such as lack of access to resources, poor housing conditions and food insecurity, which affects their ability to concentrate and succeed in school.

The effects of these educational disadvantages are long-lasting. Students who underperform in school are more likely to struggle with accessing higher education or vocational training, in turn, reducing prospects for employment and social mobility, thereby creating a generational cycle of poverty.

For one family, they had reached the point of having to choose between **heating or eating**. They had used their last funds to buy food for the children, but this meant there was no gas or electricity in the property. They had already saved where they could and reached out for further support and advice as they continued to struggle with the cost of living. **This is a story we see far too often** with families trying their best but faced with constant **combined pressures of high living costs and low income** turning to food banks and other charitable support.

Data from the Department of Education shows that the percentage of people age 16-17 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or whose activity is not known has

increased to 6.9% in the South East for 2022/23, a much higher rate than that of England (6.2%).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/participation-in-education-and-training-and-employment/2024>

## Fuel poverty

Overall, in West Sussex, 35,850 households (9.3%) are estimated to be living in fuel poverty.<sup>7</sup>

### Fuel Poverty risk factors

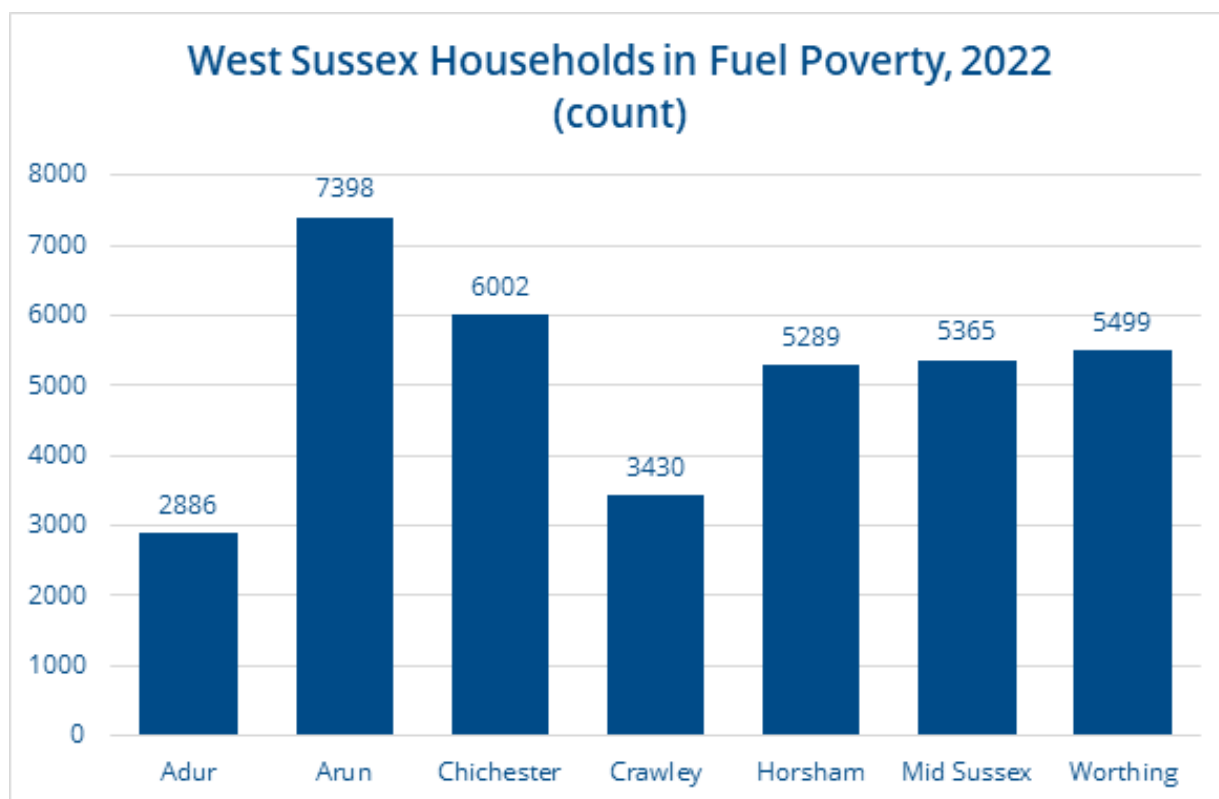
#### Characteristics of a house:

- Low EPC
- Off mains gas
- Larger properties
- End terraced
- Converted into flats buildings
- Rural areas

#### Characteristics of household:

- Low income
- Unemployed
- Private rented sector
- PPM or standard credit

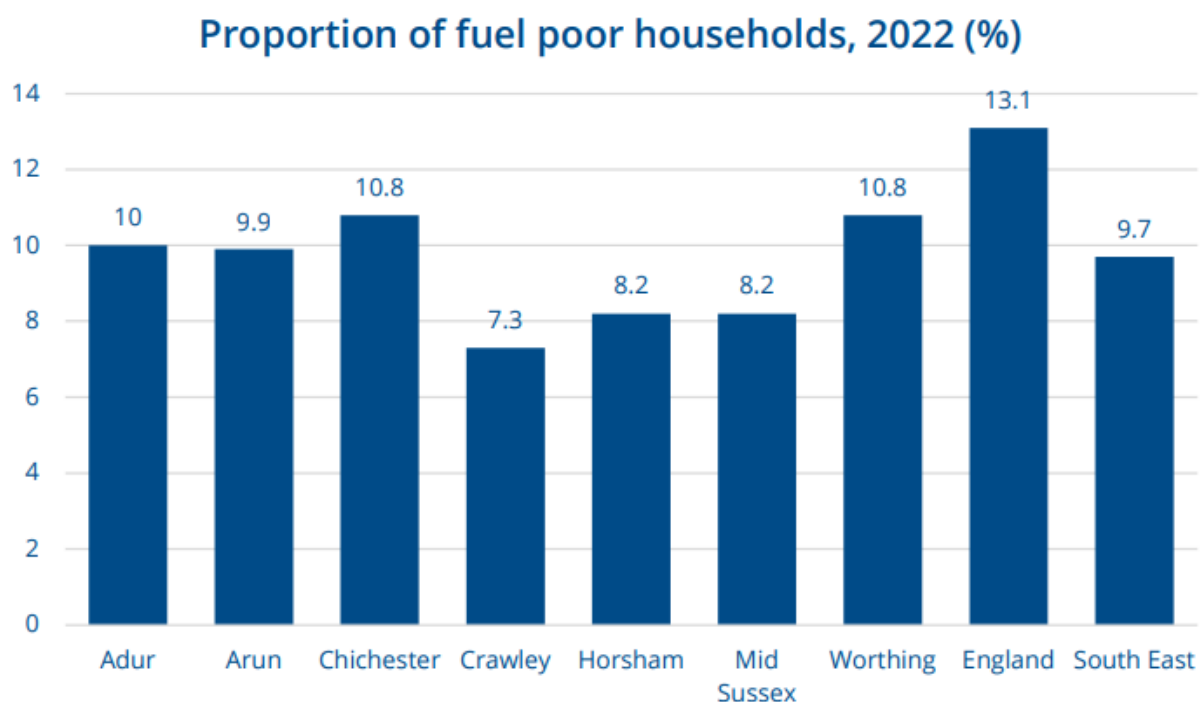
The Governments annual 'Fuel Poverty Statistics' (2022) show Arun has the highest number of households experiencing fuel poverty in West Sussex, with 7398 households affected.<sup>8</sup> This is closely followed by Chichester, which has 6002 fuel poor households.



<sup>7</sup> [https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/assets/pdf/WS\\_JSNA\\_Summary\\_2024\\_2025.pdf](https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/assets/pdf/WS_JSNA_Summary_2024_2025.pdf)

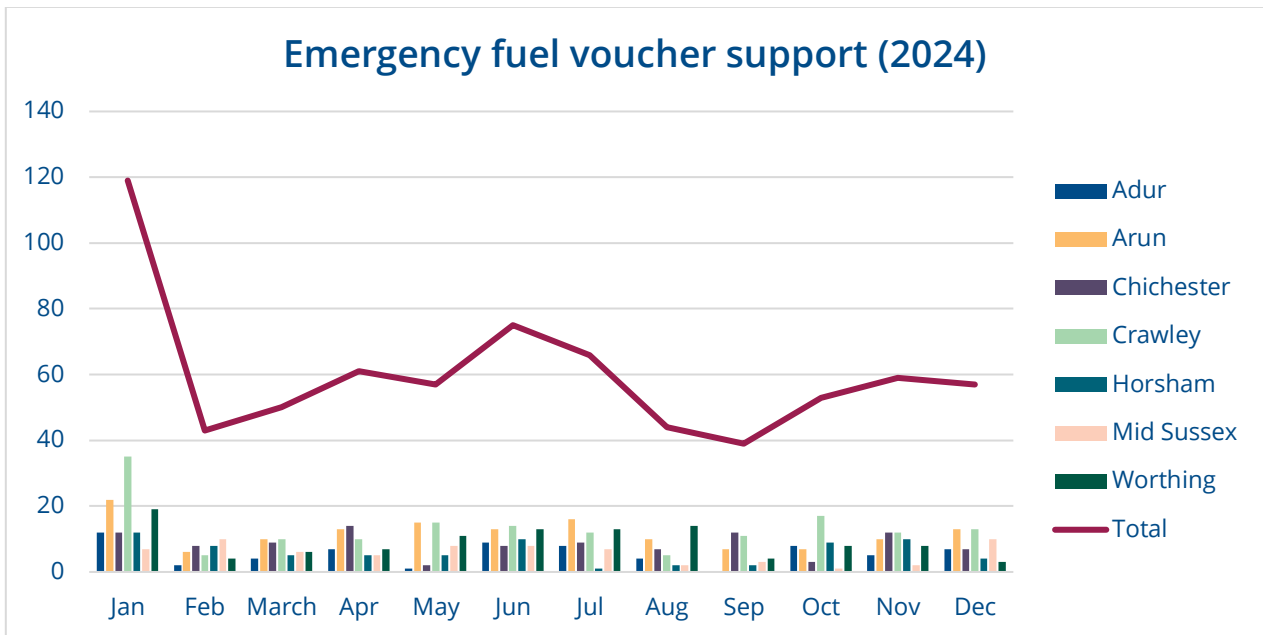
<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fuel-poverty-statistics>

In terms of the proportion of fuel poor households relative to population, Crawley has the lowest rate of fuel poverty in the county at 7.3%, while Worthing and Chichester have the joint highest rate of fuel poverty at 10.8%. In comparison, the average across England is 13.1% and 9.7% in the South East.



The chart below shows Emergency Fuel Voucher support Citizens Advice offices provided to those in West Sussex who have or are at risk of disconnection and cannot afford to top up their energy meters. In 2024, 723 households received Emergency Fuel Voucher Support. Following seasonal trends, January sees the most issues with 119 fuel vouchers requested. 22% were distributed in Crawley, 20% in Arun- the district to receive the least was Adur at 9%.

Note these figures are predominantly via the Hub Household Support Fund route and exclude other sources of Fuel support such as grants or where fuel vouchers are not appropriate particularly amongst homeowners or in service charge properties.



District or Borough	Total Emergency Fuel Voucher distributed (%)
<b>Adur</b>	9%
<b>Arun</b>	20%
<b>Chichester</b>	14%
<b>Crawley</b>	22%
<b>Horsham</b>	10%
<b>Mid Sussex</b>	10%
<b>Worthing</b>	15%

In the most recent phase of Household Support Fund (7), 2089 households were supported. Of the support distributed, 32% went to households with children, 9% to those with pensioners, 50% to households with disabilities and 9% to other households.

Charlotte\* was referred to Citizens Advice by a medical professional. The stress of financial costs was causing them to live in a **constant state of anxiety**. Charlotte reached out for support as they were now having to choose between **heating or eating**. Charlottes medical condition means they need to keep warm, and not being able to pay for energy meant they were either spending a lot of time out of the home to find warmth or left in the cold, **worsening their condition**. Charlotte became reliant on credit to pay for everyday essentials and with their **energy costs rising by 242%**, they began falling deeper into debt.

