



June 2023

HIDDEN POVERTY SURVEY INSIGHTS



HorshamMatters
Meeting Needs and Improving Lives

ABOUT HORSHAM MATTERS

Horsham Matters is a charity whose aim is to deliver projects that provide practical support for residents of Horsham District experiencing hardship, as well as a range of holistic services to address the root causes of poverty.

SERVICES

We aim to relieve need through the provision of essential services:

- Network of Trussell Trust food banks, including our Mobile Hub on the Move
- Gas and electricity vouchers
- Household budget support including benefit advice
- Provision of essential household items
- Counselling for food bank clients
- Befriending programme



CONNECTING CAFE

Our Community Cafe opened in March 2022. The goal is for the community to enjoy a meal together, especially those that are unable to afford one. The cafe runs every Tuesday at St Andrews Church in Roffey from 11:30–1:30. Everyone is welcome.

LOVE IT AGAIN SHOP

Our high street store is located at 40 West Street in Horsham. We sell quality donated vintage and retro items, the funds from which help us to support those living in need. It also gives items destined for landfill another life.

FOODBANK

We run 17 food bank sessions a week from various locations, including our mobile hub, a food bank on wheels, which goes out to surrounding villages and rural areas. As demand increases for food, we have extended the hours at some of our food banks to accommodate need, as well as adding new sessions at St Marys Church Horsham, Kingdom Faith Church Horsham and Lifespring Church in Southwater, as well as a mobile hub session in Cowfold.

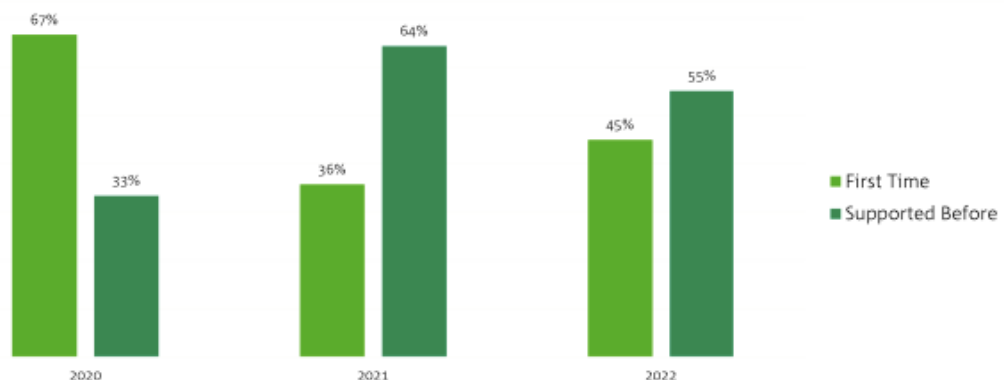
As a charity, we are being stretched to capacity to meet the demand for our services. Currently, demand is up by at least 60% from last year, as food donations have decreased by 30%-50%. We find that people who previously donated are no longer able to, or in some instances are now needing our support. This sharp increase in residents needing support is outstripping food donations. We are now needing to purchase food to top up basic food parcel items, as well as fresh fruit and vegetables.

Last calendar year, we provided 9,069 individual food parcels, with almost half of those given to children. We expect this year's numbers to be higher. In Q1 of 2023, we provided 2,366 individual food parcels, with 865 of these given for children. This is compared to 1,248 food parcels during the same period last year.

We continue to see an increase in new food bank users, residents who are on a low income, and with inflation at its highest since 1992*, they are struggling to make their money stretch far enough to cover the increase in their household bills. As the cost of energy, food, and other essentials keeps increasing, many residents are being pushed into making tough decisions: who to pay and who not to pay.

FIRST TIME USAGE

Percentage of people that have been supported before vs supported for the first time by calendar year.

