

Poverty: A Barrier to Prosperity and Growth in West Sussex



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Executive Summary

Poverty: 'When a person's resources (mainly their material resources) are not sufficient to meet their minimum needs (including social participation).' Joeseph Rowntree Foundation¹.

West Sussex is often perceived as a prosperous county, yet this prosperity is not shared equally across all communities. Significant pockets of deprivation persist, particularly within some coastal and disadvantaged areas, where residents experience barriers to opportunity, economic participation and social mobility. Despite the county's overall affluence, many households continue to face financial hardship, with challenges relating to housing, employment, skills, health and education reinforcing cycles of poverty and low financial resilience.

This report provides an overview of poverty in West Sussex, drawing on national and local datasets alongside Citizens Advice insight to explore the realities faced by residents across the county. The evidence demonstrates that poverty is not an isolated issue. It is interconnected with poor health outcomes, housing insecurity, educational disadvantages, debt, digital exclusion and barriers to employment. These challenges not only affect individual wellbeing but also restrict workforce participation, community resilience and inclusive economic growth.

Key findings

- **Household poverty:** Approximately 49% of households in West Sussex are classified as deprived in at least one dimension of poverty, with some wards falling within the 10% most deprived areas in England.
- **Employment and skills:** West Sussex has a higher proportion of residents with no qualifications than the South East average. Many residents are employed in low-paid, insecure or seasonal work, limiting financial stability and progression opportunities.
- **Housing:** A shortage of affordable housing has increased housing stress across the county, contributing to rising levels of homelessness, long waiting lists and growing financial pressures, particularly in Arun and Worthing.
- **Child poverty:** More than 20,000 children were living in poverty in West Sussex in 2023. Most districts report child poverty rates exceeding 10%, creating risks for future educational attainment, social mobility and workforce participation.
- **Health inequalities:** Poverty is closely linked to poorer physical and mental health outcomes. In 2024, 51% of Citizens Advice clients supported across West Sussex

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

reported a disability or health condition. The county also records higher-than-average rates of hospital admissions for intentional self-harm and has experienced a rising suicide rate.

- **Financial resilience:** Increasing numbers of residents are experiencing debt, fuel poverty, food insecurity and difficulties managing rising living costs, leaving many households vulnerable to financial shocks.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that poverty represents both a social and economic challenge. Poverty, financial insecurity and social exclusion limit economic participation, reduce productivity, weaken community resilience and prevent residents from fully benefiting from local growth opportunities. Addressing these challenges is essential not only for improving individual outcomes but also for strengthening thriving communities, supporting inclusive growth and ensuring that prosperity is shared more widely across West Sussex.

Call to Action

Poverty cannot be addressed through crisis intervention alone. A preventative, place-based approach is needed that tackles the underlying drivers of disadvantage while expanding access to opportunity. By investing in financial resilience, skills development, employability support, affordable housing, digital inclusion and income maximisation, partners can help residents move from crisis management to long-term stability and economic participation.

Building financial resilience is central to this ambition. It enables individuals to better withstand financial shocks, access employment and training opportunities, improve their wellbeing and plan for the future. Through coordinated action across public, private and voluntary sector partners, West Sussex can reduce inequalities, strengthen workforce participation, support sustainable prosperity and contribute to a more inclusive, resilient and productive Sussex economy.

Strategic Alignment with the Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority

This report supports the ambitions of the Sussex & Brighton Strategic Authority to create a more prosperous, inclusive and resilient economy. The evidence presented demonstrates how poverty, deprivation and low financial resilience act as barriers to:

- Workforce development
- Skills acquisition
- Labour market participation
- Business growth
- Health and wellbeing
- Housing stability
- Economic productivity
- Community resilience
- Inclusive growth

Addressing these issues through targeted investment in financial resilience, skills development and early intervention can help ensure that residents and communities across West Sussex are able to contribute to and benefit from future growth.

Introduction

Poverty in West Sussex is a significant issue, with various areas experiencing different levels of deprivation. From employment and education to health and housing, poverty remains a consistent issue with the current cost-of-living pushing those already in poverty deeper, in IMD 2025 release, West Sussex ranked 128th of 153 upper tier local authorities in England (1 being the most deprived)². According to Census 2021 data³, In West Sussex there are approximately 375,000 households, 183,856 households (49%) were deprived in at least one dimension; and 750 households were deprived in all four dimensions (0.2%).

Office for National Statistics dimensions of poverty: Employment, education, health and disability and household overcrowding.

Local Authority	IMD 2025 rank (1= most deprived)	Number of	% of
		LSOAs in 10% most deprived decile in England	
Adur	200	0	0%
Arun	141	5	5%
Chichester	191	0	0%
Crawley	126	1	1%
Horsham	279	0	0%
Mid Sussex	286	0	0%
Worthing	186	0	0%

In the most recent IMD rankings, Crawley ranks as the most deprived area in West Sussex followed by Arun, Worthing and Chichester. Mid Sussex remains the least deprived area in West Sussex.

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

IMD rank of average score has been used in line with published WSCC rankings. Average rank of scores is used where there are pockets of deprivation in areas meaning the rank is based on the actual deprivation scores of small neighbourhoods (LSOAs).

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2025>

³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/E10000032-west-sussex>

Key factors contributing to poverty in the county include:

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

Child poverty

Childhood poverty is a current and increasing issue within the UK. Recognising and understanding poverty is the first step to creating effective strategies and how resilience in these environments can be improved. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2025 UK Poverty report⁴ states that more than 1 in 5 individuals in the UK were in poverty throughout 2022/23; out of 14.3 million people, 4.3 million of them were children. Within West Sussex, 14.3% of children were categorised as being in relative poverty in 2022/23.

The two-child benefit cap which prevents parents from claiming child tax credit or universal credit for more than two children, was introduced by the Government in 2017. Data provided by the End Child Poverty Coalition shows that removing the cap would lift 350,000 children across the UK out of poverty and mean that 700,000 are in less deep poverty⁵.

ACCA and CAWS play an important role in the distribution of the Household Support Fund, out of the 2,089 unique households supported, 32% of those were households with children.

The Household Support Fund generally provides monetary support toward energy costs, but in some circumstances, this has been used to pay for furniture, household items, clothes and other children's items- in some cases- a child's bed.

ONS data states the percentage of children living in relative poverty 2024-25 as below⁶:

	Percentage of district population aged under 16
Adur	21.3
Arun	27.3
Chichester	23.0
Crawley	29.5
Horsham	15.4
Mid Sussex	14.2
Worthing	22.5

Using DWP data, in West Sussex there were:

- 20,290 children in relative poverty
- 16,100 children in absolute poverty.

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

⁵ https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/two_child_limit/

⁶ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/indicators/children-in-relative-poverty-after-housing#get-the-data>

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 is harmful to a child's health, social and emotional wellbeing, and educational outcomes. Children living in poverty are more likely to experience poor nutrition, unstable housing and food insecurity, all of which can affect their physical development, mental health and ability to thrive. Poverty is also associated with higher rates of anxiety, depression and behavioural difficulties⁷. The financial pressures experienced by families do not affect parents alone; the stress and uncertainty of living in poverty are often felt throughout the household, impacting children's wellbeing, confidence and future aspirations.

Research consistently shows that children from low-income families are more likely to underperform academically. Barriers such as limited access to learning resources, inadequate housing conditions, digital exclusion and food insecurity can affect concentration, attendance and attainment in school. These disadvantages can accumulate over time, creating unequal opportunities from an early age. Young people who leave education with fewer qualifications are more likely to face barriers to higher education, apprenticeships, vocational training and employment, reducing opportunities for social mobility and increasing the likelihood of experiencing poverty in adulthood. This contributes to an intergenerational cycle of disadvantage that can be difficult to break.

Data from the Department for Education shows that 6.9% of young people aged 16 to 17 in the South East were not in education, employment or training, or had an unknown activity status, in 2022/23, compared with 6.2% nationally⁸. This highlights the importance of early intervention to prevent young people becoming disconnected from education and employment pathways.

The consequences of child poverty extend beyond individual outcomes and impact the long-term prosperity of West Sussex. Children and young people represent the county's future workforce and future human capital. When financial hardship limits their ability to develop

⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/eca/stories/how-does-poverty-affect-children-differently>

⁸ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/participation-in-education-and-training-and-employment/2024>

skills, achieve educationally and access opportunities, the effects are felt not only by individuals and families but also by communities, employers and the wider economy.

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.

Educational disadvantage can weaken the local skills pipeline by reducing the number of young people progressing into further education, apprenticeships, training and skilled employment. As labour market demands continue to evolve, ensuring that children and young people can develop the knowledge, qualifications and capabilities needed to access good-quality employment will be critical to supporting workforce development, productivity and sustainable economic growth.

Tackling child poverty is therefore both a social and economic imperative. Investing in early intervention, educational attainment, family financial resilience and access to opportunity can help break intergenerational cycles of poverty, strengthen social mobility and support the development of a skilled, resilient and economically active future workforce. By improving outcomes for children today, West Sussex can build stronger foundations for inclusive growth, community resilience and shared prosperity in the future.

Fuel poverty

Overall, in West Sussex, 9.3% of all households are estimated to be living in fuel poverty.

Fuel Poverty risk factors

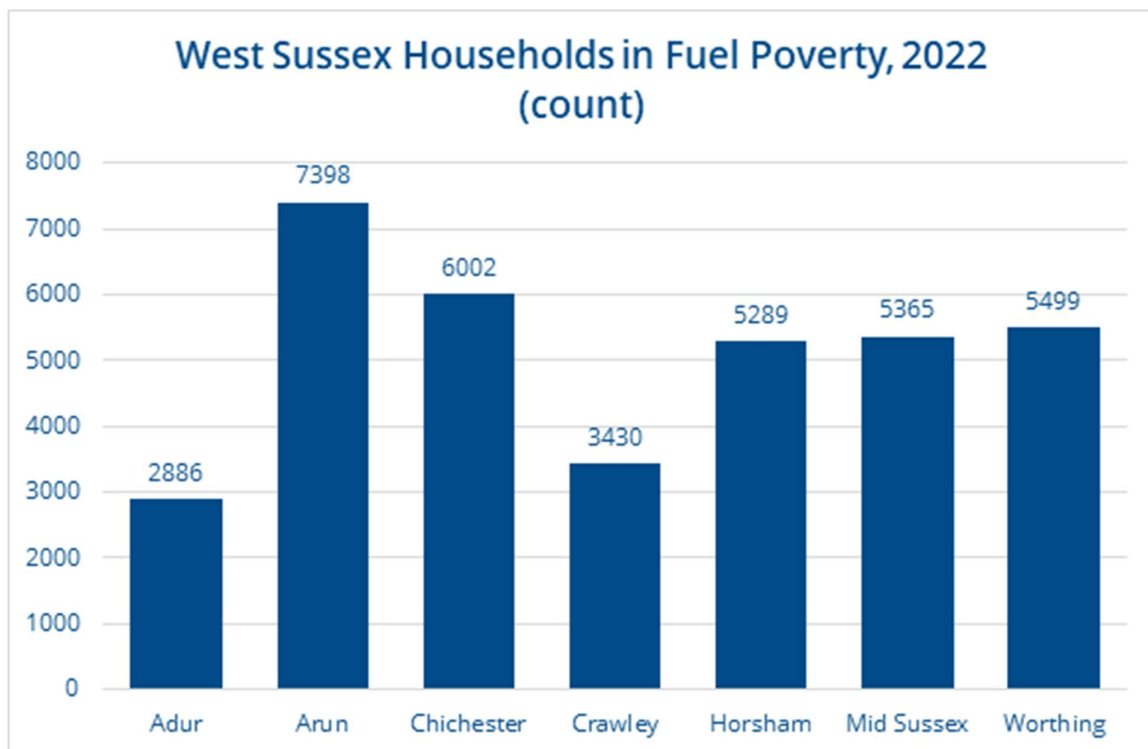
Characteristics of a house:

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

Characteristics of household:

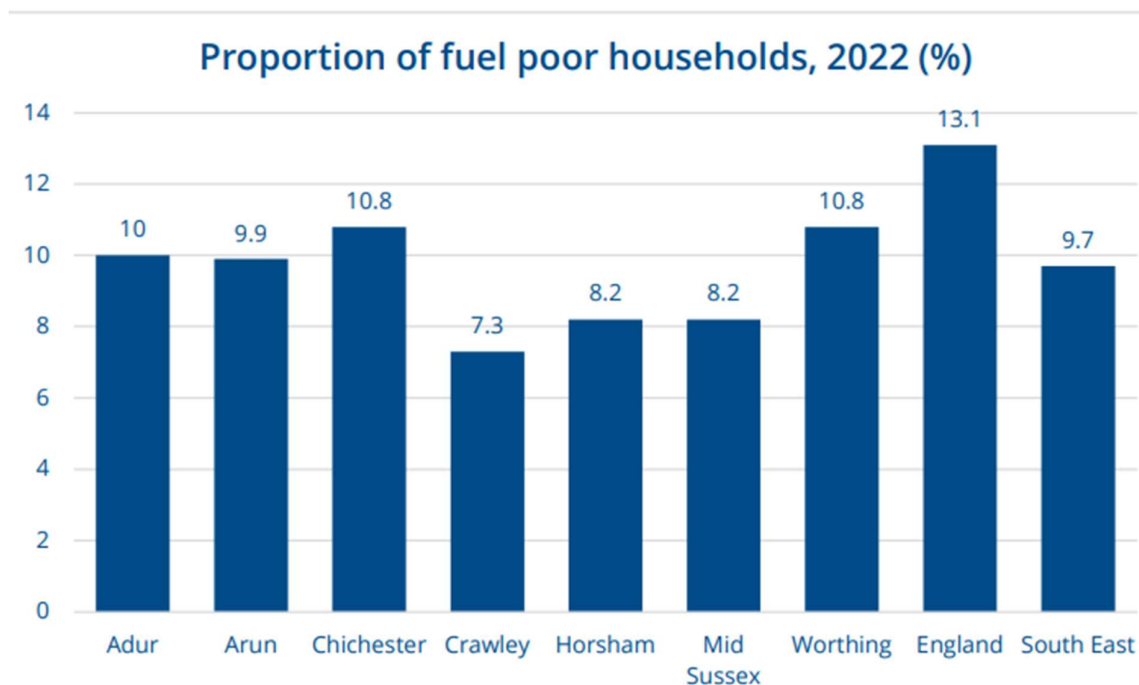
- Low income
- Unemployed
- Private rented sector
- PPM or standard credit

The Annual fuel poverty statistic report (2022 data)⁹ shows that in terms of the count of households in fuel poverty in West Sussex, Arun has by far the highest number of fuel poor households, with 7398 households in fuel poverty in the district. This is closely followed by Chichester, which has 6002 fuel poor households.

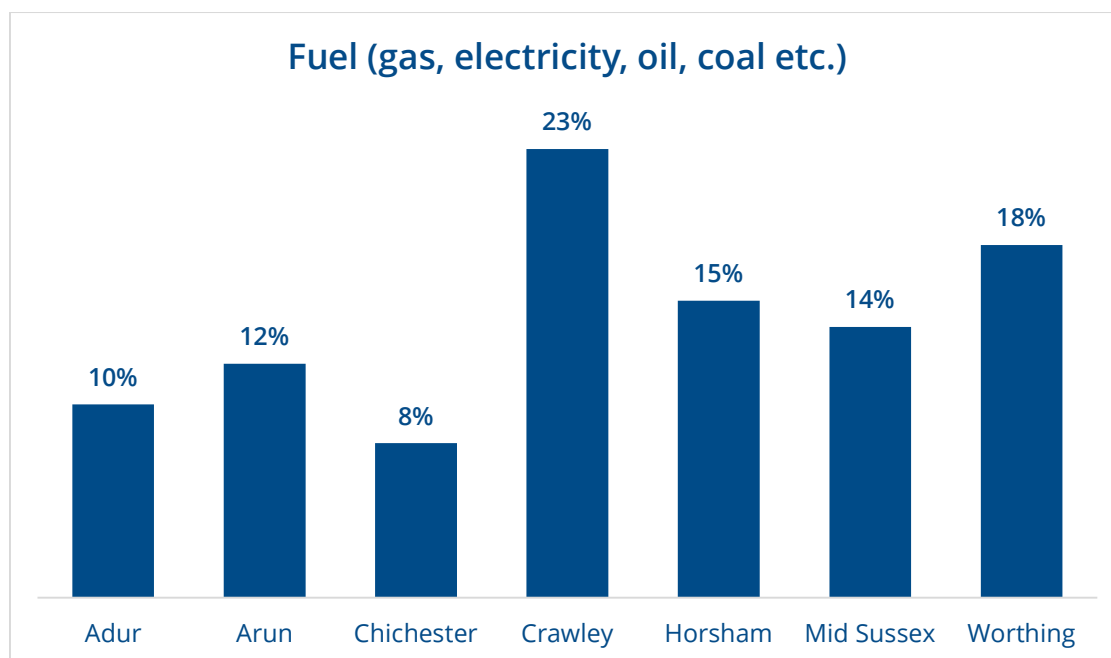


⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fuel-poverty-statistics>

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.

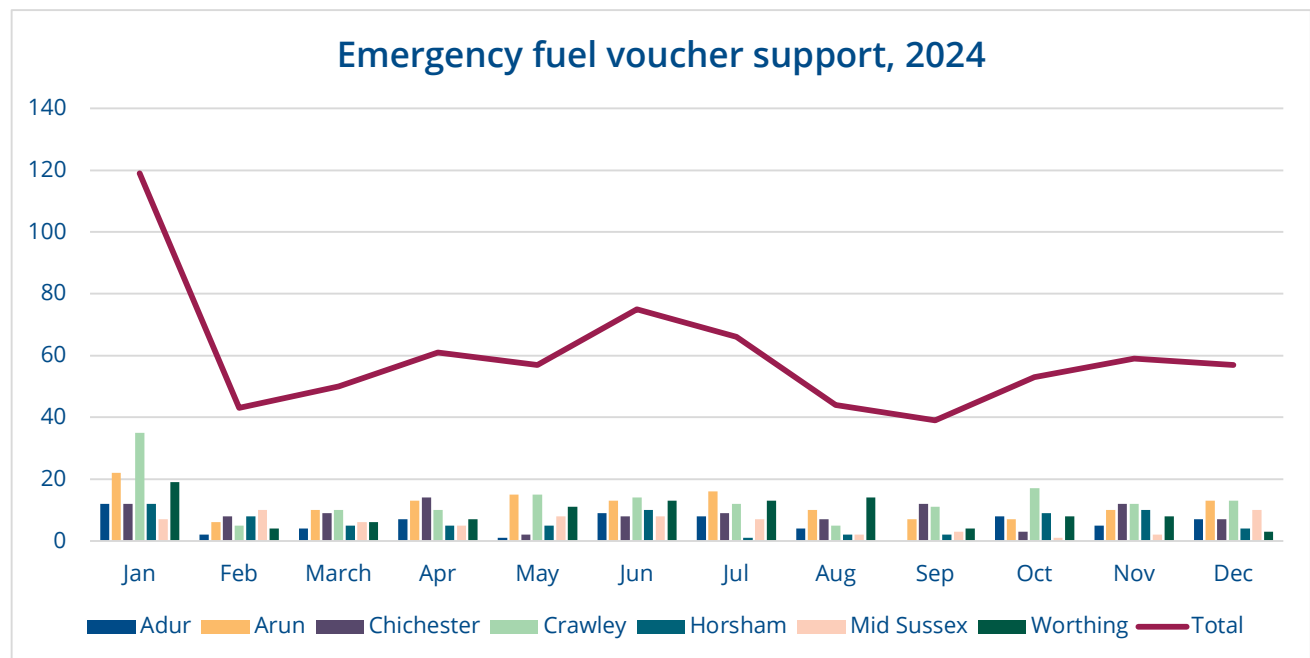


Citizens Advice data shows in 2025 4,087 residents were supported with a fuel issue with the below chart showing the distribution across districts.



The chart below shows Emergency Fuel Voucher support we provided to those in West Sussex- those that have or are at risk of disconnection and cannot afford to top up their energy meters. Last year, we supported 723 households with Emergency Fuel Voucher Support. As expected, 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%.

	Total EFV distributed, %
Adur	9%
Arun	20%
Chichester	14%
Crawley	22%
Horsham	10%
Mid Sussex	10%
Worthing	15%
Total	100%



For the most recent phase of Household Support Fund, we supported 2089 households. 32% was distributed to households with children, 9% households 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.

For one client, the cost of gas was far too much and as they could no longer afford to turn on their boiler and heat their home through mains central heating, they had their gas meter removed to avoid also paying for the standing charge costs.

Another client, who already cannot afford to top up their energy, is forced into emergency credit each week. The client was moved to a Pre-Payment Meter as they had accumulated arrears on their energy account and could not afford to repay on top of their direct debit costs. They were repaying the amount through their top ups of around £10 per week. The client already struggled with the essential cost of living and the pressure to ensure their meter was topped up each week added to the stress.

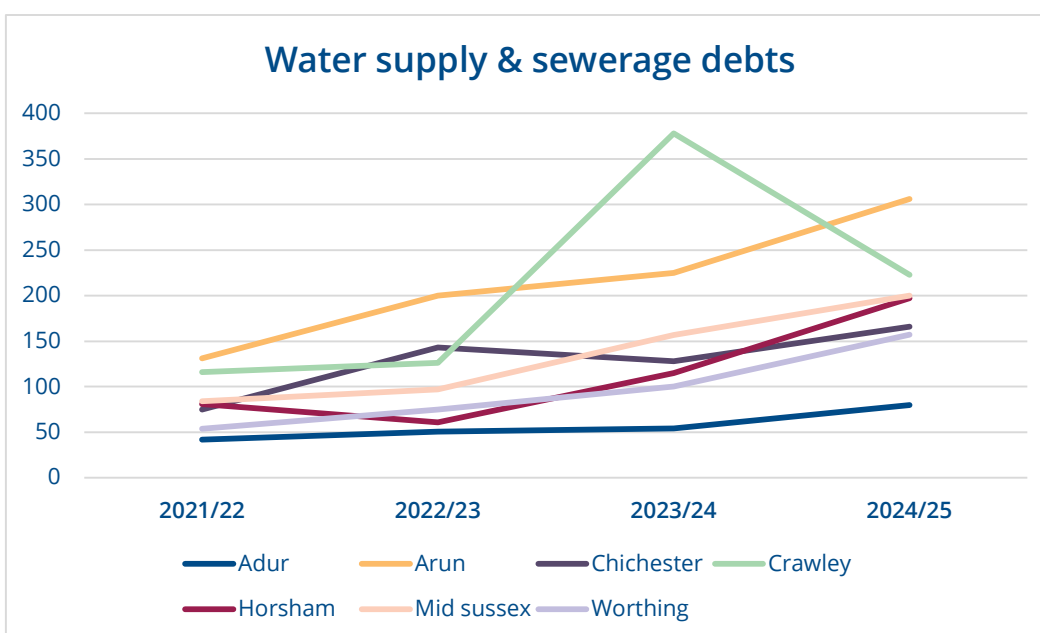
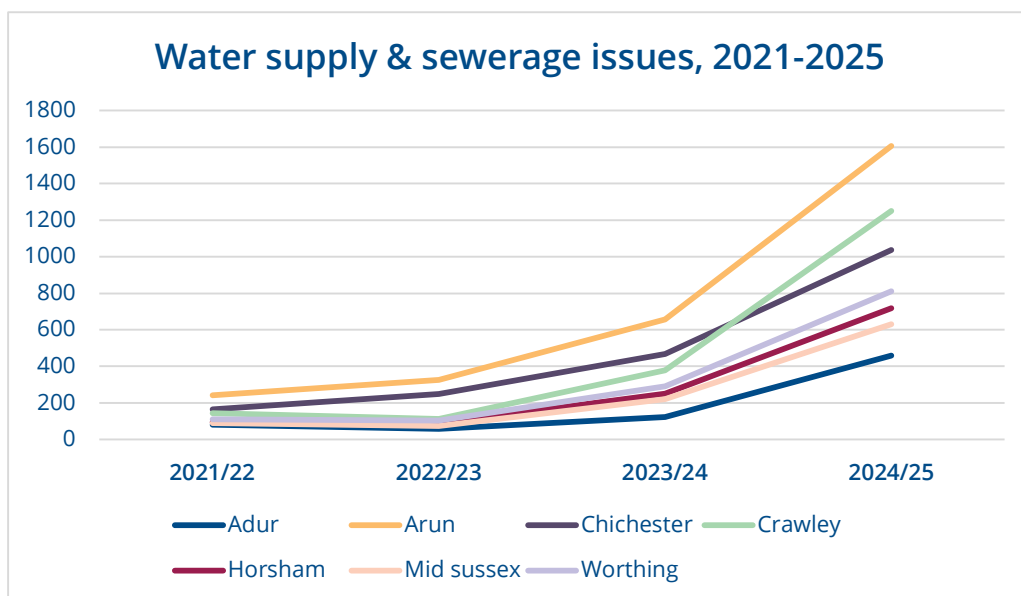
Water costs

Since privatisation in 1989 the price of water and sewerage services has increased by more than 40%¹⁰. Citizens Advice continues to hear clients' stories of the rising water costs affecting their budgets and many unable to pay.