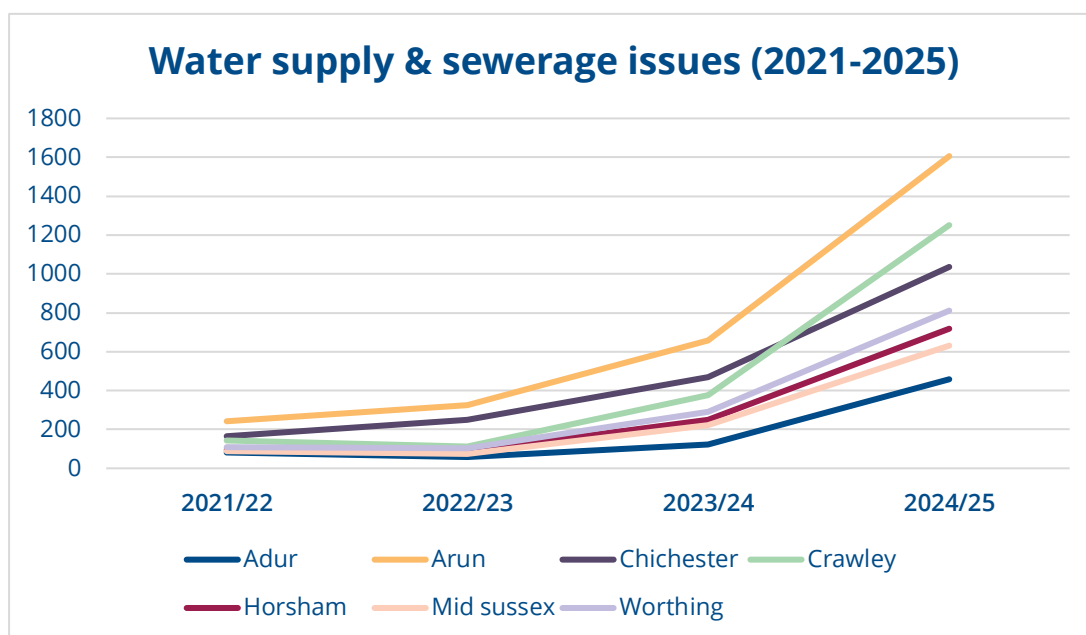
One client faced unaffordable gas costs and, unable to use their mains central heating and warm their home, they had their gas meter removed to avoid incurring standing charge fees.

Another client, unable to afford regular energy top-ups, was forced to rely on emergency credit each week. Following accumulated arrears on their energy account, they were switched to a pre-payment meter and began repaying their debt through weekly top ups of approximately £10 per week. The client was already struggling with essential living expenses and the added pressure to maintain their weekly meter top ups added to their stress.

### Water costs

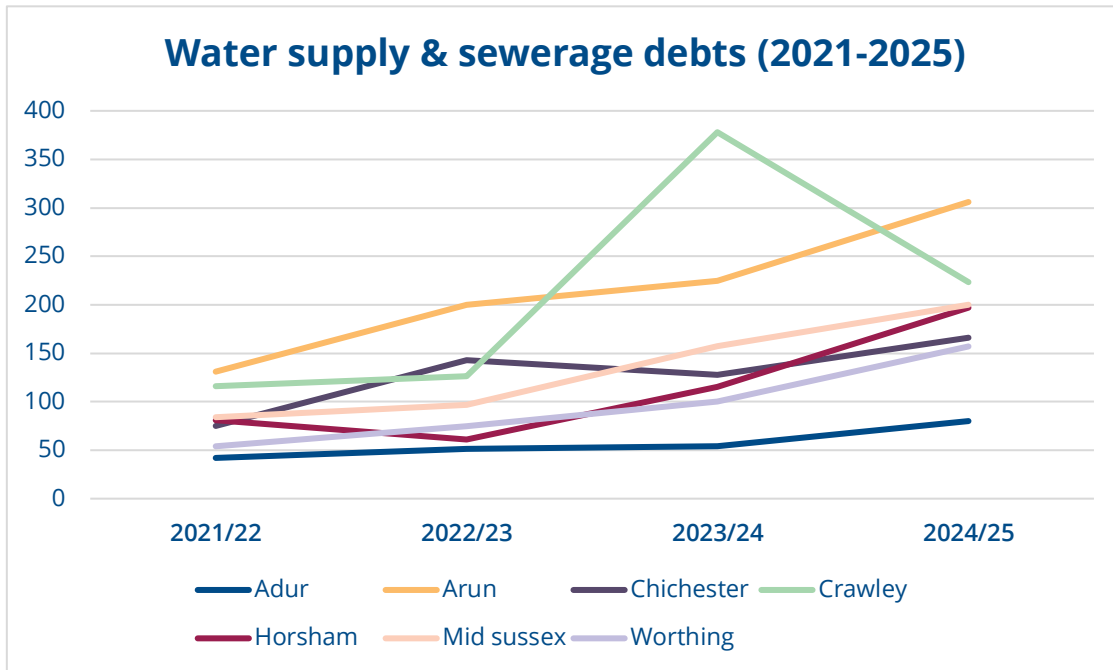
Since privatisation in 1989, the price of water and sewerage services has increased by more than 40%.<sup>9</sup> Citizens Advice continues to hear clients’ stories of the financial strain caused by rising water costs, with many unable to afford payments.

Recent increases to water bills have led to an average rise of 26%, requiring households to find an extra £123 per year to cover costs. For low-income households, this places further pressure on already stretched budgets. Southern Water customers will face an acute strain, with bills rising by 47%, the highest increase among all British suppliers.<sup>10</sup>



<sup>9</sup> <https://fullfact.org/economy/water-bills-privatisation/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4gl220ek40o>



In 2024/2025, Citizens Advice offices managed a 172% increase in the number of water supply and sewerage issues across West Sussex, compared to 2023/24. There was also a 15% increase in issues relating to water supply & sewerage debts in the same period.

## Health

The health implications of poverty in West Sussex are significant. Individuals experiencing poverty face poorer physical and mental health outcomes due to a combination of factors, including inadequate nutrition, limited access to healthcare services and elevated stress levels. Wider social determinants such as education, employment, environment, and housing also play a substantial role in health outcomes. For instance, evidence highlights how poor housing conditions, like damp and mould contribute to respiratory and cardiovascular problems.

**People in the least deprived areas of West Sussex live on average, 6 years longer than those living in the most deprived areas.<sup>11</sup>**

Clients of Citizens Advice can share information relating to health conditions or disability. When a client discloses a condition, this may not refer to a formal diagnosis.

According to the World Health Organisation, mental health is an umbrella term that refers to a state of being which enables an individual to handle life stressors which are not limited to the presence or absence of a clinical disorder.<sup>12</sup> Mental wellbeing considers factors such as an individual's resilience and life satisfaction which can significantly influence mental health outcomes but does not indicate a clinical condition.

In 2024, Citizens Advice supported 1,094 West Sussex residents who are disabled and 6,976 clients who have a long-term health condition, accounting for over half (51%) of all clients.

According to StatXplore data, in January 2025, there were 15,048 people living in West Sussex who were claiming Personal Independence Payment (PIP) with a psychiatric disorder recorded as their primary condition. This includes 3250 people with mixed anxiety and depressive disorders.

Although people with disabilities and health conditions make up only 16% of the West Sussex population (Census 2021), they are significantly overrepresented among those seeking support for complex issues.<sup>13</sup> **This highlights the disproportionate impact of poverty and related challenges on this group.**

The graph below illustrates the percentage of clients with a disability or long-term health condition, alongside the advice topics for which they sought support. Out of 23,502 clients

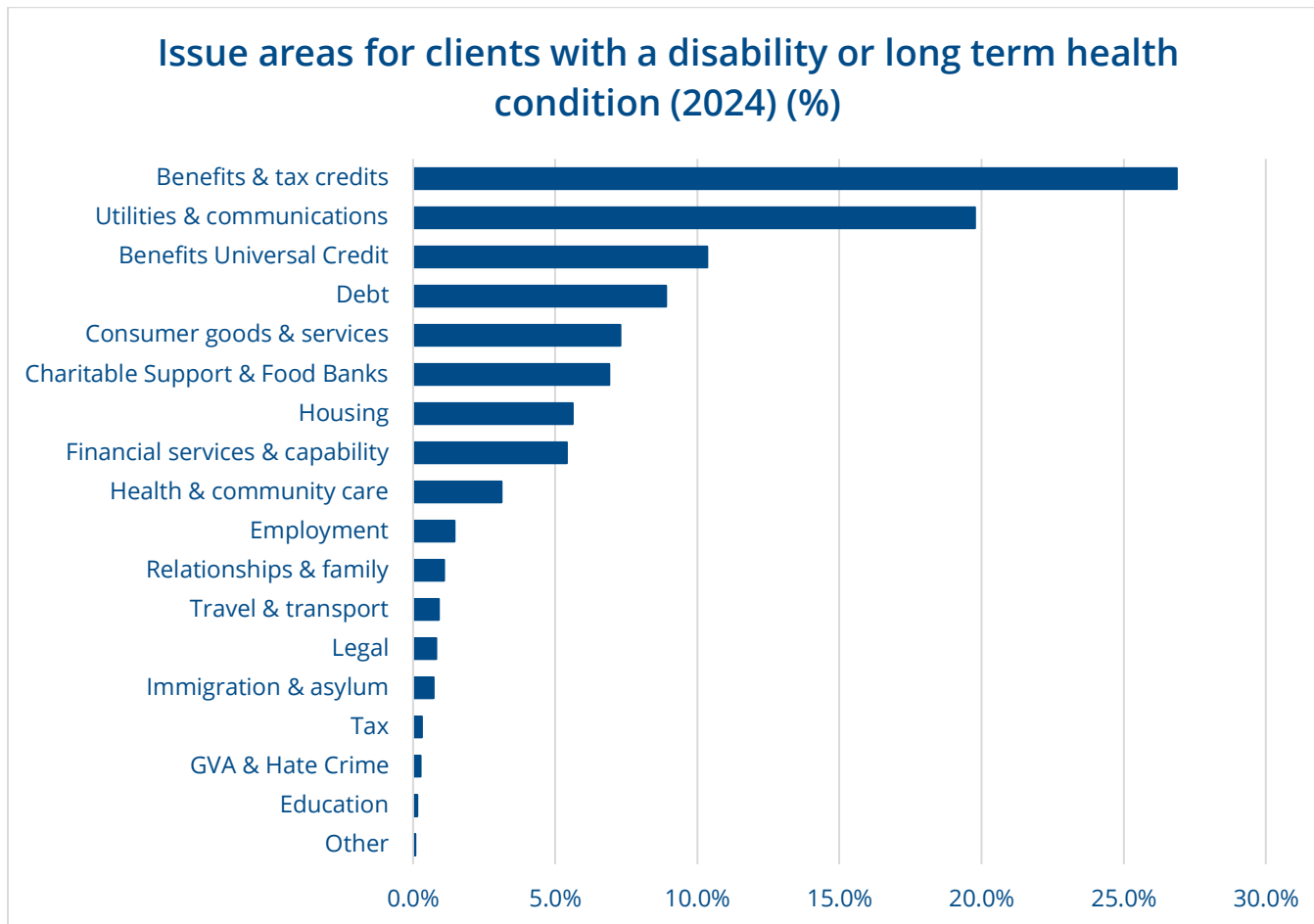
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<sup>11</sup> [https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/assets/pdf/WS\\_JSNA\\_Summary\\_2024\\_2025.pdf](https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/assets/pdf/WS_JSNA_Summary_2024_2025.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/E10000032-west-sussex>

supported in West Sussex during 2024, 7,894 clients reported no disability or health condition, while 7,538 clients had no recorded information on their health status.



Looking further into the data, we can see clients with disabilities or long-term health conditions required support with:

Issue type	Clients with disability or long-term health condition requiring support (%)
Limited Capability for Work	78%
DRO & IVA	71%
Charitable support	67%
Pension Credit	64%
Council Tax (including arrears)	63%
Fuel debts	62%
Mortgage & rent arrears	62%
Food support	60%
Water & sewerage	58%
Fuel	57%
Homelessness	52%
Property	52%

In 2024, Citizens Advice supported 3217 unique residents with PIP queries. Of these clients, more than 4 in 5 (82%) needed support with additional issues. The strongest demand was for affording household essentials such as fuel (24%) and water (17%), and there were also several clients in crisis situations requiring foodbank assistance (18%), and debt advice for fuel (8%) and council tax arrears (6%).

One client supported by Citizens Advice was hospitalized due to the detrimental health effects of poor housing conditions, including mould infestation and damp soft furnishings. Despite reporting the issue to their housing association and receiving ongoing support, the client remains in an underheated property due to accumulating debt from high utility bills. This situation is further exacerbated by bailiff visits, which adds to their stress and pushes them deeper into poverty.

Client stories have also highlighted how children have developed skin conditions and asthma because of damp housing.

**Moreover, mental health is a major concern for people living in poverty, with poverty being both a cause and a consequence of mental health problems.** Data from the Mental Health Foundation, states that children and adults living in households in the lowest 20% income bracket are two to three times more likely to develop mental health problems than those in the highest. **Mental health of a parent is the most frequently cited factor identified at the end of a Child in Need assessment.** Furthermore, the Mental Health and Money Policy Institute found that nearly 1 in 5 (18%) people with mental health problems are in problem debt, describing this trend as a never-ending cycle (see diagram below).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.moneyandmentalhealth.org/money-and-mental-health-facts/>



A national survey of counsellors and psychotherapists in 2022 found that 66% of respondents' clients' mental health was declining due to the cost-of-living pressures, including increasing insomnia because of anxiety.<sup>15</sup>

In 2022/2023, 120,000 people in West Sussex, equivalent to 1 in 6 residents, were living with a common mental health condition or disorder. Additionally, 24% of the population self-reported experiencing high anxiety, slightly above the England average of 23.3%. GP registers recorded 9,050 people, noting a 5% increase that outpaces population growth. Over 102,000 people were recorded with depression, an increase on the previous year of 4,800.<sup>16</sup>

There was a 22% increase between February 2023 and February 2024 of adults in contact with secondary mental health services.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/2022/8-september-cost-of-living-crisis-survey-shows-impact-on-mental-health/>

<sup>16</sup> [https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/assets/core/Overall\\_Exec\\_Summary\\_West\\_Sussex\\_Public\\_Mental\\_Health\\_Needs\\_Assessment\\_2024\\_FINAL.pdf](https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/assets/core/Overall_Exec_Summary_West_Sussex_Public_Mental_Health_Needs_Assessment_2024_FINAL.pdf)

The data below, shows the data held on GP records for West Sussex, compared with the South East and England<sup>17</sup>.