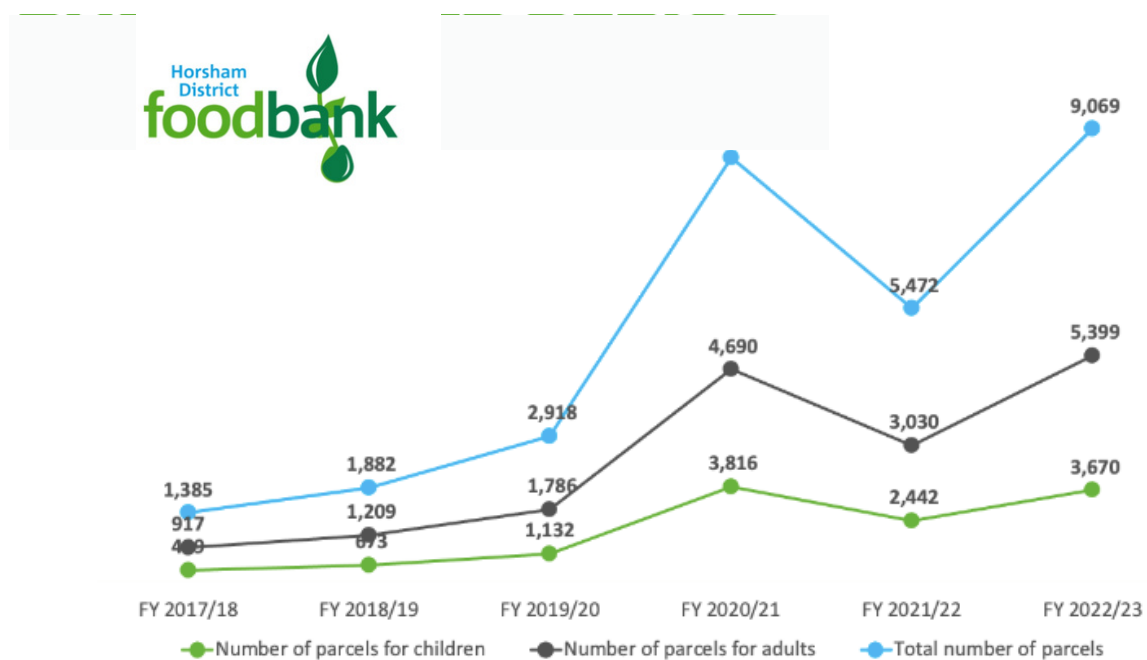


*AS OF MARCH, 2023

HIDDEN POVERTY SURVEY

Like food banks across the country, we have seen a huge increase in demand for our services (see chart below). Horsham District is considered an affluent area with pockets of deprivation, but the cost of living crisis is affecting residents from all walks of life. The aim of the survey was to identify the drivers of poverty and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis upon Horsham District residents. Our ambition was to capture as wide a reach as possible to include all demographics. So the team visited different groups across the district, including our food bank sessions and Connecting Cafe to chat with residents to fill out the survey, as well as the survey being available online.

The team spoke face to face with 120 residents and the remaining participants filled out the survey online. The survey consisted of approximately 89 questions and took about 15 minutes to complete. We had a total of 287 survey responses.



What is poverty?

The World Bank Organization describes poverty in this way:

“Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, it is fear for the future, living one day at a time.

Poverty has many faces, changing from place to place and across time, and has been described in many ways. Most often, poverty is a situation people want to escape. So poverty is a call to action -- for the poor and the wealthy alike -- a call to change the world so that many more may have enough to eat, adequate shelter, access to education and health, protection from violence, and a voice in what happens in their communities.”

SNAPSHOT

We asked participants if they are, or have ever, lived in poverty – 70% said no, with the remaining 30% saying yes. However, we feel that the number living in poverty is actually higher, as the definition of poverty for residents was borne through their own relative experiences relative to them. Food bank users said they did not live in poverty, with some stating "there are people worse off than me."

Of the 287 survey respondents, the average age was 52.

37% of respondents had children under 18. The average age of the children was 7 years old.

On ethnicity, 92% of respondents said they were white British, with 99% listing English as the primary language spoken at home. Less than 2% stated they spoke another primary language at home.

39% of respondents said they had someone at home with a disability. However, respondents seemed to think that 'disability' was only a physical disability. The legal definition of disability according to the General Medical Council is "*they have a physical or mental impairment, and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.*"

Further discussions brought to light that many participants have at least one person in the household dealing with varying degrees of mental health issues.

24% said they cared for someone who had a disability or health condition. Of these, 20% said it was an adult and 4% said it was a child. Of these respondents, 37% had children in the household.

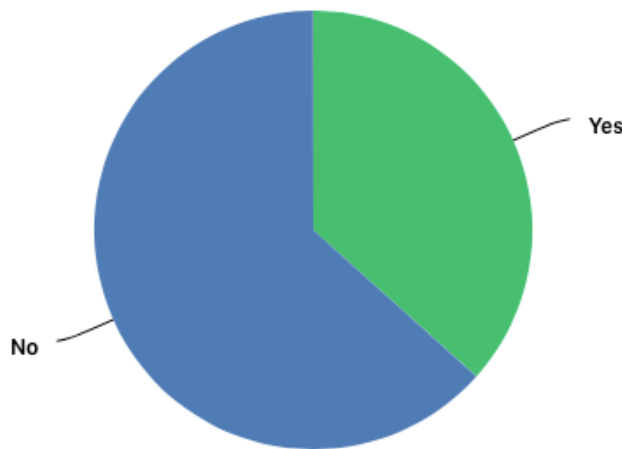
We asked respondents if they had a neighbour, friend or someone that they could rely on to help them.

78% of respondents said they did have family, friends or a neighbour. 22% said they did not have anyone.

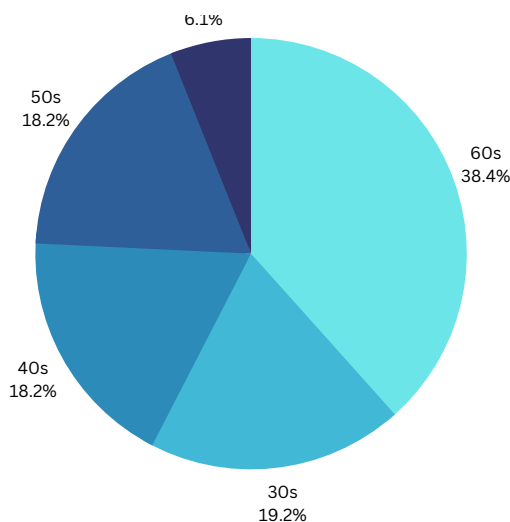
Those that didn't have anyone said they felt more isolated, especially those that lived in the surrounding villages.

6% of respondents said that they had extended family living with them. Of these, 6% were in their 30s, 25% in their 60s, 25% in their 70s, 31% in their 80s and 13% in their 90s. 44% of these stated that they felt isolated.