Recent changes to water bills have led to an average increase of 26%, meaning a household must 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 as bills increased by 47%, the highest of any British supplier¹¹.

¹⁰ <https://fullfact.org/economy/water-bills-privatisation/>

¹¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4gl220ek40o>



In 2024/25, 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 also significant. Individuals living in poverty often face poor physical and mental health outcomes due to a combination of factors- inadequate nutrition, limited access to health care and higher levels of stress. Poor housing conditions, such as mould and damp can 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 areas¹².**

Wider, social determinants including education, employment, environment, housing, have a substantial impact on health.

Clients of Citizens Advice can share information relating to health conditions or disability. When a client discloses a mental health condition, this may not refer to a formal diagnosis but rather poor mental wellbeing. According to the World Health Organisation¹³, 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. 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 in West Sussex, we supported 1,094 clients who are disabled and 6,976 clients who have a long-term health condition- this is over half of our clients where disability or a health condition was recorded (51%).

Looking at external data sources (StatXplore), in January 2025 there were 15,048 people claiming Personal Independence Payment with a psychiatric disorder recorded as their primary condition, in West Sussex. 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)¹⁴, they are significantly overrepresented among those seeking support for complex issues. **This highlights the disproportionate impact of poverty and related challenges on this group.**

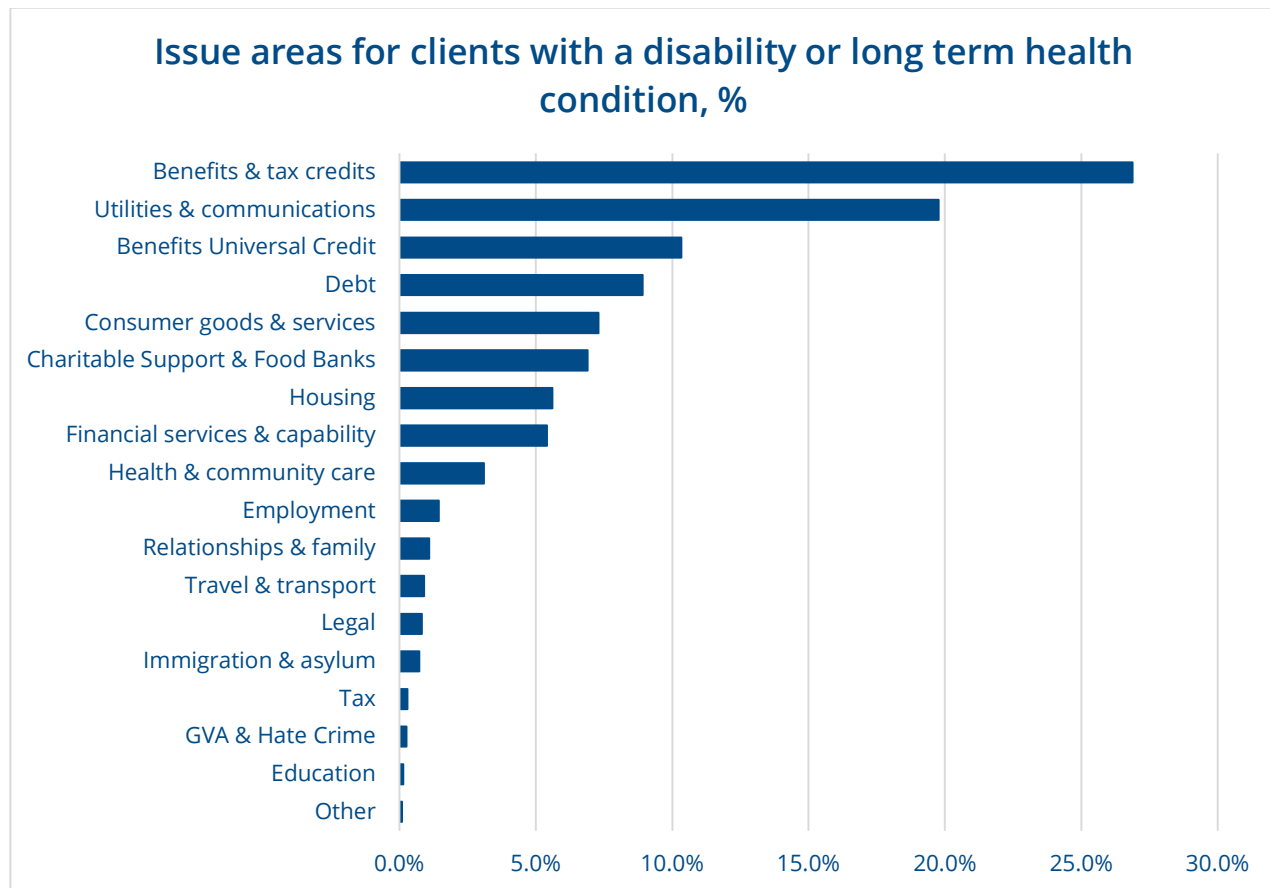
The graph below shows the percentage of clients with a disability or long-term health condition and the issue areas in which they required support. Out of 23,502 clients supported

¹² https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/assets/pdf/WS_JSNA_Summary_2024_2025.pdf

¹³ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>

¹⁴ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/explore-local-statistics/areas/E10000032-west-sussex>

in 2024 within West Sussex, 7,894 clients were not disabled or reported no health condition, and 7,538 clients were not recorded.



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

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, we 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%).

For one client, who received support from Citizens Advice, they had reached a point of being **hospitalised due to their poor housing conditions** and the effect this had on their health. The client stated their property was infested with mould and the soft furnishings were damp. The client reported the issue to their housing association and is currently being supported with the issues but due to large debts accumulating from high bills, the property remains underheated and the client is pushed further into poverty with visits from the bailiffs adding to their stress.

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

Mental health is also 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.** Moreover, the Mental Health and Money Policy Institute found that nearly 1 in 5 (18%) people with mental health problems are in problem debt¹⁵. These trends are often described as a never-ending cycle (see diagram below).

¹⁵ <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 anxiety¹⁶.

In 2022/23, there were 120,000 (1 in 6) people living in West Sussex with a common mental health condition/ disorder and 24% of the population self-report high anxiety this is slightly higher than England (23.3%). There were 9,050 people with severe mental illness on GP registers, a 5% increase, notably, this is higher than the population growth. Over 102,000 people with depression, an increase on the previous year of 4,800¹⁷.

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

West Sussex has high rates, and is above England average, of hospital admissions for intentional self-harm and rising suicide rate¹⁸.

The data below, shows the data held on GP records for West Sussex, compared with the South East and England¹⁹.

¹⁶ <https://www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/2022/8-september-cost-of-living-crisis-survey-shows-impact-on-mental-health/>

¹⁷ https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/assets/core/Overall_Exec_Summary_West_Sussex_Public_Mental_Health_Needs_Assessment_2024_FINAL.pdf

¹⁸ <https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/reports/subject-specific-needs-assessments/suicide-prevention/>

¹⁹ <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/health-profiles/data#page/1/ati/302/are/E10000032>

	Period	West Sussex			South East	England
		Recent trend	Count	Value	Value	Value
Estimated number of children and young people with mental disorders (aged 5 to 17)	2017/18	-	-	15,343	-	-
Estimates prevalence of common mental disorders: aged 65 and over	2017	-	17,879	9.30%	9.2%	10.2%
Estimated prevalence of common mental disorders: aged 16 and over	2017	-	100,757	14.40%	14.8%	1695.0%
Depression: QOF prevalence - retired after 22/23	2022/23	up	102,436	13.60%	13.8%	13.2%
Depression: QOF incidence - new diagnosis (18+ years)	2023/24	down	9,710	1.30%	1.6%	1.5%
Mental health: QOF prevalence (All ages)	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. 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”²⁰**.

Health, Economic Participation and Prosperity

Health inequalities are both a consequence and a driver of poverty. Poor physical and mental health can limit an individual's ability to access, sustain and progress in employment, while financial hardship can worsen existing health conditions and create new challenges. As a result, poverty and poor health often reinforce one another, creating a cycle that is difficult to break.

The impact extends beyond individual wellbeing. Health inequalities reduce economic participation, labour market engagement and long-term productivity by preventing people from fully contributing to the local economy. People experiencing poor health are more likely to leave employment, reduce their working hours, experience periods of economic inactivity or face barriers to accessing training and development opportunities²¹. This can limit household income, increase financial insecurity and reduce opportunities for social mobility.

The evidence throughout this report demonstrates the importance of a healthy workforce to the future prosperity of Sussex. Good health enables people to participate in education,

²⁰ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/stigma-power-and-poverty/poverty-stigma-a-glue-that-holds-poverty-in-place>

²¹ <https://www.health.org.uk/resources-and-toolkits/data-tools/evidence-hub/relationship-between-employment-and-health>

develop skills, access employment and remain economically active throughout their working lives. Conversely, poor health can restrict workforce participation, contribute to skills shortages and place additional pressure on public services and employers.

Many of the drivers of poor health are closely connected to the wider determinants of poverty, including poor housing conditions, deprivation, fuel poverty, financial stress, food insecurity and limited access to opportunities. Addressing these factors through preventative intervention can improve outcomes for individuals while reducing future demand on health and public services. Investing early to support financial resilience, healthy homes, good work and access to advice can help prevent problems from escalating into crisis.

Health and prosperity are intrinsically linked. Communities experiencing poorer health outcomes are less likely to benefit from economic growth and are at greater risk of unemployment, low pay and economic inactivity. Improving health outcomes is therefore not only a public health objective but also an economic one.

A place-based and preventative approach that recognises the relationship between poverty, health and opportunity will be essential to reducing inequalities across West Sussex. By improving health outcomes and tackling the underlying causes of disadvantage, partners can help create a healthier, more resilient workforce while supporting wider ambitions for inclusive growth, community resilience and long-term prosperity.

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 in towns and rural villages. **Many individuals in West Sussex are caught in low-wage, part-time or seasonal employment;** leading to financial insecurity, even for those who are employed. The lack of stable, well-paying jobs limits the ability of people to escape poverty and increases reliance on social welfare which can create a cycle of deprivation that is difficult to break.