	Period	West Sussex			South East	England
		Recent trend	Count	Value	Value	Value
<b>Estimated number of children and young people with mental disorders (aged 5 to 17)</b>	2017/18	-	-	15,343	-	-
<b>Estimated prevalence of common mental disorders: aged 65 and over</b>	2017	-	17,879	9.30%	9.2%	10.2%
<b>Estimated prevalence of common mental disorders: aged 16 and over</b>	2017	-	100,757	14.40%	14.8%	1695.0%
<b>Depression: QOF prevalence - retired after 22/23</b>	2022/23	up	102,436	13.60%	13.8%	13.2%
<b>Depression: QOF incidence - new diagnosis (18+ years)</b>	2023/24	down	9,710	1.30%	1.6%	1.5%
<b>Mental health: QOF prevalence (All ages)</b>	2023/24	up	8,920	0.90%	0.9%	1.0%

The social stigma associated with poverty can further exacerbate feelings of isolation and hopelessness, making it harder for individuals to seek support. ‘Poverty Stigma’, a report from JRF states “our personal reflections on experiences of being stigmatised, and recalling them together, provoked feelings of shame and other ‘bad feelings’ including rage, fear, anger, despair and sadness”.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/health-profiles/data#page/1/ati/302/are/E10000032>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.jrf.org.uk/stigma-power-and-poverty/poverty-stigma-a-glue-that-holds-poverty-in-place>

## Income

Economic inequality in the county is characterised by the disparity between districts such as those along the coastline and those in more disadvantaged districts and boroughs in rural and urban areas. **Many individuals in West Sussex are caught in low-wage, part-time or seasonal employment**, leading to financial insecurity, even among those who are employed. The shortage of stable, well-paying jobs restricts individual capacity to escape poverty and increases dependence which can perpetuate a cycle of deprivation that is challenging to break.

### Earnings by Place of residence for full time workers (2024):

Local Authority	Gross weekly pay (£)	Hourly pay-excluding overtime
<b>Adur</b>	627.1	17.43
<b>Arun</b>	695.7	17.64
<b>Chichester</b>	650.1	16.81
<b>Crawley</b>	734.6	18.57
<b>Horsham</b>	821.8	21.55
<b>Mid Sussex</b>	793.5	20.88
<b>Worthing</b>	734.4	19.00

Claimant count (Feb 2025)	Working age population (%)
<b>Adur</b>	3%
<b>Arun</b>	4%
<b>Chichester</b>	4%
<b>Crawley</b>	4%
<b>Horsham</b>	2%
<b>Mid Sussex</b>	2%
<b>Worthing</b>	3%

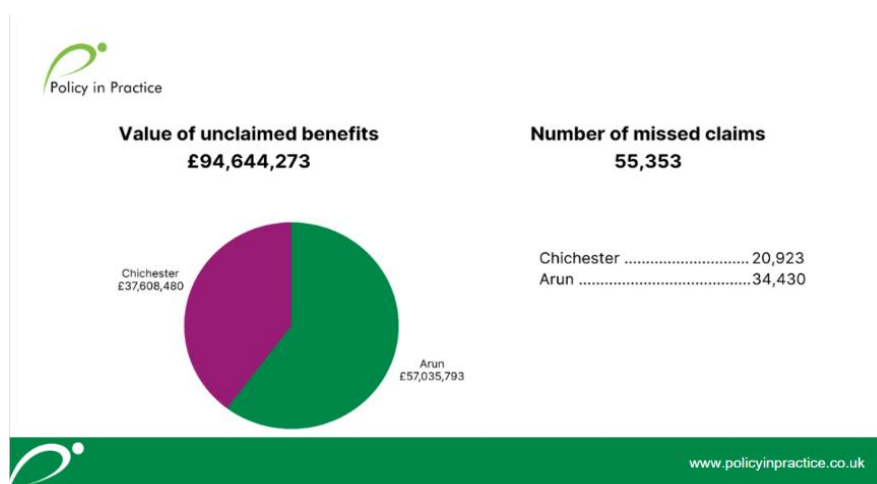
Low incomes can also restrict the ability to manage everyday responsibilities. With income failing to keep pace with the rising cost of living, many struggle to keep up to date with bills, and increasingly find it difficult to afford basic essentials, such as food, health and hygiene products.

Local Authority	Income deprived population (2019), (%)	Income deprived rank-most income deprived (out of 316)
Adur	10.8	163
Arun	10.4	173
Chichester	11	151
Crawley	7.9	237
Horsham	5.6	303
Mid Sussex	5.3	312
Worthing	10.1	178

Policy in Practice estimates that the total amount of unclaimed income related benefits and social tariffs across Great Britain is now £22.7 billion a year.<sup>19</sup> **Maximising income through the take up of benefits is essential to help people on low incomes and public services to cope in the cost of living and increasing demands.**

The overall figure excludes disability benefits and discretionary support; when these are included, the total exceeds over £30 billion.

In Arun and Chichester alone, the value of unclaimed benefits is estimated at £94,644,273.



The below shows the breakdown of unclaimed benefits for both Arun and Chichester, including both monetary values and number of missed claims.

<sup>19</sup> <https://policyinpractice.co.uk/missing-out-2024/>



**£57,035,793 of benefits is unclaimed in Arun**

34,430 missed claims

Universal Credit	£34,788,833	2,985	Water social tariffs	£172,800	1,145
Child Benefit	£3,637,979	1,918	Free School Meals and Pupil Premium	£1,016,400	N/A
Carer's Allowance	£4,148,399	974	Warm Homes Discount	£925,487	6,170
Pension Credit	£5,417,968	2,282	Free TV Licences	£271,250	1,600
Broadband	£3,249,848	16,249	Healthy Start	£614,831	423
Housing Benefit (pensioner)	£2,791,998	683			



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**£37,608,480 of benefits is unclaimed in Chichester**

20,923 missed claims

Universal Credit	£23,029,274	1,889	Water social tariffs	£107,520	714
Child Benefit	£2,427,332	1,280	Free School Meals and Pupil Premium	£1,016,400	N/A
Carer's Allowance	£2,451,431	576	Warm Homes Discount	£547,257	3,648
Pension Credit	£3,099,656	1,312	Free TV Licences	£155,014	915
Broadband	£1,953,944	9,770	Healthy Start	£398,259	274
Housing Benefit (pensioner)	£2,422,394	545			



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It leads us to question, what is the barrier to accessing benefits?

The charts below show the clients supported with benefit-related issues:

Issue type	District and Boroughs							Grand Total
	Adur	Arun	Chichester	Crawley	Horsham	Mid Sussex	Worthing	
Discrimination			4	7	4	4	3	22
Income Support	1	5	4	9	2	9	2	32
Pension Credit	39	91	54	32	118	38	46	418
Social Fund Loans-Budgeting	1	1			1		1	4
Housing Benefit	20	56	42	47	57	28	49	299
Child Benefit	4	26	17	25	15	13	10	110
Working & Child Tax Credits	1	9	5	5	4	5	5	34
Jobseekers Allowance	7	19	17	6	13	7	5	74
National Insurance	2	12	10	2	8	3	4	41
State Retirement Pension	15	45	17	12	35	30	12	166
Disability Living Allowance	12	23	16	26	27	21	10	135
Attendance Allowance	56	279	184	30	94	62	99	804
Carers Allowance	14	35	33	21	27	20	12	162
Employment Support Allowance	26	47	41	36	44	34	54	282
Personal independence payment	119	346	252	231	249	167	203	1567
Localised social welfare	301	1090	676	783	421	403	612	4286
Council tax reduction	21	72	45	31	69	42	24	304
Benefit Cap	2	10	7	20	8	11	7	65
Complaints	1	8	2	6	4	6	10	37
Passported benefits		7	3	4	5	7	3	29
General Benefit Entitlement	107	284	172	220	195	207	184	1369
Barriers to work	1	4	5	2	6	4	6	28
Other benefits issues	27	63	58	59	42	41	42	332

## Universal Credit issues:

	Adur	Arun	Chichester	Crawley	Horsham	Mid Sussex	Worthing	Grand Total
Initial claim	33	130	88	91	95	70	80	587
Standard element	4	25	21	21	13	12	12	108
Housing element	15	35	38	30	37	31	28	214
Limited capability for work elements	22	75	37	32	39	28	38	271
Child elements	1	10	5	9	15	5	7	52
Childcare costs	2	2	7	5	5	5	2	28
Carer elements	8	7	5	6	6	2	3	37
Calculation of income, earnings and capital	18	59	29	55	46	36	28	271
Conditionality and Commitment (including sanctions)	4	19	6	14	4	7	5	59
Deductions	7	16	18	20	15	13	19	108
Discrimination					1		2	3
Post Initial Claim	5	9	3	9	8	5	4	43
Managed migration	10	16	13	11	19	10	7	86
Moving from legacy benefits (not managed migration)		3		1	5	2	4	15

Not everyone who requires financial assistance is able to access the current benefit system or the support available, due to current eligibility criteria. Those under 35 years of age are affected by the Shared Accommodation Rate and larger families are capped with the two-child limit. Our client stories suggest these caps can negatively influence health outcomes as a reduction in income creates further stress and worry. It also limits the housing options available to people. One client who was being housed under the Councils duty had medical evidence stating they needed supported living but was placed in shared accommodation due to SAR, leading to an unmet need. Moreover, the Local Housing Allowance rate is falling further behind local rent prices following the rent increases.

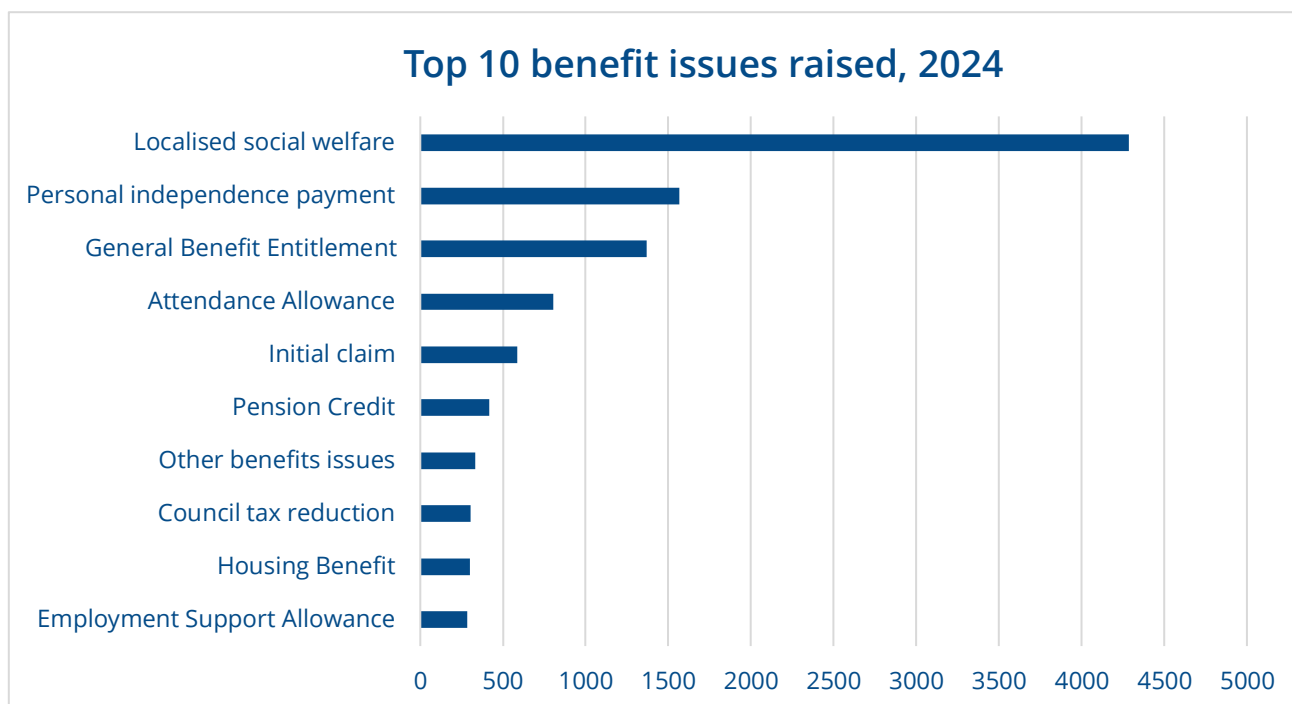
Furthermore, client stories suggests that the benefit system can be inconsistent and inflexible to varying life experiences and capabilities of individuals, including vulnerable clients. One Job Centre refused to help a pensioner set up an “alternative payment arrangement” so that their

housing payments were sent direct to their landlord, which has put the client at risk of incurring rent arrears.