We asked if respondents had family living near them that they were in contact with. 70% said they did, with the remaining 30% saying they did not. Of those that said they did not have family living near them, 32% of them also said they did not have someone that they could ask for help.



Isolation was an issue with more than a third of residents (37%).



Ages of those that said they felt isolated.

Of those that said they felt isolated, 37% lived in central Horsham with the remaining 63% living in the surrounding villages, with the highest numbers coming from Henfield, Southwater, Broadbridge Heath, Storrington and Warnham.

50% of those that said they had no family living near them stated they felt isolated as well. Of those that said they felt isolated, 25% did not attend a community group or church.

Data by the Campaign to End Loneliness found that:

- Levels of loneliness across Britain have still not returned to pre-Covid levels
- Younger people (16-29 years) were more likely to report feeling lonely than older people.

Based upon the above, there may be a larger number of older people that may have been reticent to say they are lonely.

This data also reflects the multi-faceted factors that leave people feeling isolated.

With regards to housing, 40% said they lived in a town with the remaining 60% living in a surrounding village. Of those living in the surrounding villages, 40% were over the age of 60.

76% of respondents lived in a house, 15% lived in a flat, 6% lived in a bungalow, with 1% renting a room.

68% said they had a mortgage but some of these respondents had retired and had paid their mortgage off. 20% of respondents were in social housing and 12% were in private rental.

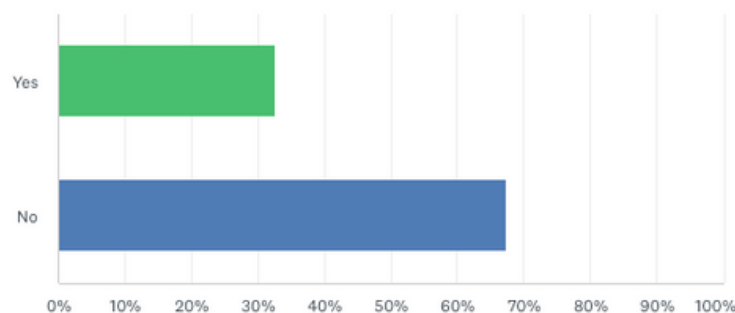
Over half of those in social housing were also employed, of whom a quarter lived in central Horsham.

- 31% were in their 50s and 29% were in their 40s
- 47% had children under 18 in the home
- the average age of the children was 9 years old

Of those in private rentals, almost 60% lived in the surrounding villages. 55% of these had children in the home, with the average age of the child being 6. We asked respondents if their current housing met their needs with 84% stating yes and 16% stating they needed more space.

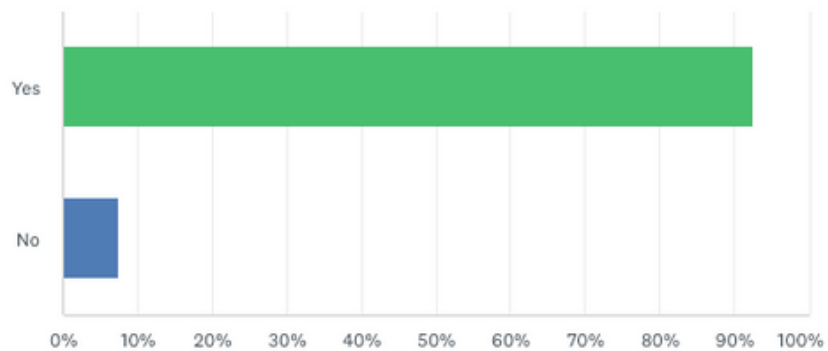
With regard to cost, 33% of respondents stated their rent or mortgage had increased in the past 6 months with 13% expecting their housing situation to change in the next 6 months. This increased to 20% expecting it to change in the next 12 months.

Have you seen a change in rent or mortgage in the past 6 months?



7% of respondents felt their housing was not secure for the next 6 months. This increased to 8% for the next 12 months.

Do you think your housing will be secure in the next 6 months?



Residents were worried about the increase in rent/mortgage, with a few stating they were dipping into their savings to cover the shortage or having to look for a better paying job.

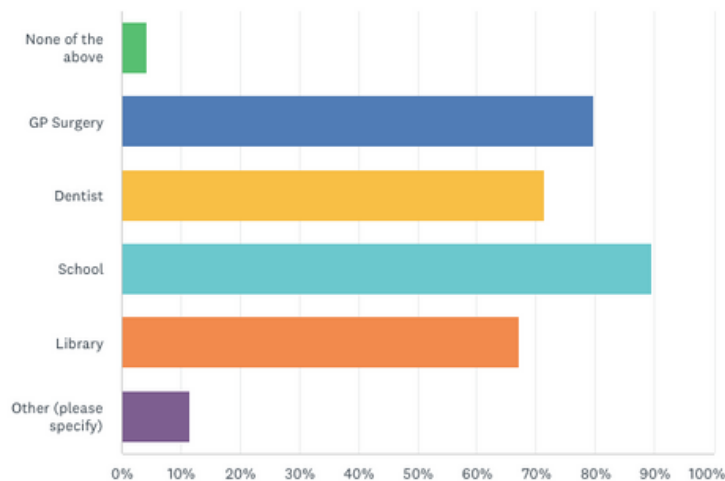
36% of respondents said they would like to move but were unable to due to moving or rent cost, as well as housing affordability in the area. Some in social housing said they were on a waiting list for a suitable home but were told it could take years due to lack of availability.