Earnings by Place of residence (2024) for full time workers	Gross weekly pay (£s)	Hourly pay-excluding overtime
Adur	627.1	17.43
Arun	695.7	17.64
Chichester	650.1	16.81
Crawley	734.6	18.57
Horsham	821.8	21.55
Mid Sussex	793.5	20.88
Worthing	734.4	19.00

Claimant count (Feb 2025)	% of working age population
Adur	3%
Arun	4%
Chichester	4%
Crawley	4%
Horsham	2%
Mid Sussex	2%
Worthing	3%

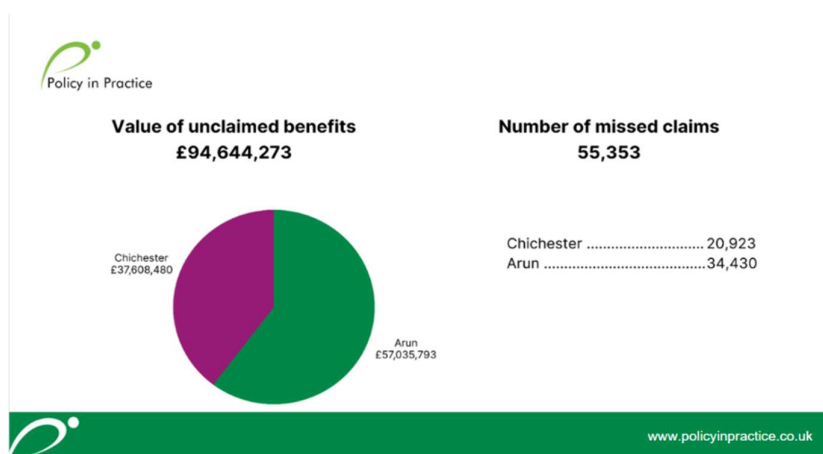
Low incomes can restrict the ability to manage life responsibilities. Income is not keeping pace with the rising cost of living which is making it more difficult for people to keep up to date with bills, let alone afford basic essentials, such as food, health and hygiene products.

	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 year²². **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- including these elements pushes the figure to 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.

²² <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			



www.policyinpractice.co.uk

£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?

	Adur	Arun	Chichester	Crawley	Horsham	Mid Sussex	Worthing	Grand Total
Discrimination			4	7	4	4	3	22
Initial claim	33	130	88	91	95	70	80	587
Income Support	1	5	4	9	2	9	2	32
Standard element	4	25	21	21	13	12	12	108
Housing element	15	35	38	30	37	31	28	214
Pension Credit	39	91	54	32	118	38	46	418
Limited capability for work elements	22	75	37	32	39	28	38	271
Child elements	1	10	5	9	15	5	7	52

Social Fund Loans-Budgeting	1	1			1		1	4
Childcare costs	2	2	7	5	5	5	2	28
Carer elements	8	7	5	6	6	2	3	37
Housing Benefit	20	56	42	47	57	28	49	299
Calculation of income, earnings and capital	18	59	29	55	46	36	28	271
Child Benefit	4	26	17	25	15	13	10	110
Conditionality and Commitment (including sanctions)	4	19	6	14	4	7	5	59
Working & Child Tax Credits	1	9	5	5	4	5	5	34
Deductions	7	16	18	20	15	13	19	108
Jobseekers Allowance	7	19	17	6	13	7	5	74
Discrimination					1		2	3
National Insurance	2	12	10	2	8	3	4	41
Post Initial Claim	5	9	3	9	8	5	4	43
State Retirement Pension	15	45	17	12	35	30	12	166
Managed migration	10	16	13	11	19	10	7	86
Disability Living Allowance	12	23	16	26	27	21	10	135
Moving from legacy benefits (not managed migration)		3		1	5	2	4	15
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
Grand Total	906	2938	1934	1918	1756	1388	1642	12482

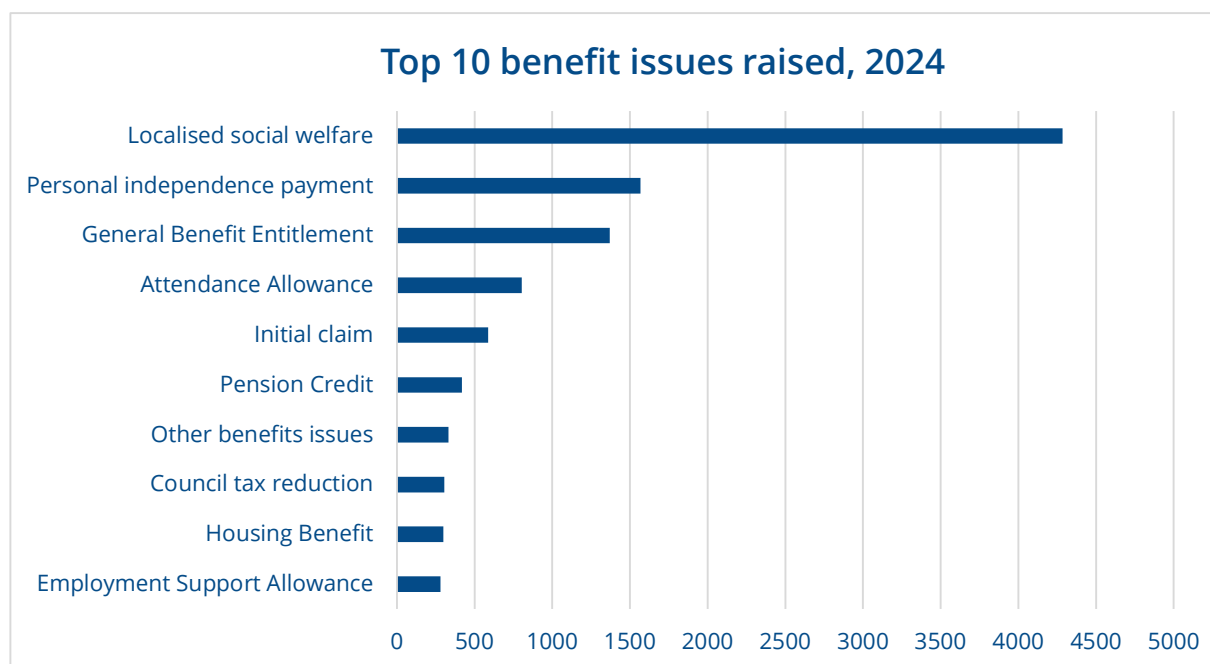
Not everyone who requires financial assistance is able to access the current benefit system or the support available, due to current eligibility criteria. Those under 35 years of age are affected by the Shared Accommodation Rate and larger families are capped with the two-child limit. Our client stories 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. The Local Housing Allowance rate is falling further behind local rent prices following the rent increases.

Moreover, our evidence 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 a “managed payment” 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- the client cannot afford food 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 this. 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 on the day 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 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.

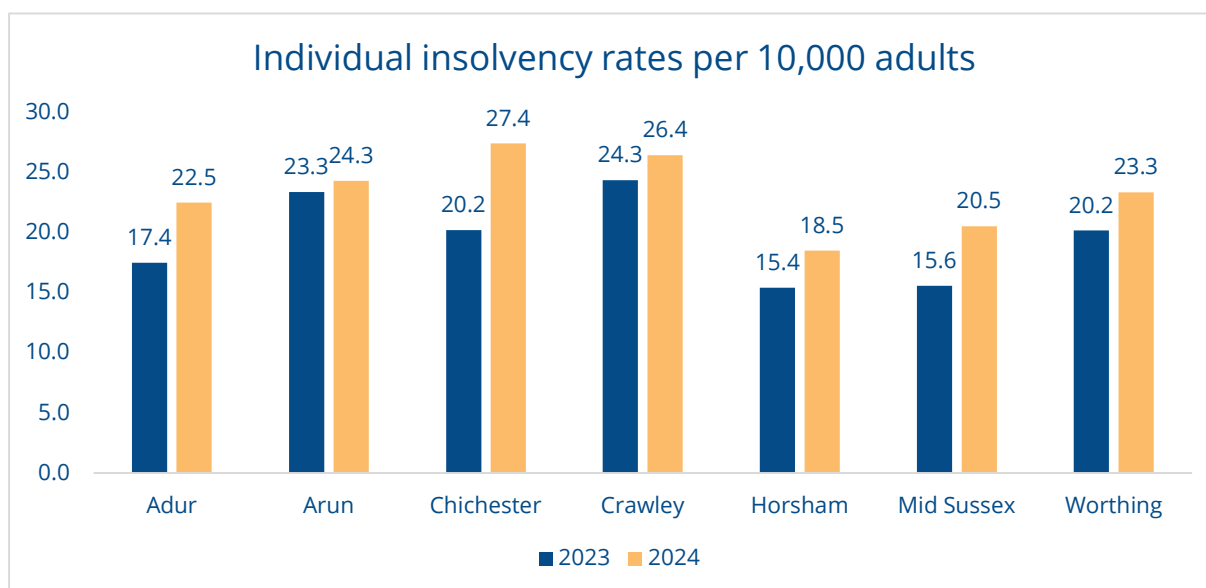
For one client, who contacted us for support with Pension Credit after the government announced the changes to the eligibility criteria. They were only entitled to £6. However, in claiming this entitlement, it meant they were able to receive £150 Warm Home Discount. A substantial amount of money that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

Clients supported with debt issues

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Adur	30	21	21	21	23	24	25	23	26	27	37	17	295
Arun	70	75	10	103	79	68	103	95	101	78	83	74	939
Chichester	71	60	64	76	72	69	75	59	62	61	73	48	790
Crawley	51	51	65	63	80	67	76	69	72	80	74	66	814
Horsham	56	62	68	54	65	56	69	53	46	59	55	47	690
Mid Sussex	47	43	44	56	55	40	52	50	42	42	51	44	566
Worthing	42	36	40	37	42	39	33	47	45	47	42	28	478
Total	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 have increased when compared to 2023.



The data from The Insolvency Service shows that individual insolvencies have fluctuated over the years, often correlating with the broader economic conditions. For example, periods of high inflation and stagnant wages leading to higher insolvency rates as individuals struggle to manage their debts. Each district saw a notable increase when compared with the previous year²³.

A client who was already in debt, has a neurological disorder and struggles with social interactions was sanctioned by the DWP for not attending face to face appointments despite telling both the DWP and Job Centre. They were also offered no alternative methods of communication.

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

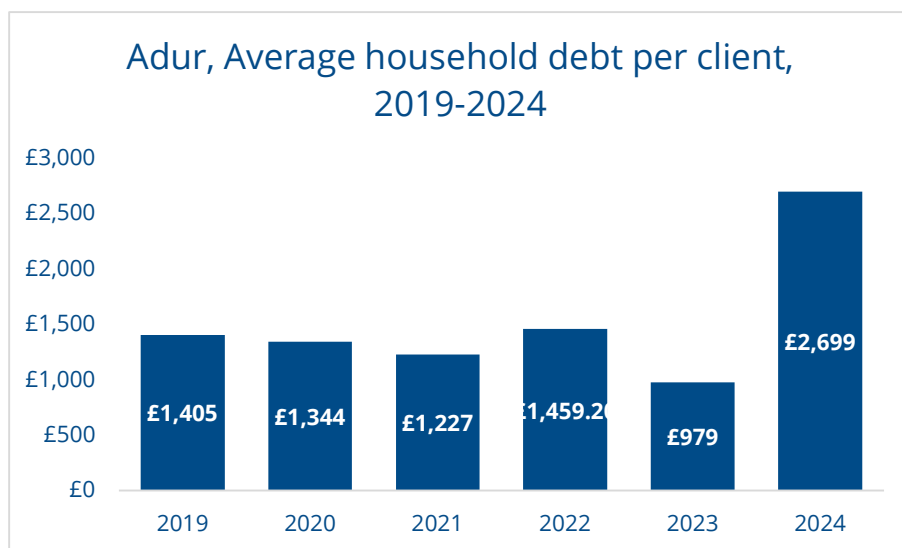
²³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/individual-insolvency-statistics-releases>