Another client informed the DWP that they had temporarily stopped work due to their worsening mental health. A missed email due to administrative issues led the DWP to close their claim. Originally the client was told to appeal the decision but was then notified this could take months and the client should reapply. With delays already apparent in the benefit system, the client now must wait even longer and is reliant on foodbanks in the meantime.

We have also supported clients who have received sanctions when struggling to update their journal despite notifying the Department for Work and Pensions of these challenges. A young family on a low income missed an appointment due to a deterioration in the client’s health but were only notified 3 weeks later that they had been sanctioned. A subsequent video call appointment was then changed to in person which they could not attend at such short notice. The DWP sanctioned them over £600.

Other issues highlighted by clients include delays, high overpayment and deduction rates and conditionality and commitment such as demand for in-person attendance at Job Centres which incurs further travel costs.



Localised social welfare issues remain high due to ACCA and CAWS' role in the distribution of the Household Support Fund. Personal independence payment is the second most common issue raised with West Sussex residents needing support to access this vital benefit.

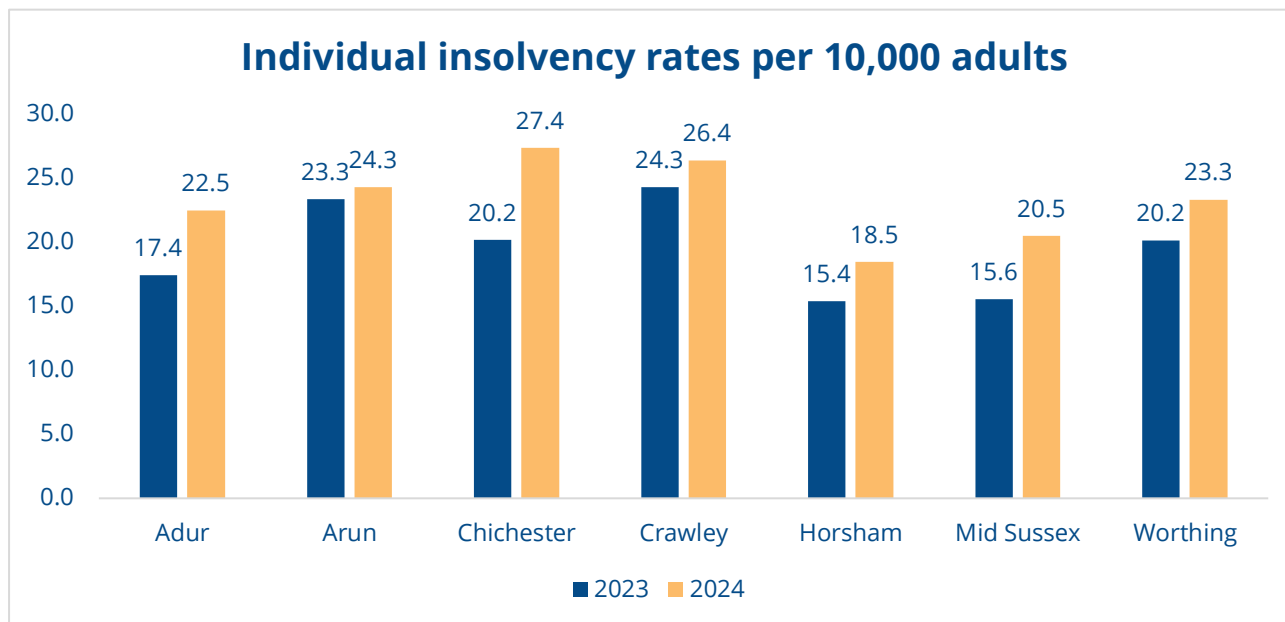
For one client, who contacted us for support with Pension Credit after the government announced the changes to the eligibility criteria. They were only entitled to £6. However, in claiming this entitlement, it meant they were able to receive £150 Warm Home Discount. A substantial amount of money that made a big impact on their energy bills.

#### Residents supported with debt issues in 2024:

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
<b>Adur</b>	30	21	21	21	23	24	25	23	26	27	37	17	295
<b>Arun</b>	70	75	10	103	79	68	103	95	101	78	83	74	939
<b>Chichester</b>	71	60	64	76	72	69	75	59	62	61	73	48	790
<b>Crawley</b>	51	51	65	63	80	67	76	69	72	80	74	66	814
<b>Horsham</b>	56	62	68	54	65	56	69	53	46	59	55	47	690
<b>Mid Sussex</b>	47	43	44	56	55	40	52	50	42	42	51	44	566
<b>Worthing</b>	42	36	40	37	42	39	33	47	45	47	42	28	478
<b>Total</b>	367	348	312	410	416	363	433	396	394	394	415	324	4572

The debt cycle and poverty are intertwined, with low incomes often leading to debt accumulation, which in turn limits a household's ability to meet basic needs and perpetuates a cycle of financial hardship.

In West Sussex, the insolvency rates in all districts and boroughs have increased when compared to 2023:



Data from The Insolvency Service shows that individual insolvencies have fluctuated over the years, often correlating with broader economic conditions. For example, periods of high inflation and stagnant wages have led to higher insolvency rates as individuals struggle to manage their debts. Each district and borough saw a notable increase when compared with the previous year.<sup>20</sup>

A client with a neurological condition who was already in debt was sanctioned by the DWP for failing to attend face-to-face appointments, despite notifying both the DWP and Job Centre of their condition. No alternative communication methods were offered to accommodate their needs.

Whilst not a prominent cohort in our data, mortgage holders are also struggling to afford essential costs. Their capital means they are often ineligible for extra support despite having spare income readily available. These situations are compounded by rising interest rates and relationship breakdowns.

### Debt levels

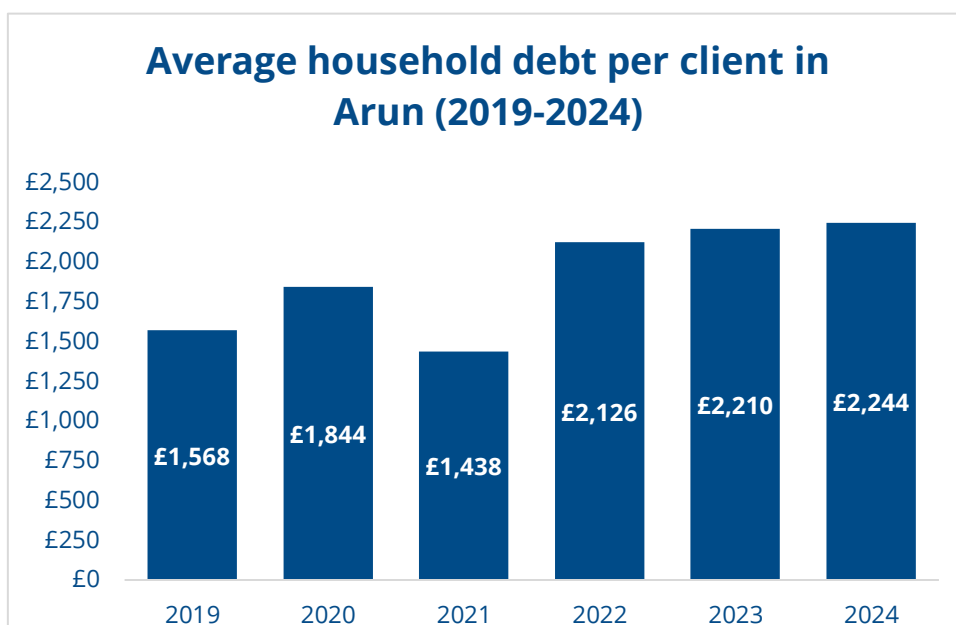
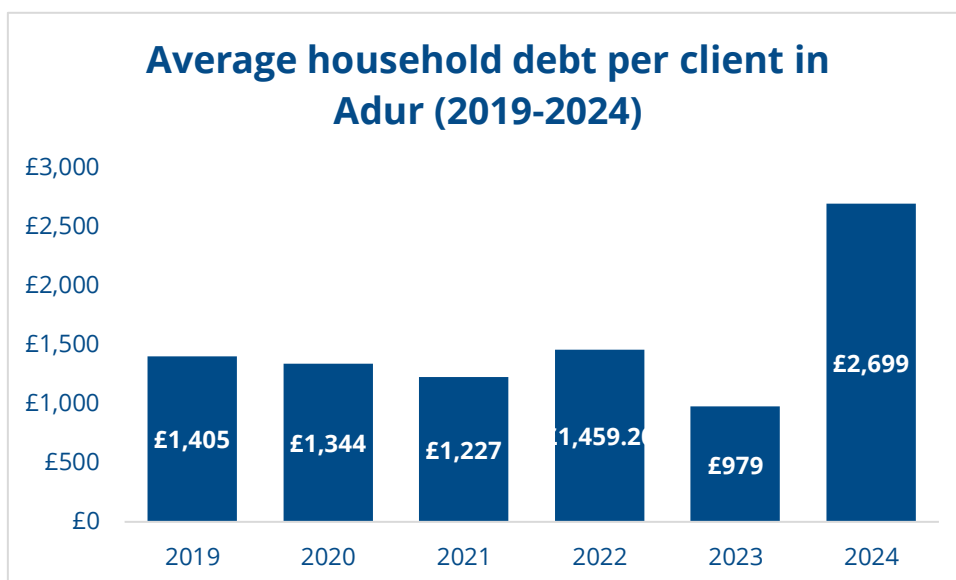
The most common debts our clients have are for household bills. The amount people owe in household bill arrears is increasing. Between 2019 and 2024, household debt levels have shown a fluctuating but generally an upward trend.

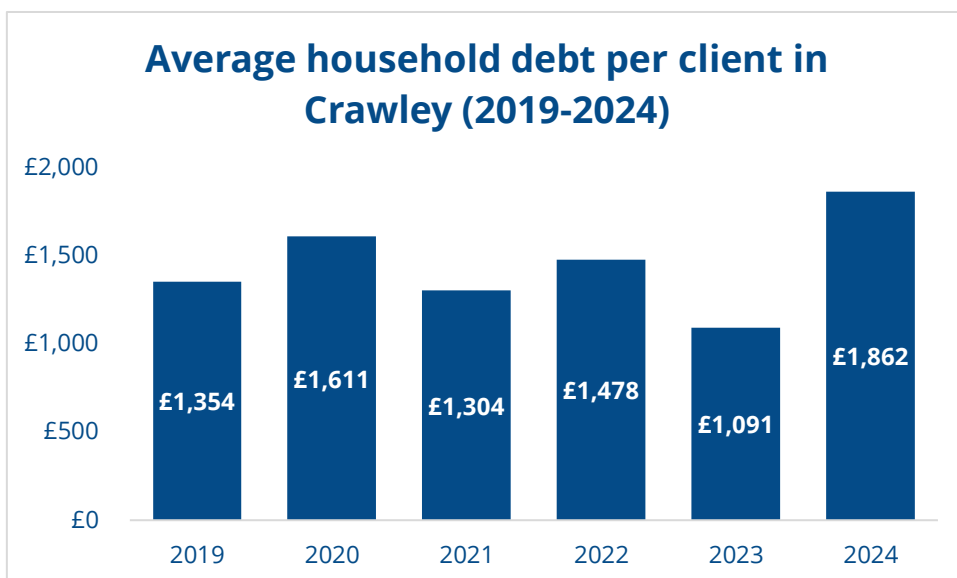
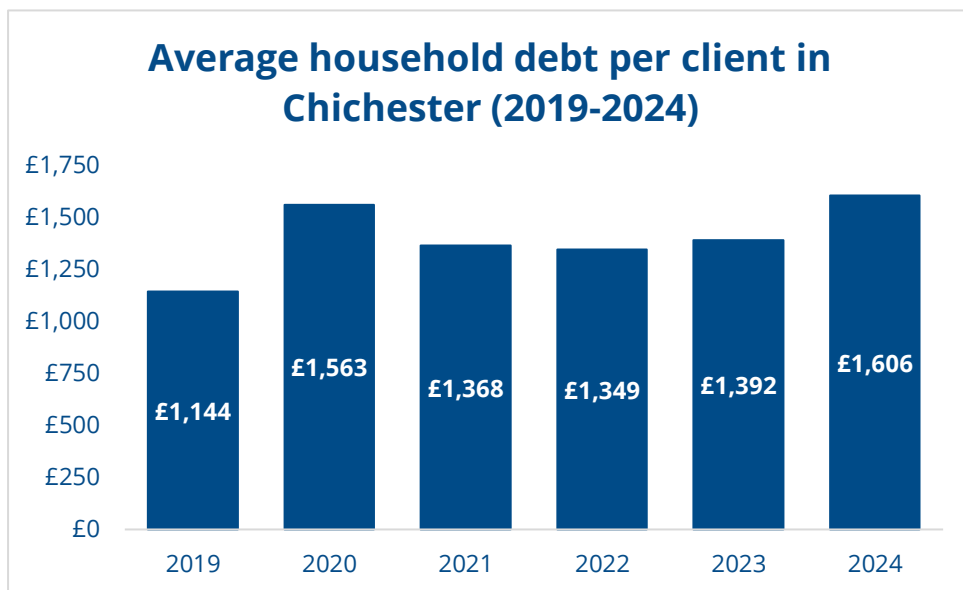
<sup>20</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/individual-insolvency-statistics-releases>