Once people move into the area, they remain in the area, with some in the same home for years. About 27% of residents have lived in their home for over twenty years, with about 54% living in their home less than 10 years.

SERVICES

We asked residents about services available in their area. See chart below.

What amenities are in your area? (Select all that apply)



29% of respondents did not have access to an NHS dentist with respondents stating they had to travel to a surrounding town to access one or had to pay for one privately.

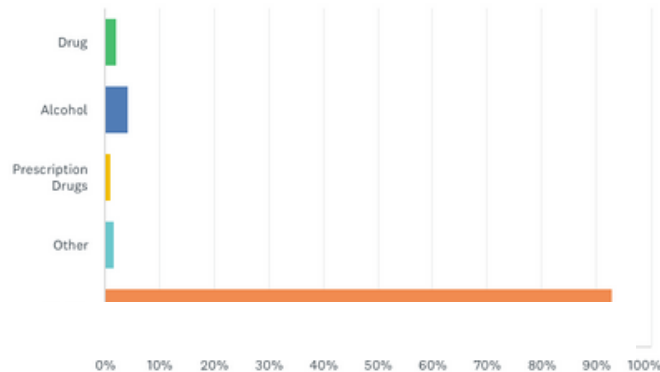
20% of respondents did not have access to a GP surgery. Of the 80% of those that said they did have a GP surgery in their area, many said they were not able to get an appointment when they needed one.

25% of respondents paid privately for procedures as they were told *"it would be a long wait on the NHS."* 4% of respondents said they did not have access to any services. These respondents lived in the outskirts of Horsham Town Centre, including Warnham and Broadbridge Heath.

45% of respondents said at the time they were receiving ongoing treatment. Of these, 30% said they had someone in the household with a disability or underlying health condition that impacts them day to day.

We asked respondents if anyone in the household had struggled with addiction, 10% said yes. Of these, 46% said alcohol, 23% said illegal drugs and 12% said prescription drugs.

Have you, or someone in your household, struggled with addiction?



9% of respondents said they had been recommended treatment but had opted not to take it with 14% stating distance, timing, cost of travel, cost of parking, or childcare as an issue. 64% of those that said they had opted not to take the recommended treatment lived in the surrounding villages.

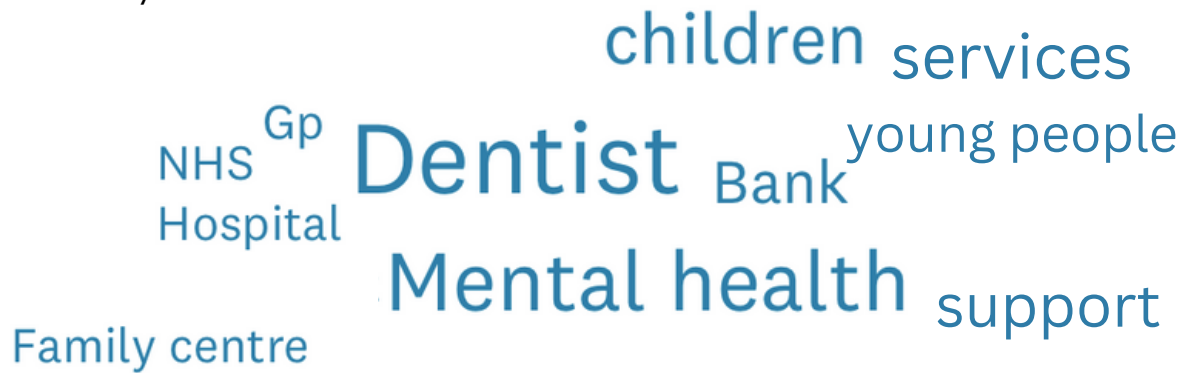
We asked respondents if the distance to services was a barrier for them to access them, with 24% of them stating yes. Of these, 64% also said they felt isolated and 34% of these also stated they had no one near them who they could rely upon for help. These respondents lived in central Horsham (22%), Henfield (16%), Southwater (12%), Warnham (10%), Storrington (8%) with the remaining living in surrounding villages.

33% of respondents also stated that the cost of services was an issue for them. Of these respondents, 54% also said that the cost of food had started influencing their eating habits.

18% of respondents said there were barriers to them accessing services independently, with 8% of these stating mobility as an issue.

18% of respondents also said they were currently waiting to access a service with 15% of them stating that the service was not available near their area. Of these, 22% lived in central Horsham, 17% lived in Southwater and 17% lived in Henfield. The remaining respondents lived in the surrounding villages.

17% of respondents said they need a service that does not exist in their area, The word cloud below shows their most frequent responses, including NHS Dentist, Hospital, GP Surgeries, mental health support, specialist services for children with autism and special needs, family centres with access to a midwife, amenities like a bank, post office and a library.



We asked respondents if they knew who to go to for immediate crisis support, 36% said no, with the majority that said they did, stating that they would go to a GP. Of those that said no, 22% were in their 50s, 20% were in their 40s, and 15% were in their 30s. 39% also had children in the household, meaning children in their household might need crisis support but their parents would not know where to go.

We asked respondents who they are currently relying on for support. This is the breakdown:



Some of the older respondents said that they had trouble accessing services because they did not drive anymore and had to rely on public transportation or friends and family for support.