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

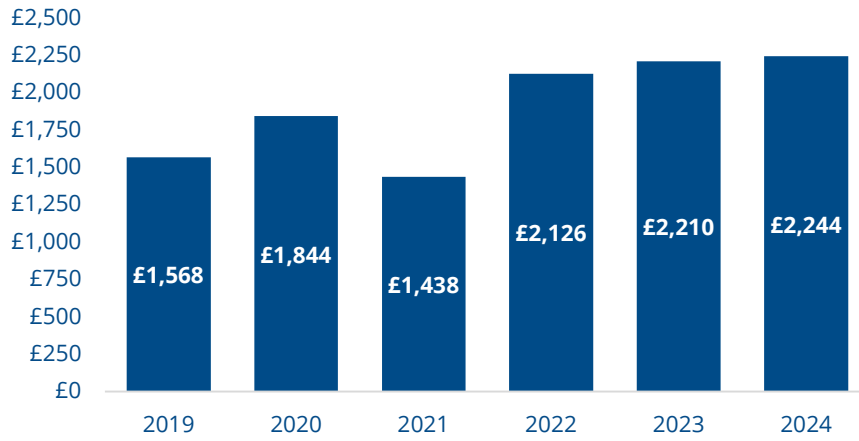
An increase is evident in most local authorities during 2020, coinciding with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, a period marked by widespread job losses and reductions in household income. Despite government intervention and financial support measures, many individuals experienced a drop in income,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

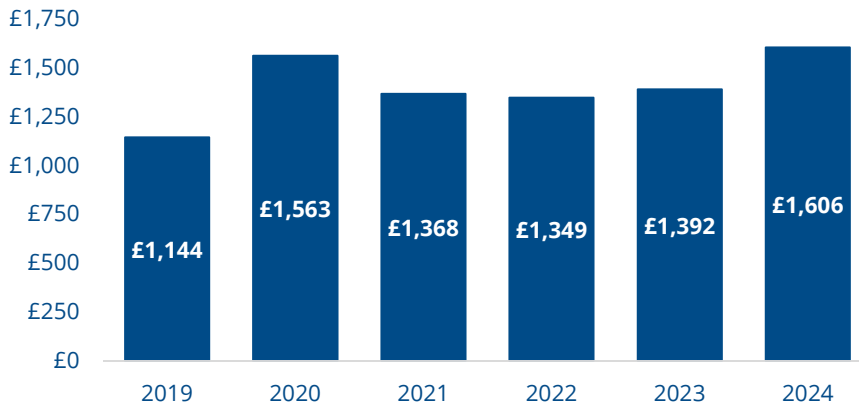
**For this report, household bill debts include energy, water, council tax, rent, telecoms, and debt to central Government for Universal Credit advances or benefit overpayments.*



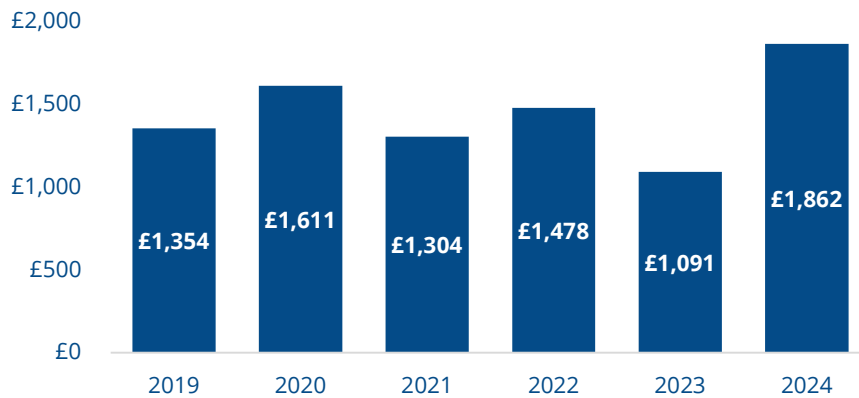
Arun, Average household debt per client,
2019-2024

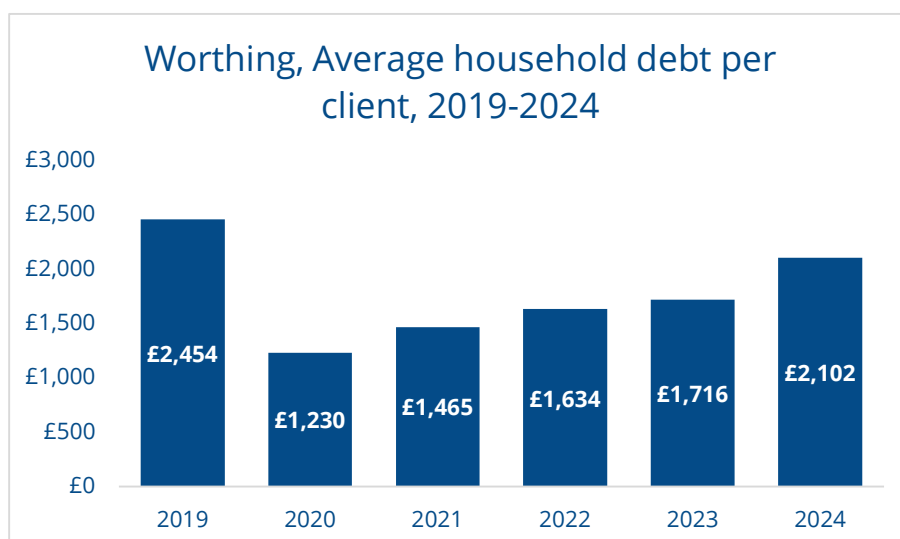
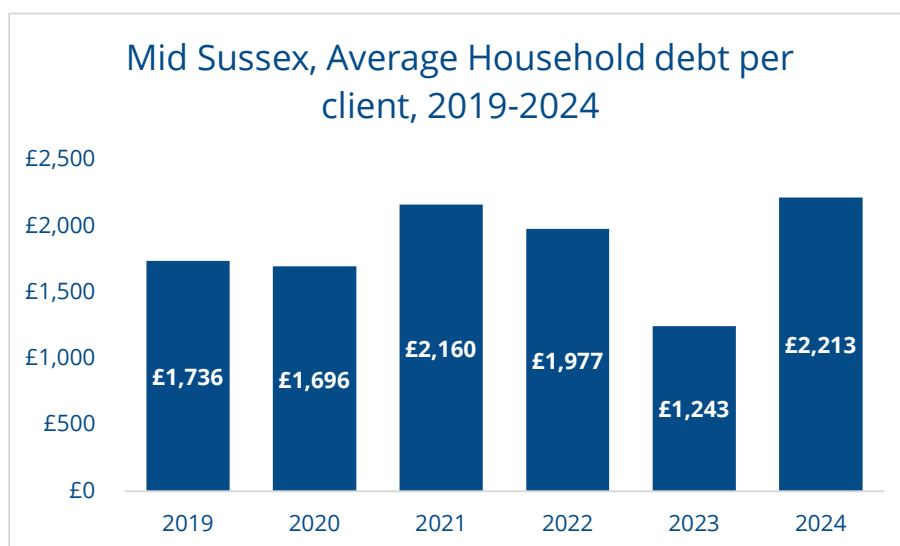
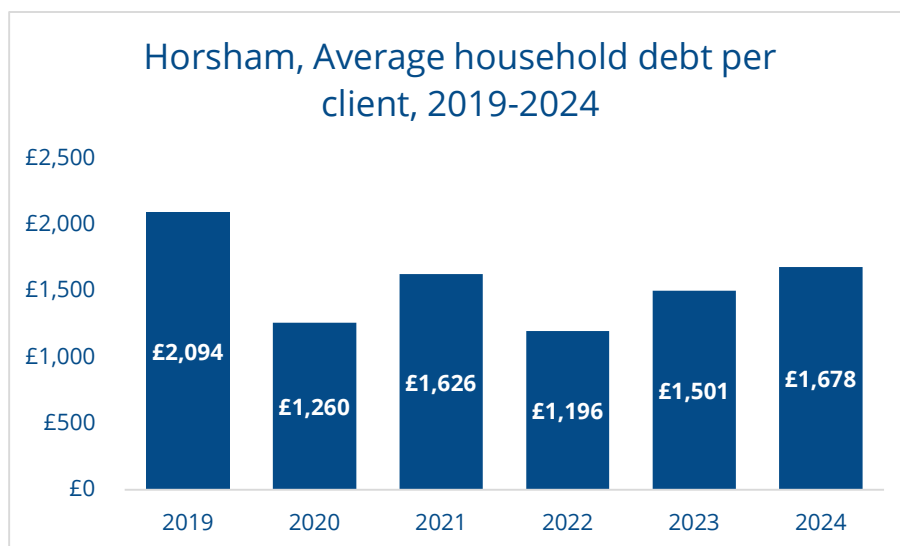


Chichester, Average household debt per
client, 2019-2024



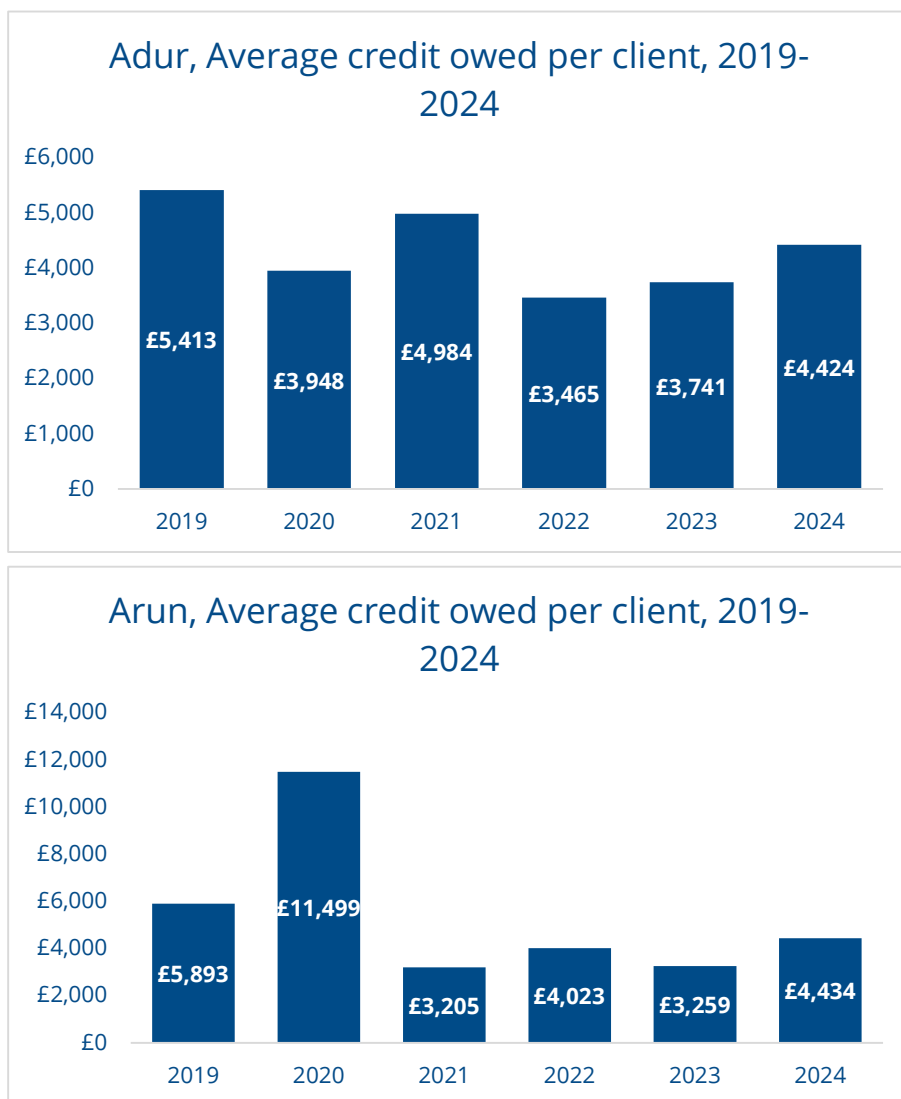
Crawley, Average household debt per
client, 2019-2024