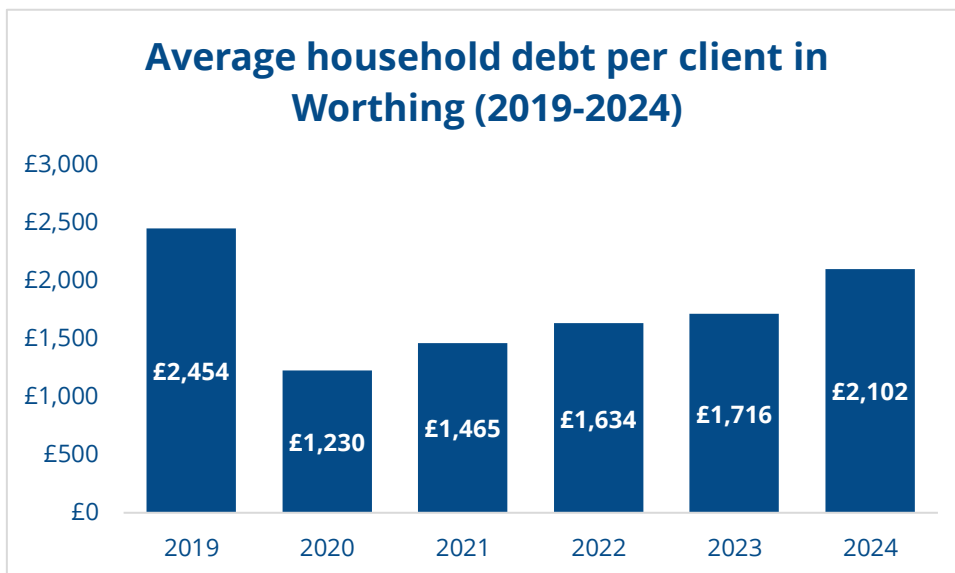
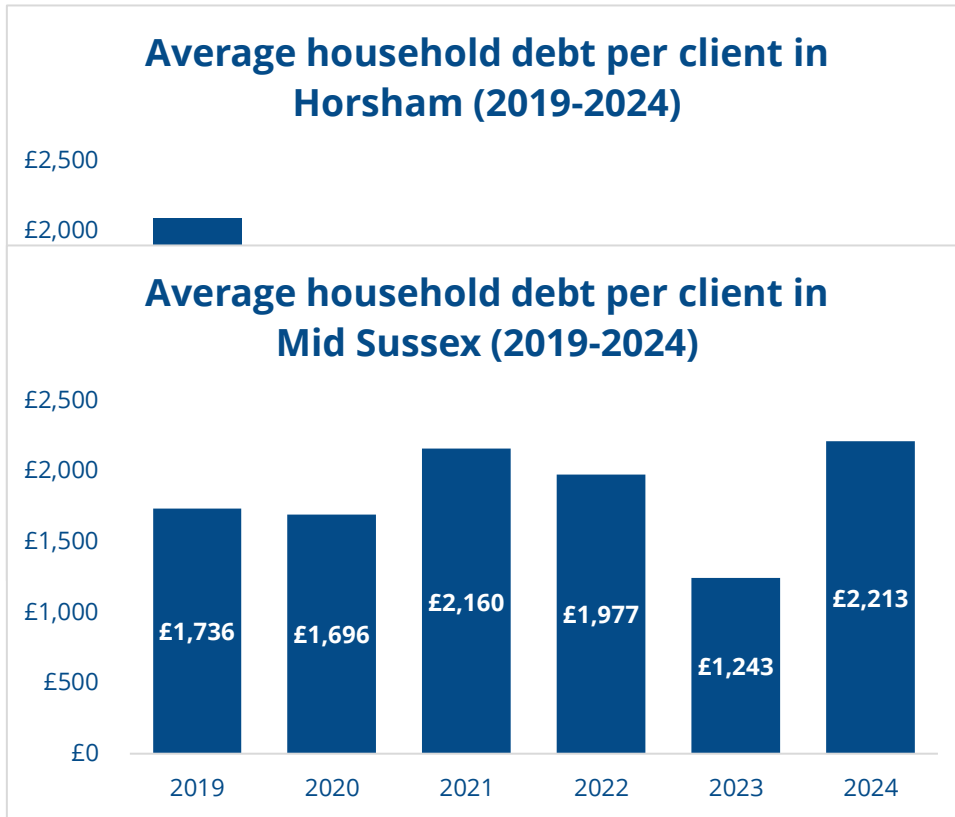
An increase is evident in most local authorities during 2020, coinciding with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, a period marked by widespread job losses and reductions in household income. Despite government intervention and financial support measures, many individuals experienced a drop in income, leaving them unable to meet their financial obligations.

Energy costs also rose as people spent more time at home, although some households that were able to work from home did manage to reduce overall spending during lockdowns. Low-income households, particularly those with insecure employment, were disproportionately affected by these economic challenges. In all areas, household debt levels are similar or have surpassed pre-pandemic levels.

*\*For this report, household bill debts include energy, water, council tax, rent, telecoms, and debt to central Government for Universal Credit advances or benefit overpayments.*





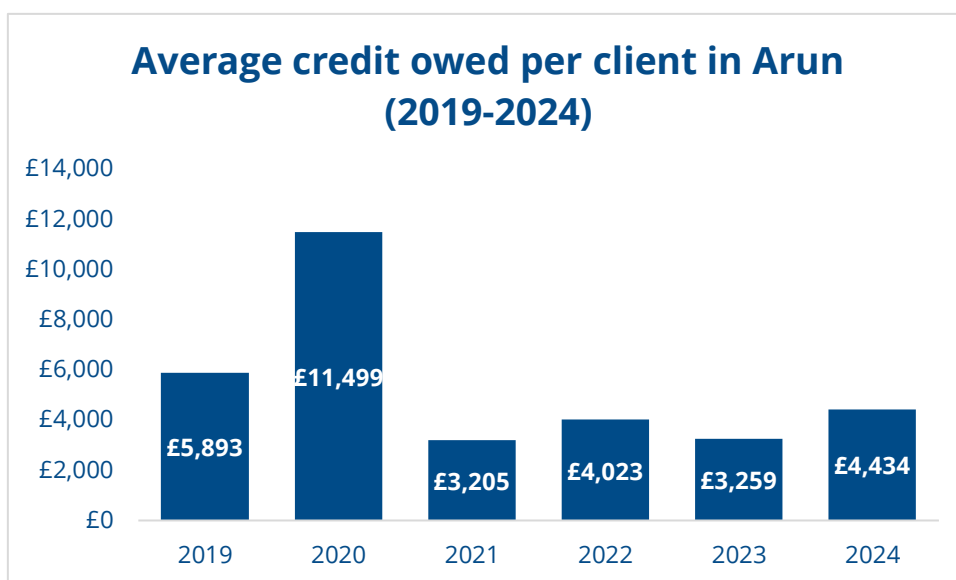
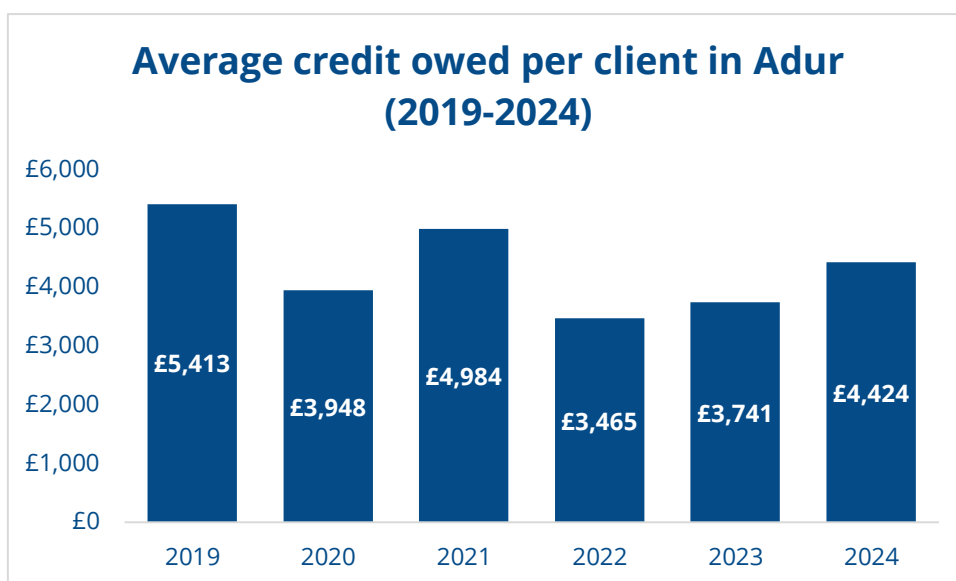


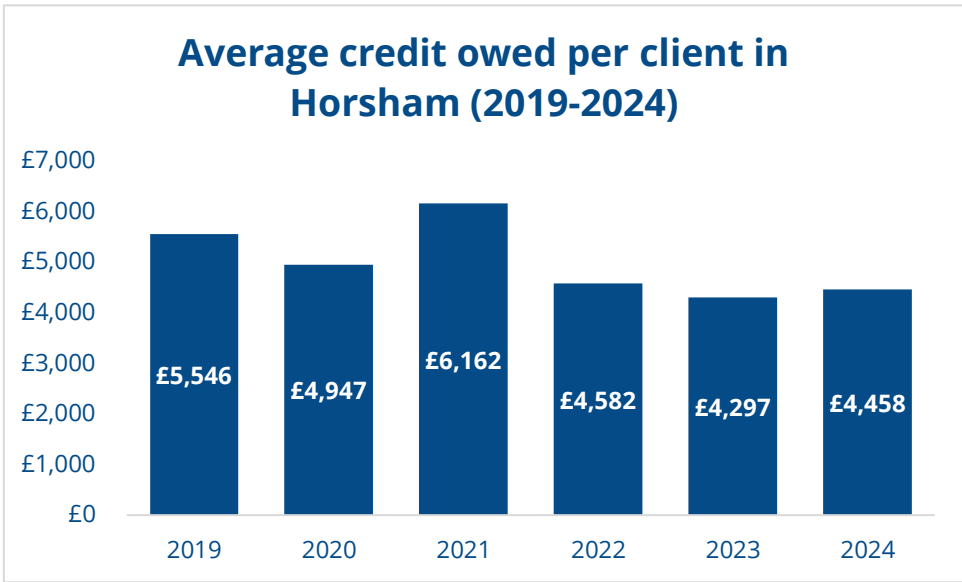
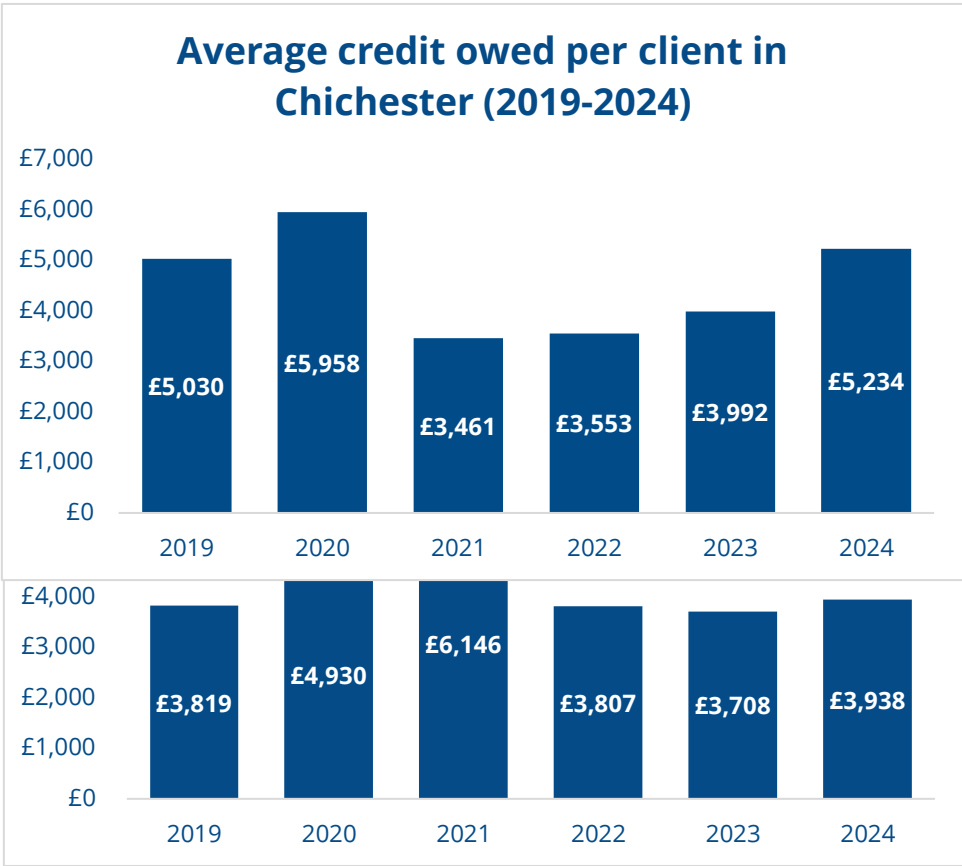
## Credit levels