We asked respondents if they knew where to access mental health support and 15% said no. Of these, 49% were over the age of 60 and 51% of these said they felt isolated. 49% of these respondents also lived in the surrounding villages and 41% said they did not have someone that they could rely on for help near them.

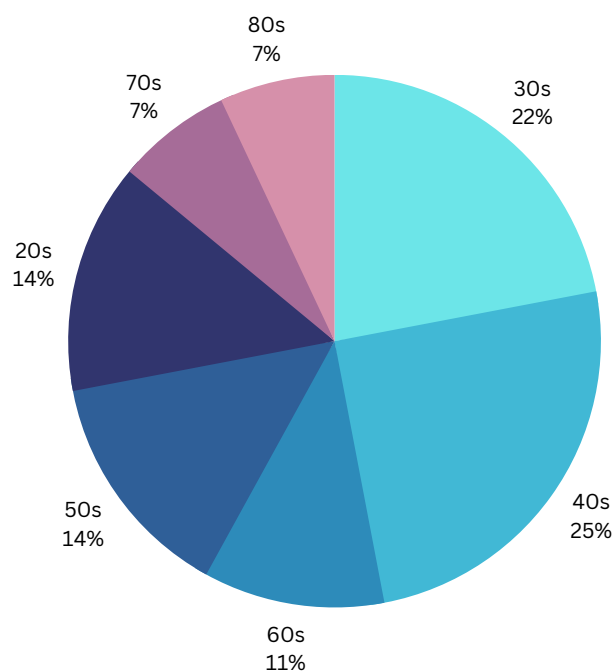
We asked respondents if they knew who provided mental health support in their area and how to access these services with 32% saying they did not.

5% of respondents did not have access to the internet.

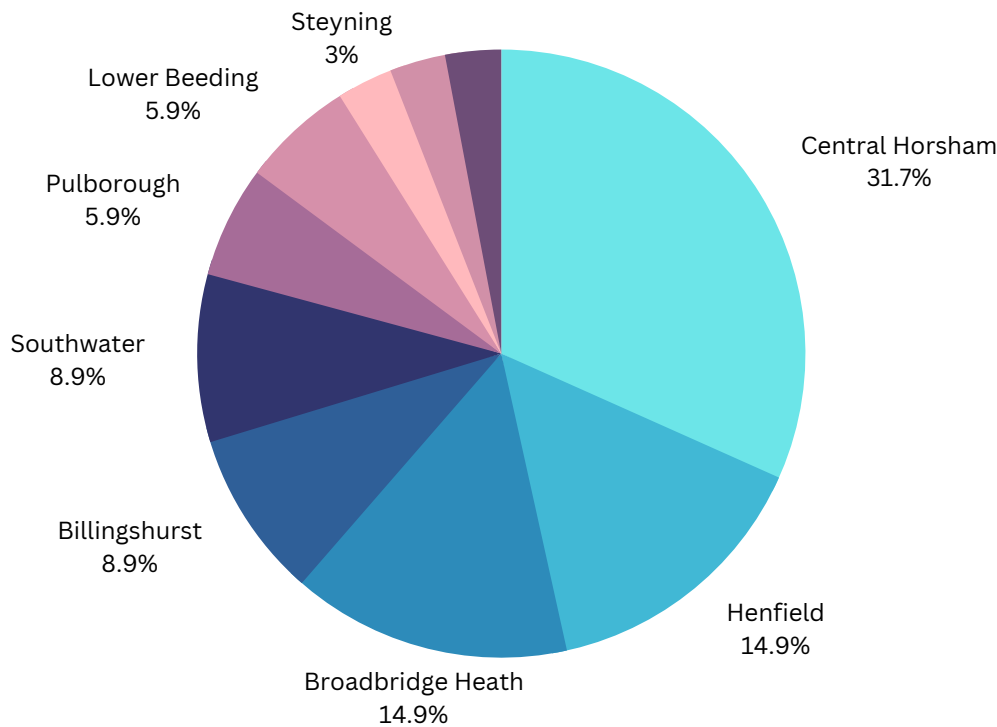
Over a third of respondents said that they, or someone in their household, had been either diagnosed or were dealing with a mental health issue. 31% were over the age of 65 with 7% being under the age of 15.

16% of respondents said they did not feel confident to ask for help.

Ages of those not confident to ask for help.



Location of residence for those not confident to ask for help.



We also asked if participants felt they could rely on organisations or charities for support. Almost a third (29%) said they did not and that they were reluctant to ask for help.

They were aged in their 60s (20%), 40s (16%), 50s (15%) and 30s (14%). Of these, 46% said they felt isolated, 39% said they did not have someone that they could rely on for help and 46% said they were not part of a group or church.

Some residents expressed they had benefitted from charities:

“

...so life does change and the kind of support organisations like Horsham Matters gives can make a huge difference. It can feel gloomy but often struggling with issues leading to poverty is transitory, having the mindset that it's a temporary situation was really important to me.

”

Emma, Henfield

TRANSPORTATION

Concerning transportation, 80% of respondents said they owned a car, with 3% stating they owned a car, as well as using public transportation. Out of the respondents that said they used public transportation, 45% said they live or had lived in poverty and 69% of them lived in a surrounding village.