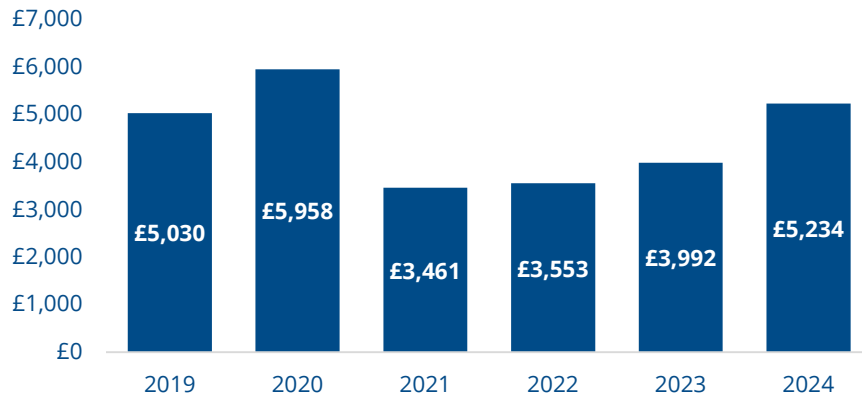


Credit levels

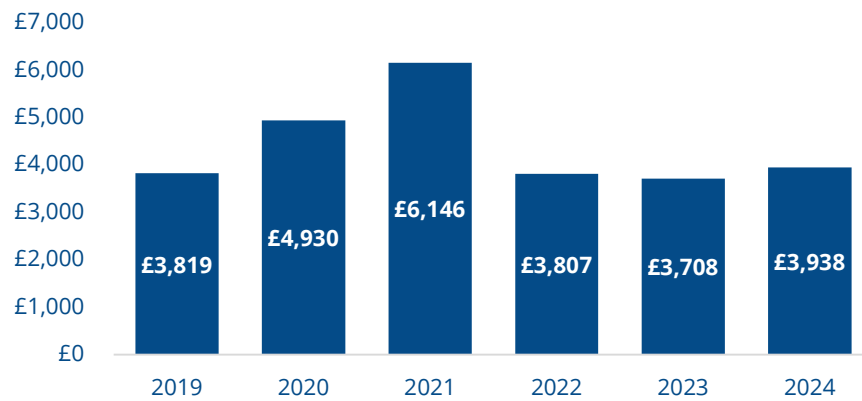
Many households turned to credit to manage everyday expenses, particularly during periods of economic uncertainty and inflation. The growing reliance on credit has had serious implications for poverty levels. As more individuals struggle to repay loans and manage rising interest payments, they face reduced 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*



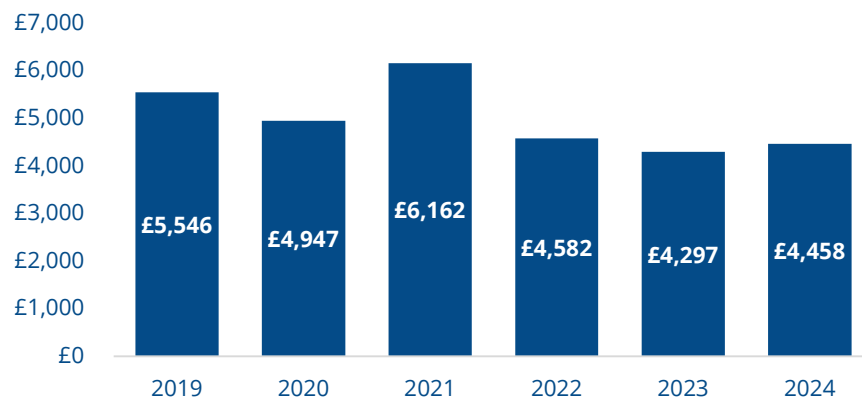
Chichester, Average credit owed per client,
2019-2024



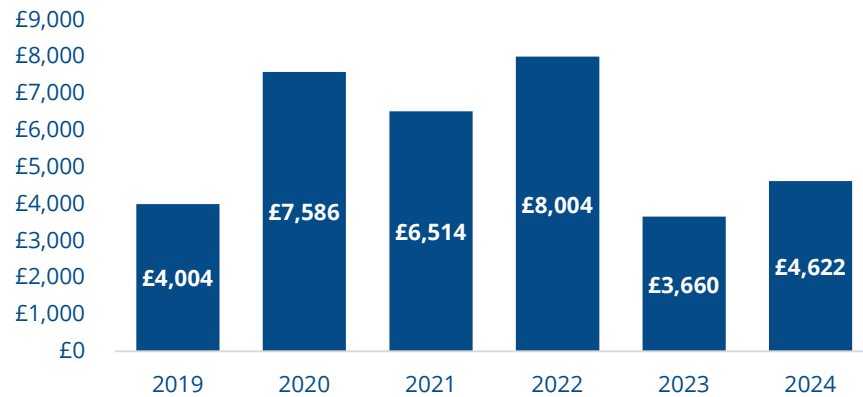
Crawley, Average credit owed per client,
2019-2024



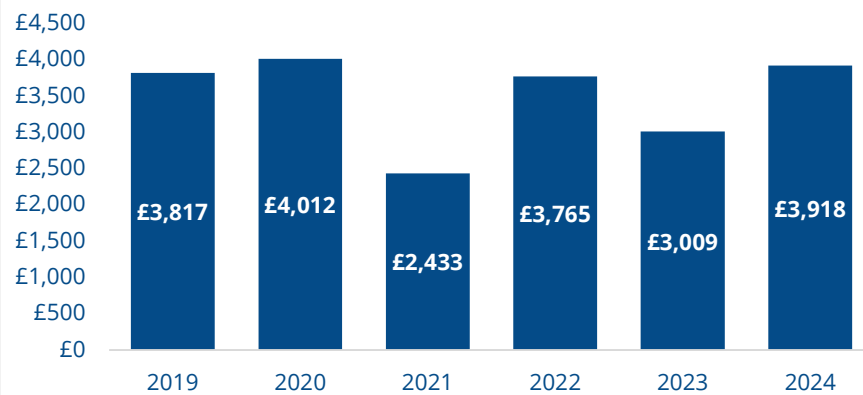
Horsham, Average credit owed per client,
2019-2024



Mid Sussex, Average credit owed per client,
2019-2024



Worthing, Average credit owed per client,
2019-2024



Skills, Employability and Economic Participation

Skills and employment are among the strongest determinants of financial resilience, long-term prosperity and social mobility²⁴. While employment remains the primary route out of poverty for many households, employment alone does not guarantee financial security.

Across West Sussex, many residents are employed in low-paid, insecure, seasonal or part-time work, particularly in coastal communities where deprivation remains concentrated. Others face barriers to work resulting from poor health, disability, caring responsibilities, housing insecurity or digital exclusion.

Educational attainment gaps, child poverty and increasing numbers of young people not in education, employment or training risk creating a pipeline of future disadvantage. Residents lacking formal qualifications or essential skills may find themselves excluded from emerging opportunities in a rapidly changing labour market.

Low skills and limited access to employment opportunities create a cycle that reinforces poverty. Individuals with poor financial resilience are more likely to:

- Experience periods of unemployment or economic inactivity
- Be employed in low-wage sectors
- Have limited career progression opportunities
- Experience greater financial shocks and debt
- Report poorer physical and mental health outcomes
- Require increased support from public services

These challenges extend beyond individuals and households. Workforce inactivity, skills shortages and underemployment affect productivity, business growth and the ability of communities to fully contribute to local prosperity. They are particularly significant in coastal and rural communities where access to services, training and employment opportunities can be more limited.

Building Prosperity Through Financial Resilience

Financial resilience is an enabler of economic participation. Individuals who can manage financial shocks, access appropriate support and make informed financial decisions are better placed to sustain employment, pursue training opportunities and invest in their future.

Building financial resilience supports employability by:

²⁴ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7af23c40f0b66a2fc03f13/bis-10-1273-skills-for-sustainable-growth-strategy-summary.pdf>

- Reducing the impact of problem debt and financial crisis.
- Supporting people to remain in work during periods of hardship.
- Increasing confidence and capability to engage with training and employment opportunities.
- Improving digital inclusion and access to online employment services.
- Supporting benefit maximisation and income stability during transitions into work.
- Strengthening mental wellbeing and reducing financial stress.
- Enabling households to plan for the future rather than focus solely on immediate survival.

Opportunities for Action

A prosperity-focused approach should include:

- Integrated financial resilience and employability programmes.
- Skills development linked to local labour market demand.
- Enhanced support for economically inactive residents.
- Targeted interventions in coastal and deprived communities.
- Digital inclusion initiatives that improve access to employment and training.
- Stronger collaboration between local authorities, employers, education providers and voluntary sector organisations.
- Early intervention support for young people at risk of economic exclusion.
- Pathways into good-quality, sustainable employment.

By connecting financial resilience with workforce development and skills investment, more residents can be supported into good work, reduce inequalities and strengthen the foundations for inclusive and sustainable economic growth

Financial Resilience as an Enabler of Employability

Financial resilience is often viewed as an outcome of employment. However, it is equally an enabler of employment.

Individuals experiencing financial crisis frequently struggle to:

- Sustain employment.
- Attend training.
- Access transport.
- Afford childcare.

- Maintain digital connectivity.
- Invest in career progression.

Debt, fuel poverty, housing insecurity and poor mental health can all act as barriers to labour market participation. Evidence throughout this report demonstrates that these challenges rarely occur in isolation.

Food poverty

We are witnessing food insecurity at a level never seen before by this generation.

Levels of local food insecurity

According to the University of Sheffield's research into local food insecurity of adults (Jan 2021)²⁵, in Chichester:

- 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

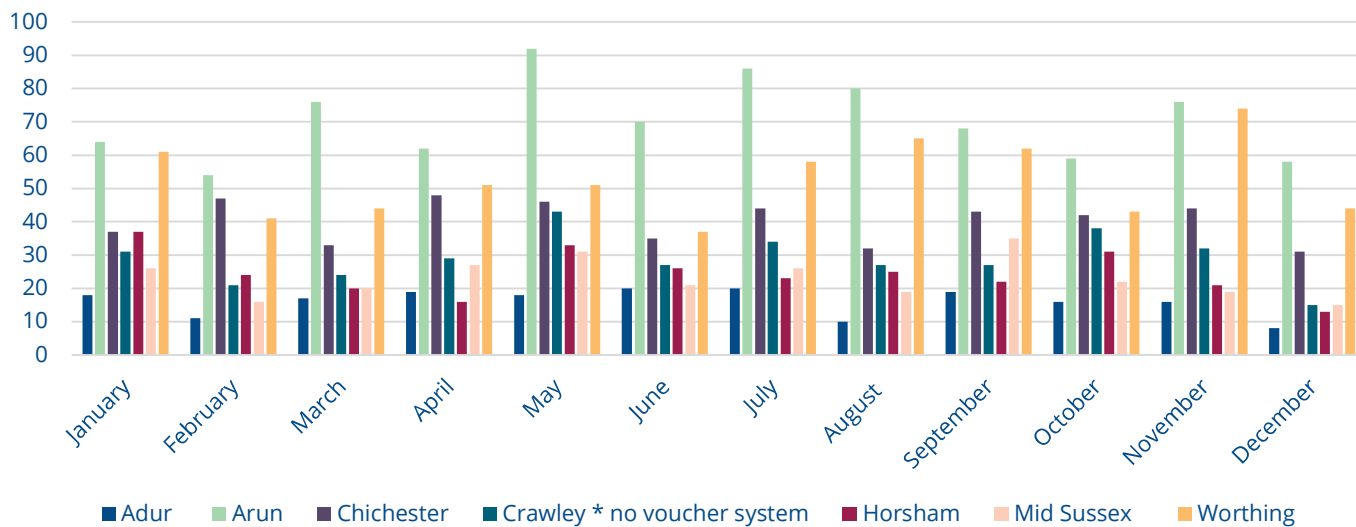
Food prices have been rising since the second half of 2021. Food and non-alcoholic drink prices were 19.1% higher in the 12 months to March 2023, the highest since 1977. In July 2024, food inflation was 1.5%, but the long period of high food inflation affected households. In July 2024, 45% of adults in Great Britain reported an increase in their cost of living compared with the month before according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS)²⁶. Of these, 92% saw the price of their food shopping go up, and 37% had started spending less on essentials, including food. The rising cost of living is increasing household food insecurity. A YouGov survey by the Food Foundation, found that **in June and July 2024, 13.6% of households in the UK were 'food insecure' (ate less or went a day without eating because they couldn't access or afford food)**. More than 655,000 people used a Trussell Trust food bank for the first time in 2023/24, in addition to the more than 760,000 first time users in 2022/23.