Many households have turned to credit to manage everyday expenses, particularly during periods of economic uncertainty and inflation which has had serious implications for poverty levels. As more individuals struggle to repay loans and manage rising interest payments, they face reduced financial resilience, a higher risk of falling into poverty and an increased

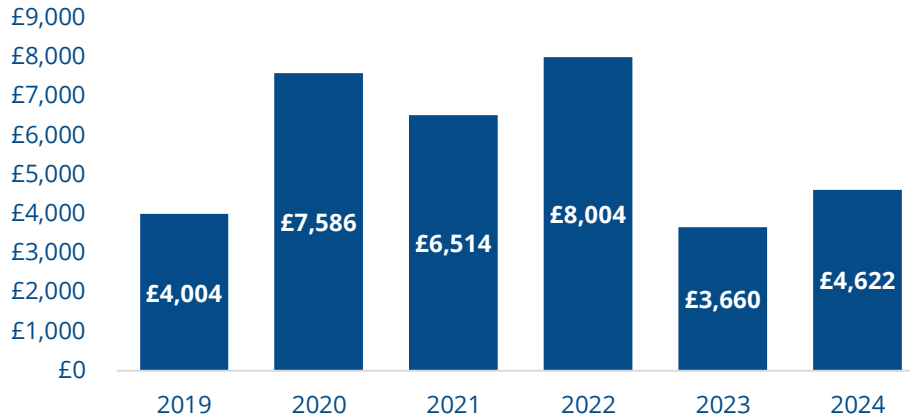
likelihood they become trapped in the poverty cycle. This can lead to social exclusion, as those affected may be unable to afford adequate housing, nutrition, or participate fully in society. The burden of debt, therefore, not only reflects economic hardship but also deepens the divide between those who can manage financially and those who cannot.

*\*For this report, credit debt includes, credit cards, unsecured loans, catalogue/ mail order, other non-priority debt, overdraft, store card and payday loans*

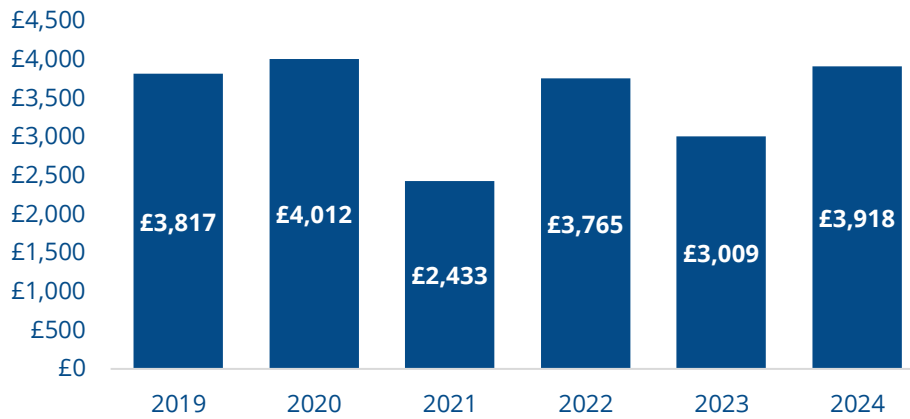




### Average credit owed per client in Mid Sussex (2019-2024)



### Average credit owed per client in Worthing (2019-2024)



## Food poverty

Food insecurity, such as not being able to afford to eat or having to eat less to make food go further, continues to increase across communities, placing greater pressure on households.

### Levels of local food insecurity

According to the University of Sheffield's research into local food insecurity of adults (Jan 2021), in Chichester: <sup>21</sup>

- 2.43% of adults suffered from hunger
- 7.54% struggled to access food
- 9.55% worried about not having enough food

whilst in Arun:

- 2.11% of adults suffered from hunger
- 8.69% struggled to access food
- 8.23% worried about not having enough food

Food prices have been rising since the second half of 2021. By March 2023, food and non-alcoholic drink prices were 19.1% higher than the previous year; the greatest increase since 1977. In July 2024, food inflation was rising by 1.5% year on year. However, the prolonged period of high food prices has continued to affect households. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), 45% of adults in Great Britain reported an increase in their cost of living compared to the previous month.<sup>22</sup> Of these, 92% noted that the price of their food shopping had increased, and 37% reported spending less on essentials, including food.

The rising cost of living continues to increase higher levels of household food insecurity. A YouGov survey by the Food Foundation, found that **13.6% of households in the UK were 'food insecure' in June and July 2024, meaning they ate less or went a day without eating because they couldn't access or afford food.** In 2023/2024, more than 655,000 people used a Trussell Trust food bank for the first time, following over 760,000 first time users in 2022/2023.

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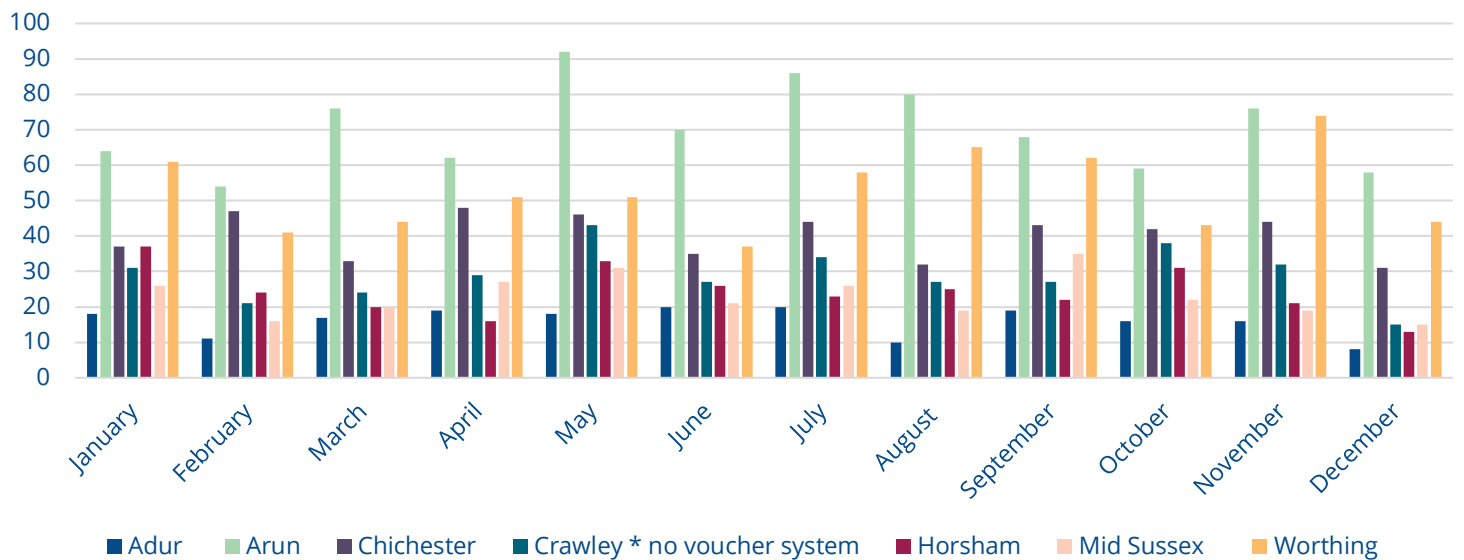
<sup>21</sup> <https://feedingbritain.org/location/arun-and-chichester/#:-:text=Levels%20of%20local%20food%20insecurity,about%20not%20having%20enough%20food>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/publicopinionsandsocialtrendsgre-atbritain/july2024>

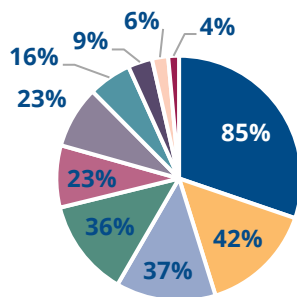
<b>Residents given a food voucher (2024)</b>	<b>Adur</b>	<b>Arun</b>	<b>Chichester</b>	<b>Crawley * no voucher system</b>	<b>Horsham</b>	<b>Mid Sussex</b>	<b>Worthing</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>January</b>	18	64	37	31	37	26	61	<b>274</b>
<b>February</b>	11	54	47	21	24	16	41	<b>214</b>
<b>March</b>	17	76	33	24	20	20	44	<b>234</b>
<b>April</b>	19	62	48	29	16	27	51	<b>252</b>
<b>May</b>	18	92	46	43	33	31	51	<b>314</b>
<b>June</b>	20	70	35	27	26	21	37	<b>236</b>
<b>July</b>	20	86	44	34	23	26	58	<b>291</b>
<b>August</b>	10	80	32	27	25	19	65	<b>258</b>
<b>September</b>	19	68	43	27	22	35	62	<b>276</b>
<b>October</b>	16	59	42	38	31	22	43	<b>251</b>
<b>November</b>	16	76	44	32	21	19	74	<b>282</b>
<b>December</b>	8	58	31	15	13	15	44	<b>184</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>845</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>631</b>	<b>3066</b>

A significant proportion of food bank clients are in receipt of benefits, indicating that the standard rate of benefits is not enough to cover essential costs. Part-time and seasonal workers (including those who have fluctuating work hours) are particularly affected as well as those on fixed incomes, such as benefits.

### Count of food bank issues (2024)



### Additional issues supported for Clients receiving food banks & charitable support (2024)



- Benefits & tax credits
- Benefits Universal Credit
- Utilities & communications
- Debt
- Consumer goods & services
- Financial services & capability
- Housing
- Health & community care
- Immigration & asylum
- Employment

### Free school meals in England

In England, Free School Meals (FSM) are a statutory entitlement available to eligible pupils. In January 2024, there were around 2.1 million pupils known to be eligible for FSM, representing 24.6% of state funded pupils.<sup>23</sup> This eligibility rate has increased rapidly since 2018 and is the highest rate recorded since the current time series began in 2006. On average, pupils eligible

<sup>23</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2023-24>

for free school meals achieve lower GCSE attainment than other pupils, based on the proportion achieving a “standard pass” in English and Maths GCSE.<sup>24</sup> Government statistics show that in 2023, 43% of pupils eligible for FSM achieved a standard pass in both English and Maths GCSE compared to 72% of pupils who were not eligible.

In 2022/2023, 15.6% (17,671) of children were known to be eligible for free school meals in West Sussex, this rose to 16% (18,170) in 2023/24.

JSNA 2024/25<sup>25</sup> data provides a breakdown of pupils eligible for FSM at Key Stage 2 level:

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>Adur</b>	<b>Arun</b>	<b>Chichester</b>	<b>Crawley</b>	<b>Horsham</b>	<b>Mid Sussex</b>	<b>Worthing</b>
<b>Pupils eligible (%)</b>	31.9 %	36.9%	28.4%	42.8%	30.1%	33.6%	33.2%

<sup>24</sup> <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9209/CBP-9209.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> [https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/assets/pdf/WS\\_JSNA\\_Summary\\_2024\\_2025.pdf](https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/assets/pdf/WS_JSNA_Summary_2024_2025.pdf)

## Housing and Homelessness

Housing insecurity and homelessness reflect and reinforce broader socio-economic inequalities, acting both as causes and consequences of poverty. Structural factors such as affordability, availability, and policy frameworks contribute to persistent disadvantage.

The table below records the average house prices in each district and borough within West Sussex. Escalating housing costs contribute significantly to poverty by reducing affordability, limiting access to suitable housing, and increasing the financial burden on low-income households.