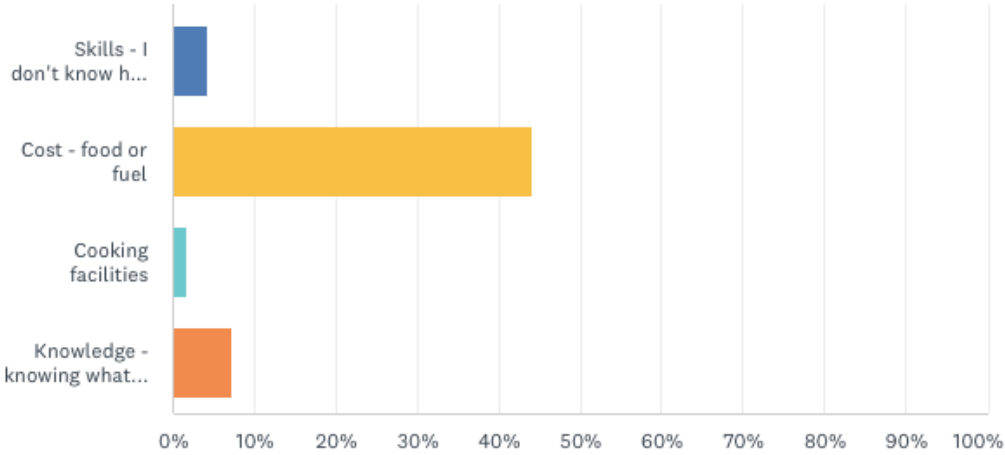
78% of respondents felt that there were reliable and dependable transport routes. 22% felt this was not the case. Of these respondents 31% were in Henfield, 16% in central Horsham and 10% in Cowfold.

Respondents felt that in some villages, public transportation was not frequent enough and limited where they could travel to with ease. Parking cost was also a factor, especially those in rural areas that had to drive to shops. A few of the older residents we spoke to said that they had trouble accessing services because they did not drive anymore and had to rely on public transportation or friends and family for support. This added to the feelings of isolation for some of them.

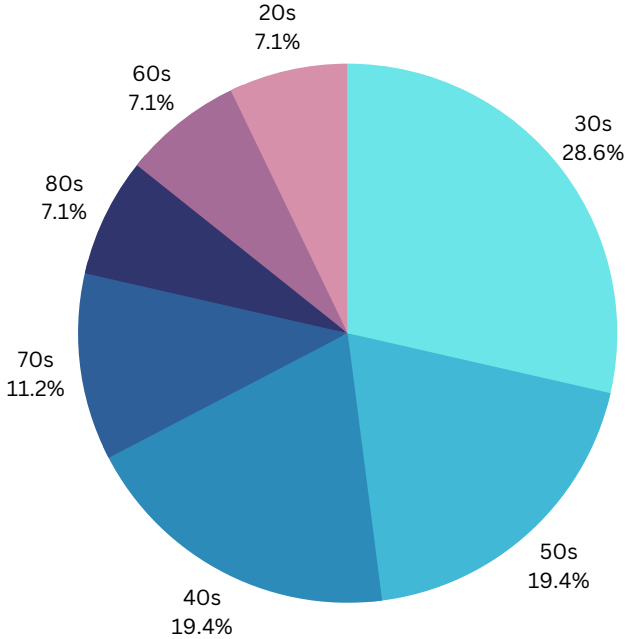
FOOD

We asked respondents what influenced their eating habits; 77% of these said the cost of food and fuel, 13% said knowledge of what food to eat, 7% said lack of cooking skills and 3% said their cooking facilities.

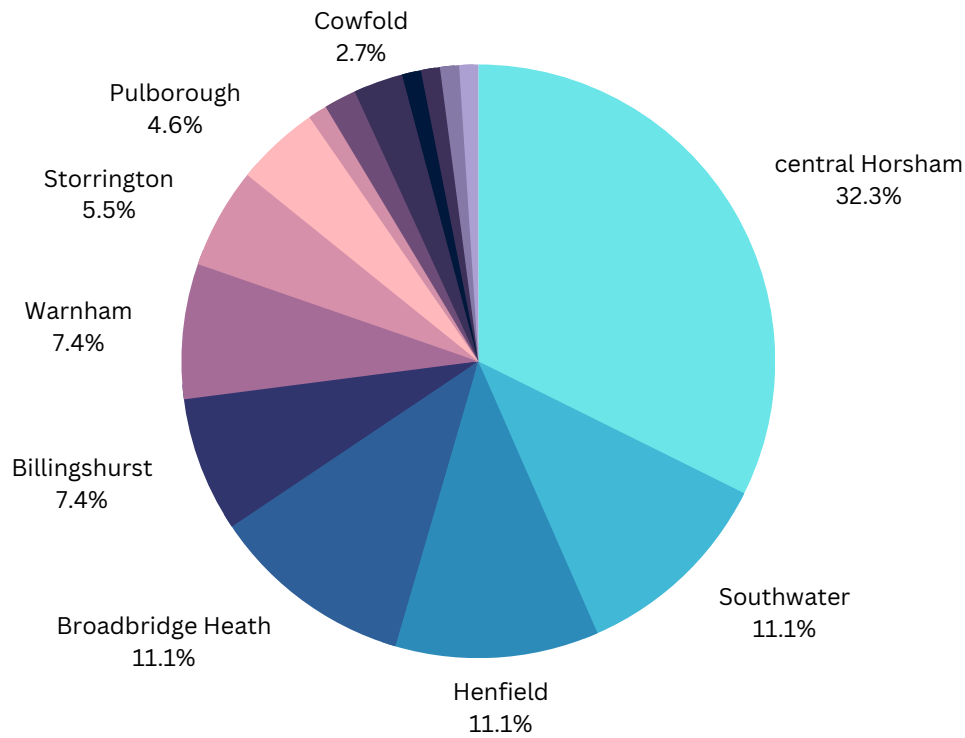
Are your eating habits influenced by any of the following:



Making food choices due to cost by age of resident.