²⁵ <https://feedingbritain.org/location/arun-and-chichester/#:~:text=Levels%20of%20local%20food%20insecurity,about%20not%20having%20enough%20food>

²⁶ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/publicopinionsandsocialtrends/greatbritain/july2024>

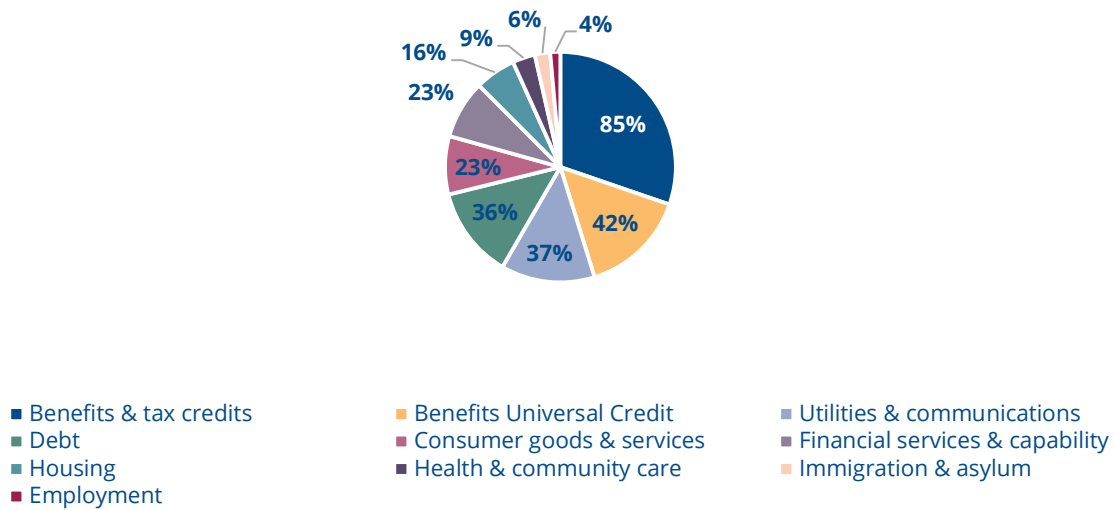
Number of residents given a voucher and recorded on the system- 2024	Adur	Arun	Chichester	Crawley * no voucher system	Horsham	Mid Sussex	Worthing	Total
January	18	64	37	31	37	26	61	274
February	11	54	47	21	24	16	41	214
March	17	76	33	24	20	20	44	234
April	19	62	48	29	16	27	51	252
May	18	92	46	43	33	31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

Count of food bank issues, 2024



A significant proportion of food bank clients are in receipt of benefits, which shows 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.

Clients supported with food banks & charitable support were also supported with



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 pupils²⁷. 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 for free school meals achieve lower GCSE attainment than other pupils. This is based on achieving a “standard pass” in English and maths GCSE. 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 not eligible.

In 2022/23 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. The Department for Education state that **“on average, pupils eligible for FSMs achieve lower GCSE attainment than other pupils”**²⁸.

JSNA 2024/25²⁹ data provides a breakdown of pupils eligible for FSM at Key Stage 2 level:

Local Authority	Adur	Arun	Chichester	Crawley	Horsham	Mid Sussex	Worthing
% of pupils eligible	31.9%	36.9%	28.4%	42.8%	30.1%	33.6%	33.2%

²⁷ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2023-24>

²⁸ <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9209/CBP-9209.pdf>

²⁹ 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 states the average house prices in each district within West Sussex. Escalating housing costs contribute significantly to poverty by reducing affordability, limiting access to stable housing, and increasing the financial burden on low-income households.

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

Average weekly earnings play a critical role in determining housing affordability across West Sussex. While rental costs are high throughout the county, differences in earnings mean that the burden of housing costs varies considerably between districts. Areas with lower earnings, such as Adur (£627 per week) and Chichester (£650 per week), experience some of the greatest affordability pressures, with average rents consuming 48.3% and 44.1% of estimated monthly earnings respectively.

	Gross weekly pay (£)	Estimated monthly earnings (£) *	Average rent per district (£)	Rent as % of earnings
Adur	627.1	2717.43	1,315	48.3
Arun	695.7	3014.7	1,124	37.2
Chichester	650.1	2817.1	1,244	44.1
Crawley	734.6	3183.26	1,371	43
Horsham	821.8	3561.13	1,349	37.8
Mid Sussex	793.5	3438.5	1,316	38.2
Worthing	734.4	3182.4	1,255	39.4

*Monthly earnings were calculated by converting weekly earnings to monthly equivalent (weekly pay x 52 / 12).

In contrast, Horsham (£822 per week) and Mid Sussex (£794 per week) have some of the highest earnings in the county. However, these higher incomes are accompanied by high rental costs, with average rents of £1,349 and £1,316 per month respectively. As a result, rent still accounts for around 37.8% of earnings in Horsham and 38.2% in Mid Sussex. Crawley combines relatively high earnings (£735 per week) with the highest average rent in the county (£1,371 per month), meaning that housing costs absorb 43.0% of estimated monthly earnings. Meanwhile, Arun has more moderate rental costs (£1,124 per month), resulting in the lowest rent-to-income ratio among the districts examined (37.2%), despite average earnings being lower than in Horsham, Mid Sussex and Crawley. Worthing sits between these extremes, with average weekly earnings of £734 and rents of £1,255 per month, leaving households spending around 39.4% of estimated monthly earnings on rent.

Overall, the data suggests that higher earnings do not necessarily translate into greater housing affordability. In districts such as Horsham and Mid Sussex, stronger incomes help offset high housing costs, while in Adur, Chichester and Crawley, a combination of lower earnings relative to rents results in greater affordability pressures. Across all districts, rents consume between 37% and 48% of earnings, indicating that housing costs are likely to place significant financial strain on many households, particularly those on lower incomes or with insecure employment.

Housing is a key driver of poverty:

- High private rents relative to income
- Limited supply of affordable housing
- Rising homelessness
- Coastal areas see higher homelessness demand
- Temporary accommodation use remains high

Housing insecurity contributes to:

- financial instability
- poor health
- increased service demand

Despite variations in earnings and housing costs across West Sussex, homelessness remains a significant issue in every district. Between July and September 2024, over 1,100 households were assessed for homelessness assistance, with most found to be owed a statutory duty. The data demonstrates the scale of both threatened homelessness and homelessness already experienced, while also highlighting the links between housing insecurity, poor health, economic inactivity and family responsibilities.

	Statutory homeless duties owed, July to September 2024						
	Adur	Arun	Chichester	Crawley	Horsham	Mid Sussex	Worthing
Total households assessed	54	280	132	348	88	120	171
Total households assessed as owed a duty	53	252	125	278	87	113	166
Threatened with homelessness- Prevention duty owed	29	92	56	112	39	48	67
Of which: due to service of a valid Section 21 Notice	3	47	0	39	2	18	20
Homeless- Relief duty owed	24	160	69	166	48	65	99
Not threatened with homelessness within 56 days- no duty owed	1	20	5	21	0	4	5
Withdrew application before assessment- no duty owed	0	7	2	7	0	3	0
Not eligible / no longer eligible - no duty owed	0	1	0	42	1	0	0
% of households with history of mental health	43.4%	27.0%	38.4%	20.9%	14.9%	32.7%	36.7%
% of households with physical ill health and disability	30.2%	23.0%	26.4%	16.5%	12.6%	19.5%	25.9%
Employment status of main applicants owed a duty (Top 3, most common being first and least written last)	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%)
Households with children							
Prevention duty owed	11	42	19	66	15	24	29
Relief duty owed	3	51	18	74	6	19	14

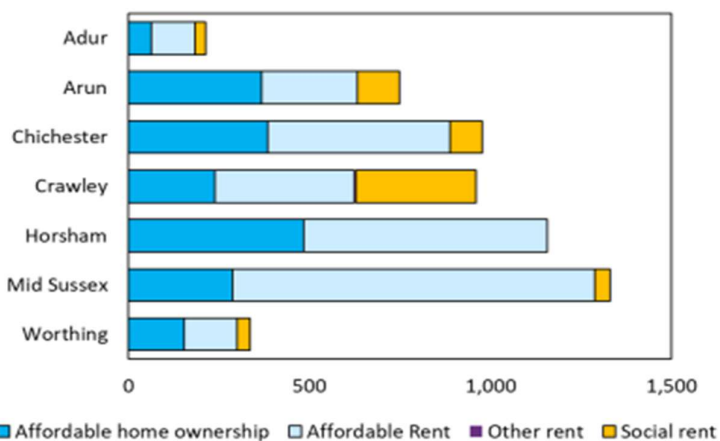
Crawley had the highest number of households assessed to be owed a duty, closely followed by Arun.

In 2022/23 there was an additional 1,319 affordable homes built or acquired in West Sussex³⁰, of these 406 were for home ownership schemes. 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	585
2013/14	1	110	127	81	292	138	11	760
2014/15	35	330	297	106	159	229	72	1,228
2015/16	5	48	98	112	167	79	12	521
2016/17	0	103	135	249	120	82	56	745
2017/18	36	183	154	172	378	178	27	1,128
2018/19	100	98	137	172	553	73	105	1,238
2019/20	30	107	179	200	274	139	141	1,070
2020/21	24	204	113	172	233	197	25	968
2021/22	50	131	159	292	87	398	11	1128
2022/23	10	208	390	125	9	524	53	1,319

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,

³⁰ https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/assets/pdf/WS_ISNA_Summary_2024_2025.pdf

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 knowing. 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 2022/23 there were 1,342 households in temporary accommodation³¹. Worthing and Crawley had the highest rates, both of which were significantly higher than England, followed by Arun. By December 2023, this figure had reached 1,463. 690 households had children with a total of 1,390 children living in temporary accommodation. Worthing and Adur have seen the highest increase from 2019/20 to 2022/23 in temporary accommodation rates with 196% increase 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 responsibilities means they miss out on support. For instance, some clients have refused accommodation on the basis it does not suit their needs without realising that this means the council no longer has a duty to house them.

Unstable or insecure housing can also compound people's livelihoods. Several clients have been placed in out of area accommodation which has led to social isolation, increased

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

transport costs for school or work and disruption to children's academic and social lives.