<b>Average house prices according to ONS most recent data (2024)</b>				
<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>House Price</b>	<b>Monthly Rent</b>	<b>First time buyers</b>	<b>Mortgage buyers</b>
<b>Adur</b>	£359,000	£1,315	£301,000	£363,000
<b>Arun</b>	£337,000	£1,124	£226,000	£339,000
<b>Chichester</b>	£458,000	£1,244	£349,000	£470,000
<b>Crawley</b>	£319,000	£1,371	£289,000	£324,000
<b>Horsham</b>	£426,000	£1,349	£315,000	£429,000
<b>Mid Sussex</b>	£445,000	£1,316	£336,000	£457,000
<b>Worthing</b>	£326,000	£1,255	£261,000	£335,000

	<b>Statutory homeless duties owed, July to September 2024</b>						
	<b>Adur</b>	<b>Arun</b>	<b>Chichester</b>	<b>Crawley</b>	<b>Horsham</b>	<b>Mid Sussex</b>	<b>Worthing</b>
<b>Total households assessed</b>	54	280	132	348	88	120	171
<b>Total households assessed as owed a duty</b>	53	252	125	278	87	113	166
<b>Threatened with homelessness- Prevention duty owed</b>	29	92	56	112	39	48	67
<b>Of which: due to service of a valid Section 21 Notice</b>	3	47	0	39	2	18	20
<b>Homeless-Relief duty owed</b>	24	160	69	166	48	65	99
<b>Not threatened with homelessness within 56 days- no duty owed</b>	1	20	5	21	0	4	5
<b>Withdrew application before assessment- no duty owed</b>	0	7	2	7	0	3	0
<b>Not eligible / no longer eligible - no duty owed</b>	0	1	0	42	1	0	0
<b>% of households with history of mental health</b>	43.4%	27.0%	38.4%	20.9%	14.9%	32.7%	36.7%
<b>% of households with physical ill health and disability</b>	30.2%	23.0%	26.4%	16.5%	12.6%	19.5%	25.9%

<b>Employment status of main applicants owed a duty (Top 3, most common being first and least written last)</b>	Not working due to long-term illness / disability (37.7%), Part-time work (15.1%), Registered unemployed (13.2%)	Registered unemployed (33.3%), Not working due to long-term illness/ disability (19.4%), Full time work (15.9%)	Not working due to long-term illness / disability (28%), Registered unemployed (24%), Fulltime work (16.8%)	Registered unemployed (32%), Full time work (16.9%), Not seeking work / at home (11.5%)	Registered unemployed (28.7%), Not working due to long-term illness / disability (19.5%), Full time work (18.4%)	Registered unemployed (31.9%), Full time work (20.4%), Part time work (15.9%)	Not working due to long-term illness / disability (38%), Registered unemployed (22,9%), Full time work (13.9%)
<b>Households with children</b>							
<b>Prevention duty owed</b>	11	42	19	66	15	24	29
<b>Relief duty owed</b>	3	51	18	74	6	19	14

Crawley had the highest number of households assessed to be owed a housing duty, closely followed by Arun. These duties refer to the statutory responsibilities of local authorities to prevent or relieve homelessness under the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017).

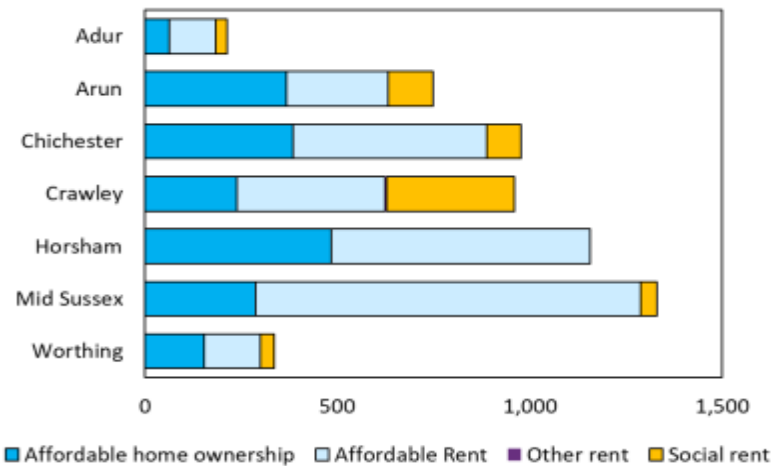
In 2022/2023 there was an additional 1,319 affordable homes built or acquired in West Sussex. Of these, 406 were for home ownership schemes.<sup>26</sup> The lack of affordable homes forces many into private rented properties where rents are higher and conditions are often worse- leading to increased homelessness, overcrowding and financial strain. It also means people must live in these conditions for longer, putting them at greater risk, due to not being able to afford alternatives.

**Table 25 New Affordable Housing**

Year	Adur	Arun	Chich.	Craw	Hors.	Mid Sussex	Worth.	Total
2012/13	27	164	80	49	103	108	54	<b>585</b>
2013/14	1	110	127	81	292	138	11	<b>760</b>
2014/15	35	330	297	106	159	229	72	<b>1,228</b>
2015/16	5	48	98	112	167	79	12	<b>521</b>
2016/17	0	103	135	249	120	82	56	<b>745</b>
2017/18	36	183	154	172	378	178	27	<b>1,128</b>
2018/19	100	98	137	172	553	73	105	<b>1,238</b>
2019/20	30	107	179	200	274	139	141	<b>1,070</b>
2020/21	24	204	113	172	233	197	25	<b>968</b>
2021/22	50	131	159	292	87	398	11	<b>1128</b>
2022/23	10	208	390	125	9	524	53	<b>1,319</b>

<sup>26</sup> [https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/assets/pdf/WS\\_JSNA\\_Summary\\_2024\\_2025.pdf](https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/assets/pdf/WS_JSNA_Summary_2024_2025.pdf)

**Figure 19 Type of Additional Affordable Housing (5 Years Combined Data 2018/19 to 2022/23)**



Source: DLUHC, Live Tables 1006C 1006aC 1007C 1008C

Affordable housing is vital but expensive housing is not the only problem affecting resident incomes. Poor housing processes can lead to further financial turmoil. A lack of coordination, such as not setting up Alternative Payment Arrangements during the transition stage of clients moving from temporary to social housing, has meant clients incur debts without knowledge. Miscommunication between housing providers and incorrect information from the DWP compounds this problem. Moreover, the requirements of medical evidence for further support can be difficult and intensive and this can deter some people from applying. These missed opportunities mean that support networks must expend more time and resources resolving these situations.

In 2022/2023 there were 1,342 households in temporary accommodation in West Sussex.<sup>27</sup> Worthing and Crawley recorded the highest rates, both significantly higher than the national average, followed by Arun. By December 2023, this figure had risen to 1,463 households in temporary accommodation, of which 690 households included children, totaling 1390 children living in temporary accommodation. Worthing and Adur experienced the largest increases in demand for temporary accommodation between 2019/2020 and 2022/2023, with rises of 196% and 163% retrospectively.

Homelessness issues can also be exacerbated by long housing register waiting times and discrimination by landlords who do not accept benefit claimants or those on low incomes. **There is also some evidence to suggest that residents not knowing their rights and**

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statutory-homelessness-in-england-july-to-september-2024/statutory-homelessness-in-england-july-to-september-2024-infographic#temporary-accommodation>

**responsibilities means they miss out on support.** For example, some clients have refused accommodation because it does not meet their needs without understanding that this action ends the councils statutory duty to provide housing.

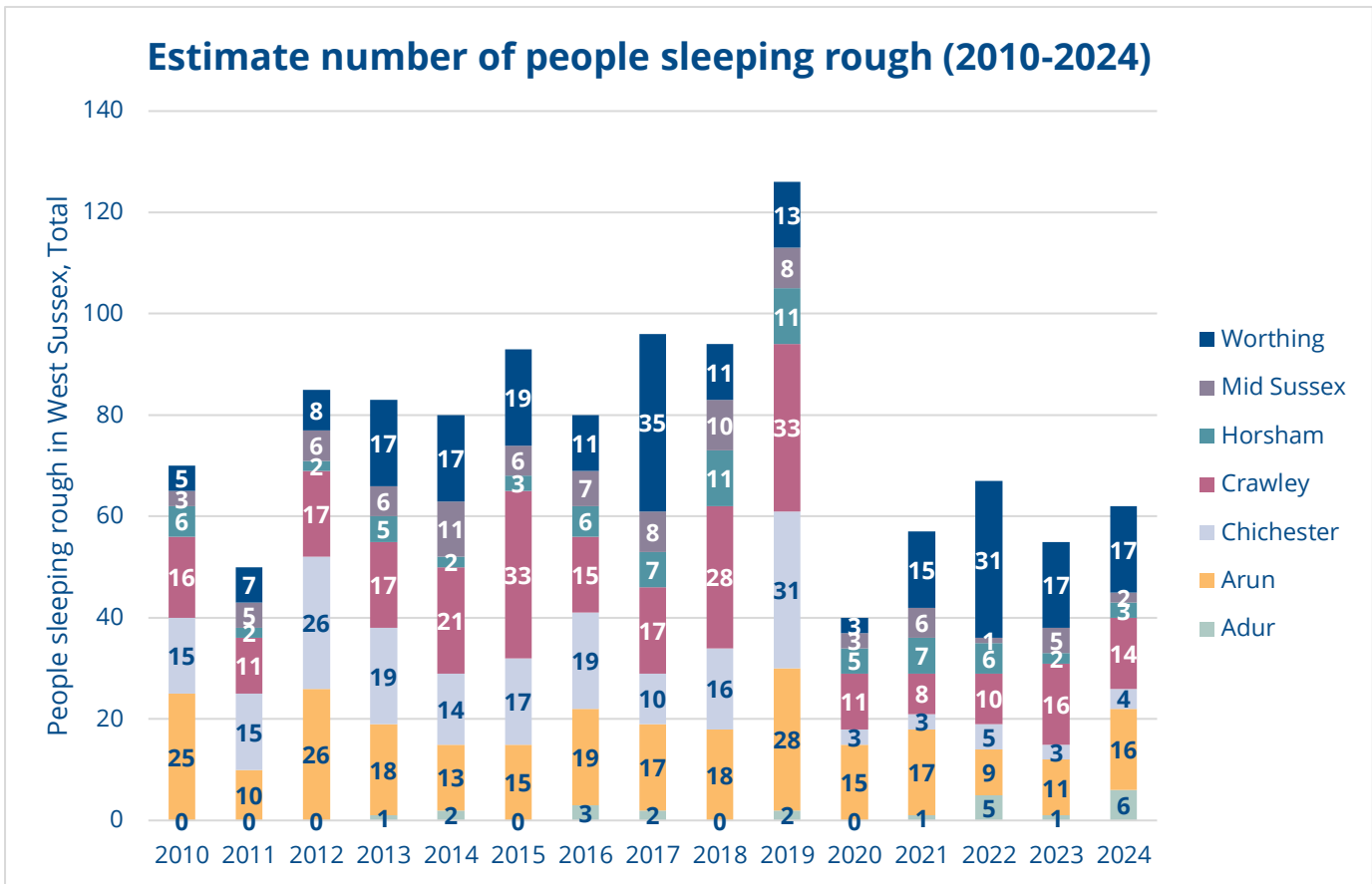
Unstable or insecure housing can also compound people’s wellbeing. Several clients have been placed in out of area accommodation which has led to social isolation, increased transport costs for school or work and disruption to children’s academic and social lives. Moreover, there are reports of antisocial behaviour, including drug and alcohol issues that lead clients to feel unsafe and lack a sense of belonging.

Additional concerns relate to the precarity of Section 21 notices, which allow landlords to evict tenants without providing a reason. Anecdotal evidence highlights a growing number of issues concerning relationship breakdowns that increase demand for alternative accommodation.

Like poor housing conditions, sleeping rough is dangerous for clients and can create or worsen health problems. The Government’s housing data highlights in 2024 there were 62 known rough sleepers in West Sussex with 17 people in Worthing and 16 in Arun.<sup>28</sup>

Local Authority	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Change-2019/20 to 2022/23	% Change
<b>Adur</b>	46	81	115	121	75	163%
<b>Arun</b>	132	114	151	168	36	27%
<b>Chichester</b>	-	-	-	99	99	-
<b>Crawley</b>	175	241	276	328	153	87%
<b>Horsham</b>	108	100	113	133	25	23%
<b>Mid Sussex</b>	71	96	112	73	2	3%
<b>Worthing</b>	142	256	331	420	278	196%

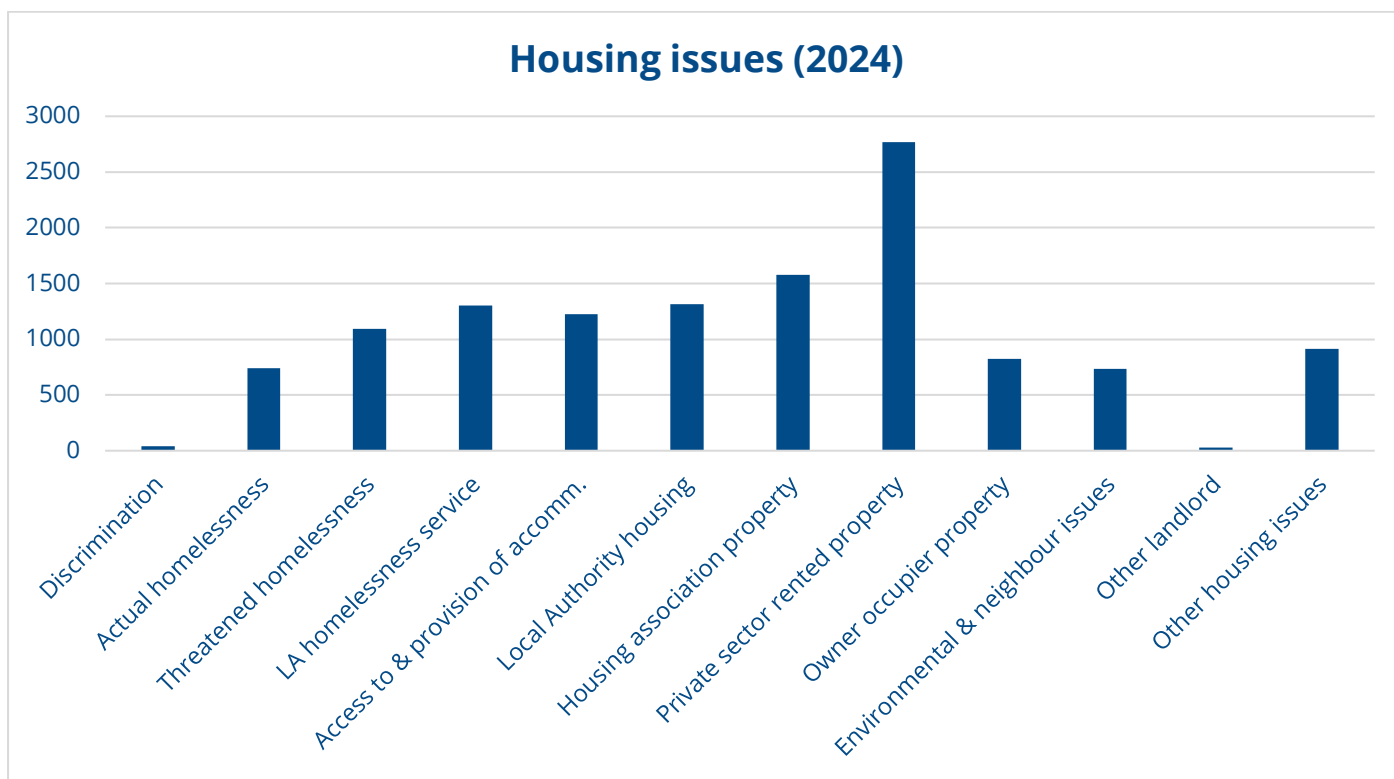
<sup>28</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2024/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2024>



Several clients sleeping rough are disconnected and disengaged from society and support services. A common feeling amongst these clients is hopelessness.