Location of residence of those making food choices due to cost.



Of those making decisions relating to cost, 44% of these did not have children in the household with 23% having one child and 21% having two children.

EMPLOYMENT

With regards to employment, 56% stated they were employed. Of these:

- 20% were in their 40s, 27% in their 30s, and 30% were in their 50s.
- 55% of them had children in the household.
- 37% were in full-time employment, 40% were in part-time employment and 2% were in a contract role.
- 54% said they did not have any training opportunities with them stating age, physical health, mental health, cost and childcare as barriers.



18% of respondents stated that they were self-employed.

Of those not in employment, 40% said someone had a disability in the household.

We asked respondents if they were aware of learning opportunities e.g. apprenticeships, internships. Of those that responded, 38% were not aware of learning opportunities.

45% of respondents had attended university with 42% attending college. 75% of respondents stated that they did not have any barriers to furthering their education, with 33% stating they did have barriers, which included cost (47%), access to childcare (5%), transportation (3%), access to school (1%).

We asked respondents if there were career progression opportunities with 57% stating yes and 43% stating no. Of those that stated no, reasons given included age, role, employer, and sector.

We asked respondents if they expected their employment circumstances to change in the next 6 months, with 82% saying no and 18% saying yes. When we asked if they expected it to change in the next 12 months, the number of respondents saying yes increasing to 23%.

Of those that said they were unemployed, we asked them what were the factors. The main three factors included physical health/disability (65%), carer responsibilities (26%) and mental health issues (17%).

We asked those that said they were unemployed how long they had been unemployed. The breakdown was under one year (25%), 2-5 years (25%), 5-10 years (10%), 10-20 years (30%) and over 20 years (10%).

We asked respondents what support they would benefit from to get a job or progress their career with 49% stating affordable childcare and 15% stating flexible working hours. Other respondents mentioned training, mental health support and support for people aged over 60 to find work.

We asked respondents if they rely on friends or family to look after their children whilst working. Of those that responded, 35% said yes.

One woman we spoke to had a law degree but had to stop working after she had a child due to lack of working pattern flexibility in her field and the high cost of childcare.

13% of respondents stated they had barriers to learning like dyslexia, with a few over 50s stating that they "*probably had a learning disability but those things were not diagnosed back then so they dropped out of school to work instead.*"

COMMUNITY

20% of respondents did not feel safe at night.

We asked respondents if they felt safe in their community during the day. 97% of respondents said they did feel safe. This number dropped to 80% when we asked if they felt safe at night. 33% of these respondents lived in central Horsham, 20% lived in Southwater, 18% lived in Broadbridge Heath with the remainder living in the surrounding villages.

24% of respondents said they, or someone in their household, had been subject to a scam. Of these, 31% did not know who to go to for immediate crisis support. 37% did not know who delivered services in their area.

32% of respondents said they, or someone in their household, had been a victim of a crime.

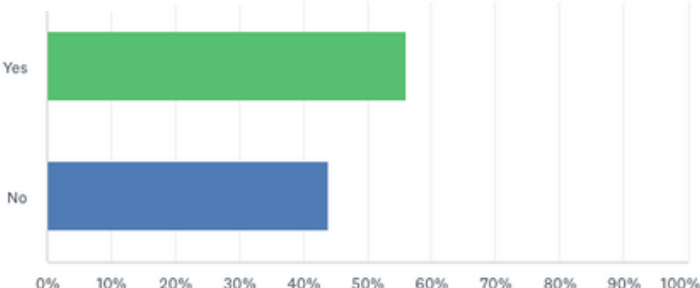
93% of respondents said they would be confident to report a crime. Of the 7% that said they would not be confident to report a crime, almost a third were in their 40s, with an even spread across the other age ranges.

4% of respondents had a criminal record, suspended sentence or community service. 4% also stated they had considered resorting to crime.

34% of respondents had been subjected to anti-social behaviour, with 3% stating they had participated in anti-social behaviour.

We asked respondents if they felt confident in services to improve their environment (e.g. District Council, Police, etc). 44% of respondents said they did not feel confident. A few mentioned media reports of anti-social behaviour happening in different towns and villages, especially in Horsham Town Centre*. They said they would like to see more of a police presence to minimise these situations happening. Others mentioned issues with housing and "that everything takes so long for them to sort out." Another mentioned how hard it is to get mental health support for their child.

Do you feel confident in services to improve your environment (police, district council, etc.)?