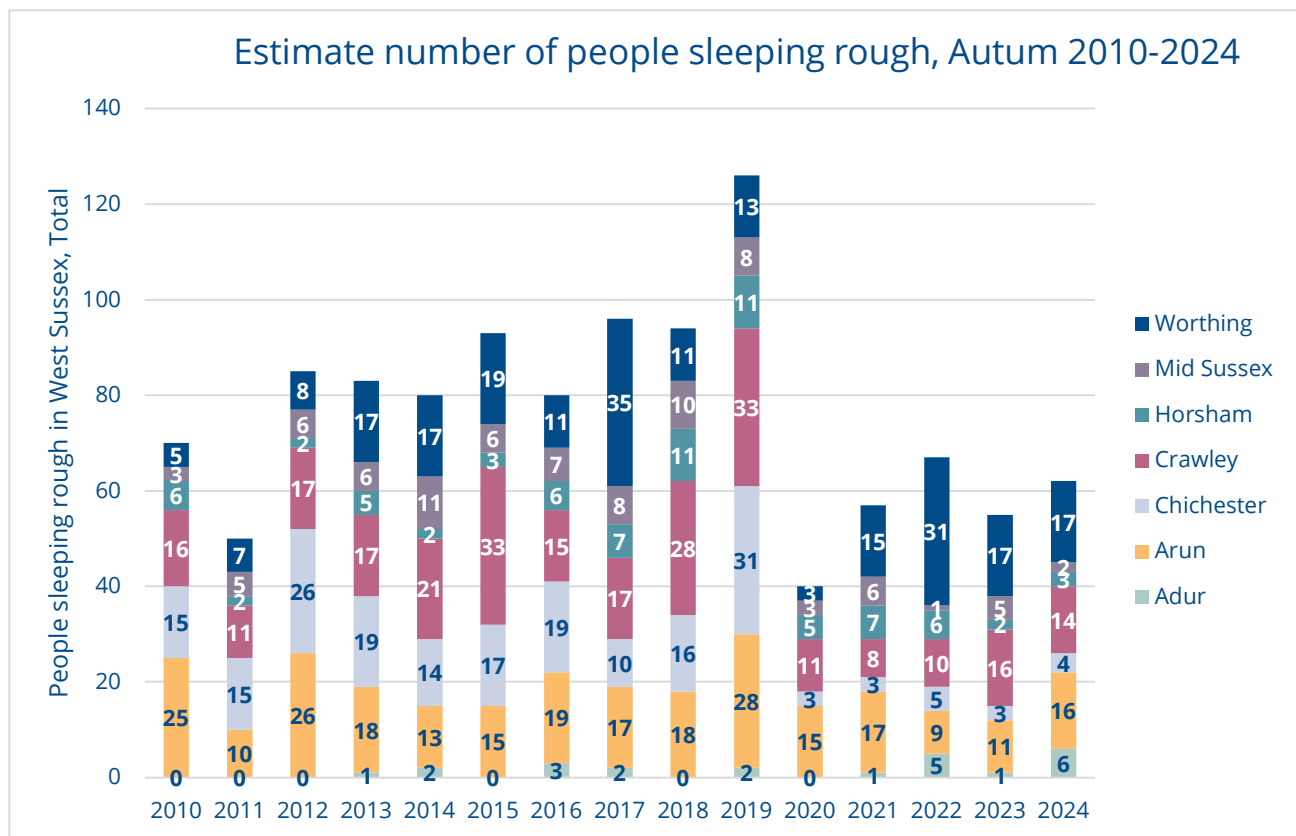
Moreover, there are reports of antisocial behaviour, including drug and alcohol issues that lead clients to feel unsafe and lack a sense of belonging.

³¹ <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>

Other issues surround the precarity of Section 21's which allows landlords to evict tenants without needing to provide a reason. There are 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. Data released by gov.uk states that in 2024, there were 62 known rough sleepers in West Sussex with 17 people in Worthing and 16 in Arun³².

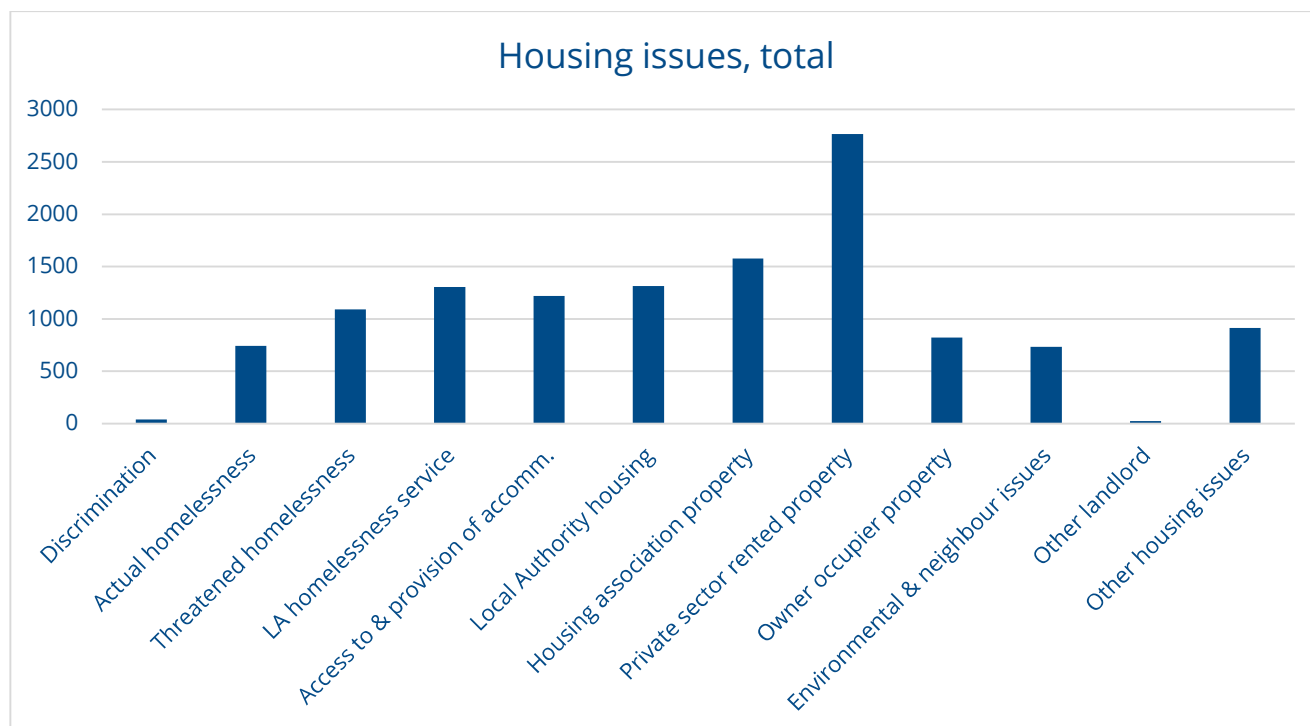
Several clients sleeping rough are disconnected and disengaged from society and support services. **A common feeling amongst these clients is hopelessness.**



³² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2024/rough-sleeping-snapshot-in-england-autumn-2024>

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

The rising cost of private rented sector housing has become a significant factor in the unequal distribution of income 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 PRS not only reflects existing income inequalities but actively reinforces 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 Bill³³ 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. 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.

Access to safe, affordable and suitable housing enables residents to participate fully in education, employment and community life, while supporting employers to attract and retain talent. Strategic investment in housing can help address affordability pressures, support workforce housing needs and create the foundations for housing-led growth. Beyond increasing housing supply, good housing contributes to effective place making by creating vibrant, connected and resilient neighbourhoods where people can thrive. Ensuring access to affordable homes is therefore essential to building thriving communities, strengthening economic participation and supporting long-term, inclusive prosperity across West Sussex.

³³ <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- that's 4% of the population and over 2 million households struggle to afford broadband³⁴.

In a recent study conducted by WPI Economics, commissioned by Trussell Trust and Good Things Foundation, they found "that digital exclusion is clearly related to income poverty and to risk factors of income poverty³⁵." 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 having no access at all to the internet was more prevalent amongst food bank users, at 16%, than the general population; 44% of those without any internet access and referred to food banks were severely socially isolated.
- 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 mostly a requirement. 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 of deep 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.

³⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-inclusion-action-plan-first-steps/digital-inclusion-action-plan-first-steps>

³⁵ <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/policy-and-research/research-and-evidence/research-2024/deep-poverty-and-digital-exclusion>

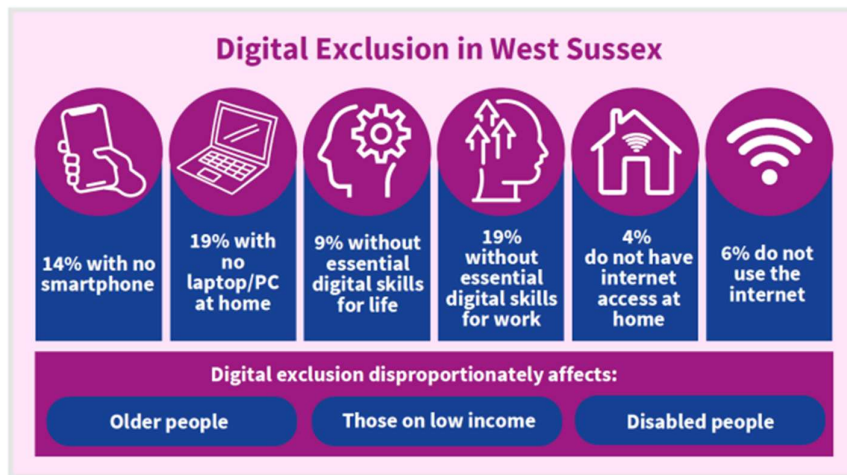
- Many people who can't afford to be online face a 'poverty premium' for goods and services.
- People with the least digital capabilities are nine times more likely to struggle immediately following a financial shock than those with the highest digital capabilities (27% vs. 3%).

IMPACTS OF DIGITAL EXCLUSION		
Income	Goods and Services	Housing
90% of jobs are only advertised on the internet. ¹⁸	Household with lower incomes spent about £478 ²⁰ a year more on mobile and broadband than those with higher incomes.	Estate agents advertise rental properties online, and require applications to be made via online portals.
16% of all DWP customers and 36% of pension credit customers reported being currently offline. ¹⁹	People with lowest digital capability are over 6 times more likely to struggle immediately following a financial shock. ²¹	Applying for a council or housing association property is primarily done online and can be difficult on some devices.

"Of the 4.1 million people living in deep poverty, 57% 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). This means 2.2 million people are living in both deep and persistent poverty. Those most likely to experience persistent and deep poverty are people who are either unemployed or work part-time, and also parents – 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 2024-2027³⁶, 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.

³⁶ https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/media/bysp0g13/digital_strategy.pdf



The framework suggests that cost of living pressures are pushing people on a low income further into digital exclusion not only highlighting the cost of devices to go online but as well as being able to afford internet costs (broadband or mobile data). Many items can be bought cheaper online, or it provides the ability to shop around.

Our data reflects a lot of the above findings. But problems for our 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 our service, they would be disconnected and trying to live without the correct levels of support in place. 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, we also have evidence to suggest that the system is not always responsive to user capability or need. **We have supported several clients who have been sanctioned by the DWP for failing to update or respond to their online journals despite being proactive and notifying them that their phone is broken or lost. This has also happened to clients who have asked for adjustments due to their autism, dyslexia or memory conditions.**

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 2 months of earnings in one assessment period and their claim was subsequently closed. This left the client with no income and in fuel poverty.

Digital exclusion is increasingly a barrier to skills development, employability, financial resilience and economic participation. In a labour market that is becoming ever more digital,

access to technology, connectivity and digital skills is essential for engaging with education, training, employment opportunities and public services. Without digital inclusion, many residents face significant barriers to accessing opportunity, whether applying for jobs, managing benefits, developing new skills or accessing financial services.

As employers continue to adapt to the needs of a modern workforce, digital capability is becoming a fundamental requirement for participation and progression. Addressing digital exclusion is therefore critical to improving financial resilience, supporting workforce development and ensuring that all residents can access the opportunities needed to contribute to and benefit from long-term economic prosperity.

Building Financial Resilience

Lacking long-term planning can contribute to poverty, particularly in situations where individuals and families struggle with immediate needs and lack the resources or stability to work towards 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 cycle of prioritising immediate physiological needs, like food, shelter, and basic necessities, leaving little time or resources for long-term planning like education, career development, or financial security, limiting personal growth and development. The constant pressure of managing immediate needs and the uncertainty of the future can take a toll on mental health and well-being, making it even harder to engage in long-term planning.

Limited opportunities, such as access to quality education, stable employment with a decent wage, or affordable housing, can make it difficult for individuals and families to envision a brighter future and plan for it effectively as individuals and families in poverty live day by day in a constant struggle for survival.

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.

Financial resilience is not simply about money management. It is a foundational component of economic participation, workforce development, community resilience and long-term prosperity. By embedding financial resilience within broader strategies relating to skills, housing, health and employment, West Sussex has an opportunity to reduce inequalities while supporting sustainable and inclusive growth. Investment in prevention, early intervention and collaborative partnerships will help ensure that all residents can contribute to and benefit from the future prosperity of Sussex and Brighton.

Resilience can be both an individual and communal characteristic. Improved resilience can act as a protection against poverty and destitution, by providing the tools that prevent people from falling into poverty to begin with.

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10A The Arcade, Belmont Street, Bognor Regis, PO21 1LH.

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