Navigating systems is made harder for clients who have no fixed address and there is a lack of awareness surrounding programmes that allow clients to move forward without one, such as setting up a bank account.

## Housing issues raised:



## Breakdown of issues

	Adur	Arun	Chichester	Crawley	Horsham	Mid Sussex	Worthing	Grand Total
<b>Discrimination</b>	1	9	4	18	4		4	<b>40</b>
<b>Actual homelessness</b>	21	122	62	303	121	44	69	<b>742</b>
<b>Threatened homelessness</b>	43	172	96	284	239	116	143	<b>1093</b>
<b>LA homelessness service</b>	16	127	55	575	361	95	75	<b>1304</b>
<b>Access to &amp; provision of accomm.</b>	50	180	104	391	269	118	110	<b>1222</b>
<b>Local Authority housing</b>	112	343	89	409	155	94	112	<b>1314</b>
<b>Housing association property</b>	34	188	313	204	395	295	150	<b>1579</b>
<b>Private sector rented property</b>	134	501	335	661	468	270	398	<b>2767</b>
<b>Owner occupier property</b>	43	246	134	61	114	98	126	<b>822</b>
<b>Environmental &amp; neighbour issues</b>	24	141	109	117	138	100	103	<b>732</b>
<b>Other landlord</b>	4	3	5	6	4	3	2	<b>27</b>
<b>Other housing issues</b>	58	153	150	215	130	109	100	<b>915</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>540</b>	<b>2185</b>	<b>1456</b>	<b>3244</b>	<b>2398</b>	<b>1342</b>	<b>1392</b>	<b>12557</b>

The rising cost of private rented housing is increasingly affecting income distribution across West Sussex. As rental prices continue to outpace wage growth, a growing proportion of household income is distributed towards housing costs, particularly among low-income renters. This financial strain reduces disposable income, limits access to essential goods and services and exacerbates economic insecurity. Consequently, the structure of the private rented sector not only reflects existing income inequalities but can actively reinforce them, contributing to a cycle of poverty and limited upward mobility for many households.

Area Name	One Bedroom	Two Bedrooms	Three Bedrooms	Four or more Bedrooms	All categories
Adur	£914	£1,193	£1,480	£1,951	£1,297
Arun	£737	£1,000	£1,227	£1,791	£1,081
Chichester	£846	£1,101	£1,366	£1,962	£1,208
Crawley	£926	£1,212	£1,436	£2,031	£1,305
Horsham	£890	£1,185	£1,496	£2,188	£1,295
Mid Sussex	£883	£1,139	£1,432	£1,997	£1,258
Worthing	£833	£1,117	£1,353	£1,874	£1,228

The Renters Rights Bill aims to abolish Section 21 no-fault evictions and will introduce Awaab’s Law into the private rented sector, where landlords will have to inspect and rectify health hazards within specific timeframes.<sup>29</sup> It will also seek to balance tenant and landlord rights. The evidence from our data shows that these reforms are urgently needed.

Safe, affordable and suitable housing provides shelter that ensures security, promotes health and wellbeing and allows individuals and families to thrive.

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-the-renters-rights-bill/guide-to-the-renters-rights-bill>

## Digital Exclusion

1.6 million people do not use the internet, approximately 4% of the population and over 2 million households struggle to afford broadband.<sup>30</sup>

In a recent study conducted by WPI Economics, commissioned by Trussell Trust and Good Things Foundation, found “that digital exclusion is clearly related to income poverty and to risk factors of income poverty”.<sup>31</sup> Some important points from the review state:

- “2022: Fabian Society analysis of Ofcom data found that households with very low incomes (under £11,500 per year) were twice as likely to be without internet access
- 2023: Trussell Trust’s Hunger in the UK survey found that 16% of foodbank users had no access to the internet, a higher proportion than in the general population. Among those without internet access who were referred to foodbanks, 44% experienced severe social isolation
- 2024: Minimum Digital Living Standard Survey of Households with Children found strong correlations between households below the publicly defined benchmark (a holistic household measure of access and skills) and factors widely associated with child poverty.”

The report highlights how the digital world is now “the passport to essential services” such as applying for benefits or updating the online system, applying for a job, finding a home or even paying for rent. Access to the internet is increasingly becoming the default for essential services and information. Although digitalisation has opened different channels for accessing accounts or information and some may find this a more manageable way, it carries major risks of barriers to those that are digitally excluded. The research report stated that:

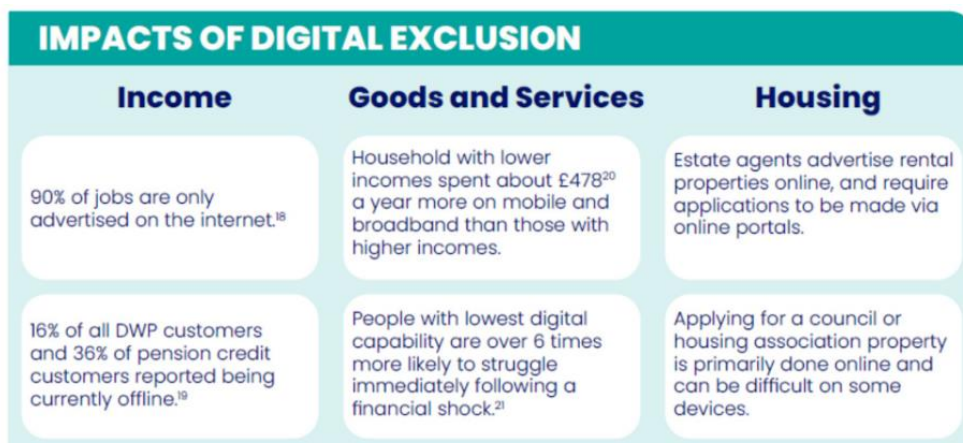
- People receiving Universal Credit may not always be able to afford a device or connectivity, putting them, and their children, at risk of sanctions, and deeper poverty
- Universal Credit claimants were six times more likely to have stopped spending on broadband altogether in the last twelve months than those not in receipt of Universal Credit
- Many people who can’t afford to be online face a ‘poverty premium’ for goods and services

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-inclusion-action-plan-first-steps/digital-inclusion-action-plan-first-steps>

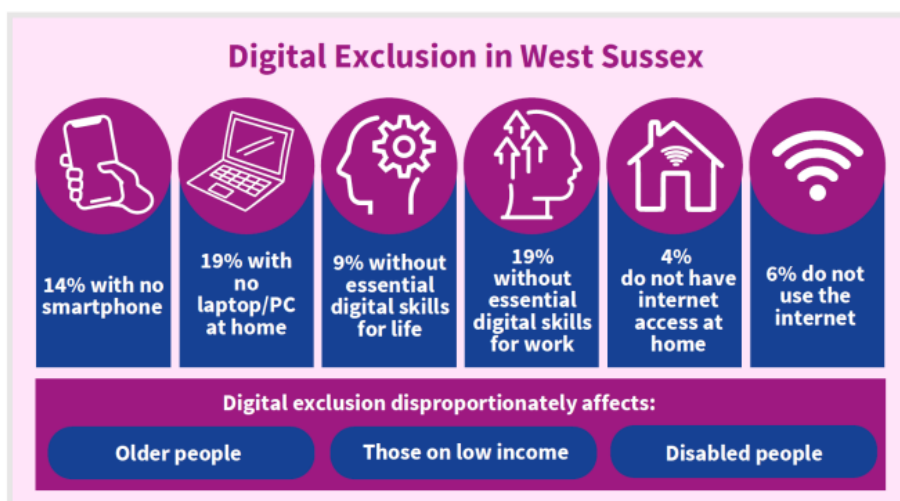
<sup>31</sup> <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/policy-and-research/research-and-evidence/research-2024/deep-poverty-and-digital-exclusion>

- People with the least digital capabilities are nine times more likely to struggle immediately following a financial shock than those with the highest digital capabilities (27% vs. 3%)



“Of the 4.1 million people living in deep poverty, 57%, equivalent to 2.2 million individuals, are living in persistent poverty, defined as a person or household currently living in poverty and having also lived in poverty for two of the last three years. Those most likely to experience persistent and deep poverty are unemployed or in part-time employment, and include parents both lone parents and couples with children. Other groups likely to be at risk of deep poverty and digital exclusion are people seeking asylum, Roma, Traveller and Gypsy groups; people experiencing homelessness, or those with no recourse to public funds.”

In the West Sussex Digital Inclusion, Access and Safety Strategic Framework 2024-2027, it is estimated that over 138,000 adults in West Sussex do not have all the “essential digital skills for life” and over 43,000 are estimated to be completely offline.<sup>32</sup>



<sup>32</sup> [https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/media/bysp0g13/digital\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/media/bysp0g13/digital_strategy.pdf)

The framework suggests that cost of living pressures are pushing people on low incomes further into digital exclusion, highlighting not only the cost of devices needed to go online but also the affordability of internet services, such as broadband or mobile data. Online access enables individuals to purchase many items at lower prices and offers the opportunity to compare options.

Citizens Advice data reflects many of the findings outlined above. But problems for clients do not only surround an inaccessible digital world due to affordability reasons. Some clients lack the confidence to navigate websites and online application forms, whilst others do not have the digital literacy levels to manage independently. Without support services such as Citizens Advice, these clients risk disconnection and missing out on the correct levels of support. With more people migrating over to Universal Credit, the importance of the DWP's phone claim service is paramount to ensuring these clients stay connected.

However, Citizens Advice also have evidence to suggest that the system is not always responsive to user capability or need, having supported several clients who have been sanctioned by the DWP for failing to update or respond to their online journals despite proactively notifying them that they cannot do this. Clients with autism, dyslexia and memory conditions who have asked for adjustments have also experienced this.

Moreover, some clients who have fluctuating incomes and must regularly update their journals find this frequent engagement time consuming and frustrating. For one client who must submit their earnings every assessment period, they became confused and submitted two months of earnings in one assessment period and their claim was subsequently closed. This left the client with no income and in fuel poverty.

## Building financial resilience

A lack of long-term planning can contribute to poverty, particularly when individuals and families face immediate needs and lack the resources or stability to build a secure financial future. This is further exacerbated when systemic issues, such as lack of opportunity, high unemployment, or inadequate social safety nets, make long-term planning even more challenging.

Poverty often involves a constant struggle for survival, characterised by a cycle of prioritising immediate physiological needs, like food, shelter, and basic necessities. This leaves little time or resource for future goals like education, career development, or financial security, thereby restricting personal growth and development. The ongoing pressure of meeting immediate needs and uncertainty about the future can negatively impact mental health and well-being, further hindering the ability to plan.

**Building financial resilience and ensuring individuals have the knowledge and resources to plan long term and better navigate economic uncertainties will include:**

**Collaboration** - A collaborative effort is crucial to developing valuable and sustainable financial resilience.

**Context** - An understanding of the different dimensions of poverty and the specific challenges faced by West Sussex residents.

**Clear aims** - To build financial resilience aiming to support areas that have the largest impact on individuals and communities, such as:

- Financial capability
  - Financial literacy and education: budgeting, credit, interest
  - Access to tools: banking apps, budgeting systems, independent and accredited advice
- Financial inclusion
  - Access to reliable and accessible financial services: savings accounts, payment systems
- Risk awareness: job loss, family breakdown
- Planning: having plans in place- budgets, debt management, support networks
- Crisis support: fuel support, food banks, grants and schemes
- Opportunity and empowerment to learn, build and grow: skills, employment training, digital literacy, awareness of rights.

Resilience can be both an individual and communal characteristic. Improved resilience can act as a protection against poverty and destitution, by equipping individuals with the tools that prevent them from falling into poverty in the first place.

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