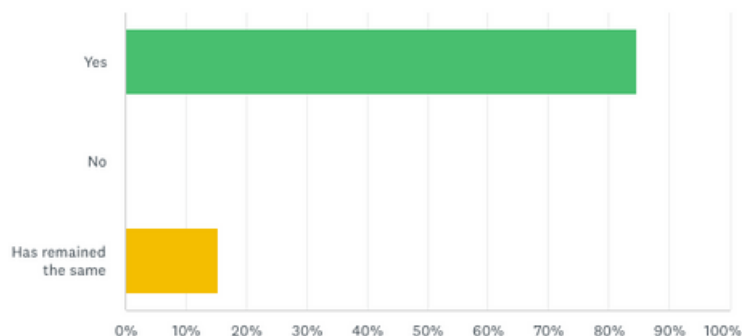
*At the time of the survey, this was prevalent in the local media.

WHAT OUR PARTNERS SAY

We also ran a separate partners survey to hear from other organisations that are working directly with residents affected by the cost of living crisis. Sadly, most responding charities are feeling stretched and are struggling to keep up with the demand for their services.

85% of respondents said that they had seen an increase in demand for their services in the past year. 54% of these said that this increase in demand had impacted on their capacity to deliver these services.

Has demand for your services increased during the past year?

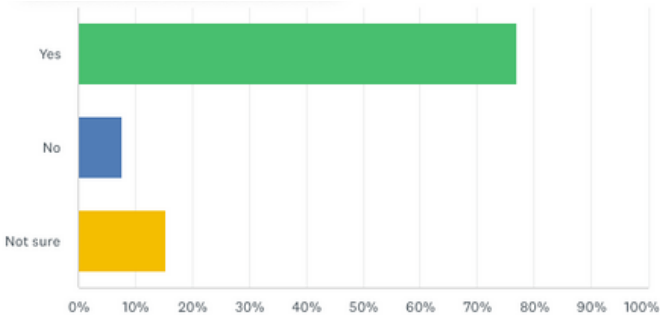


28% of partner charities agreed or strongly agreed that the increase in demand has hindered the development of existing and new services.

We asked partners 'Thinking about the residents you support have their situations become more complex?' 77% agreed that they have become more complex.

Thinking about the residents you support have their situations become more complex?

Answered:

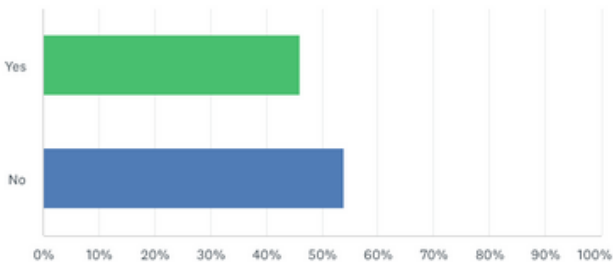


The main issues their clients are dealing with are in relation to the cost of living and mental health issues. Other themes include financial hardship/low income, money management, long waiting lists for existing services, respite care, housing, lack of cooking skills, wellbeing and increasing debt levels coupled with mental health issues.

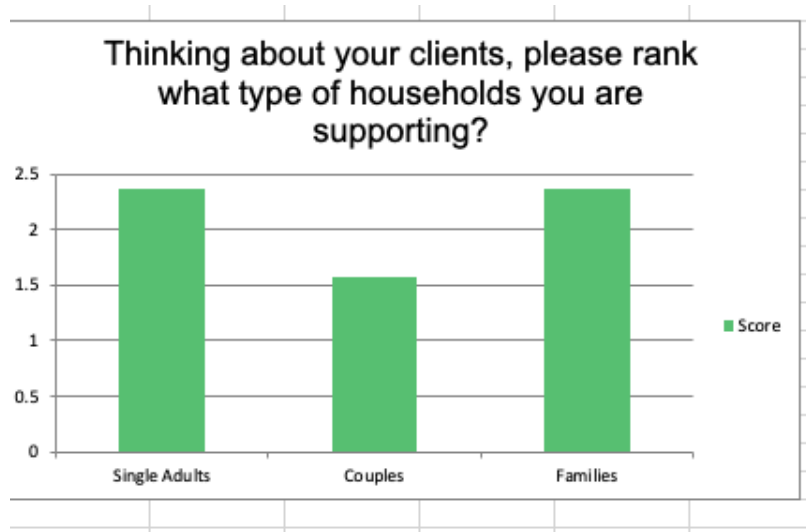
27% of charities said that their organisation was not able to meet the complex needs of their clients. Of these, 25% said it was due to capacity, 25% said they did not have the expertise or knowledge. Although, all said they are able to signpost to other organisations with this expertise.

46% of partner charities said that they had become increasingly concerned about the safety and welfare of those that they are working with.

Have you become increasingly concerned about the safety of those that you are working with?



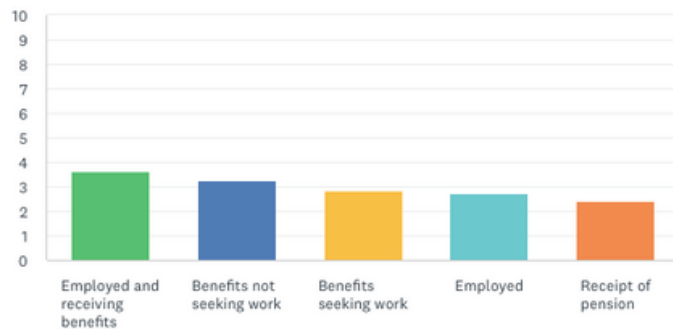
We asked partner charities the composition of households they were supporting.



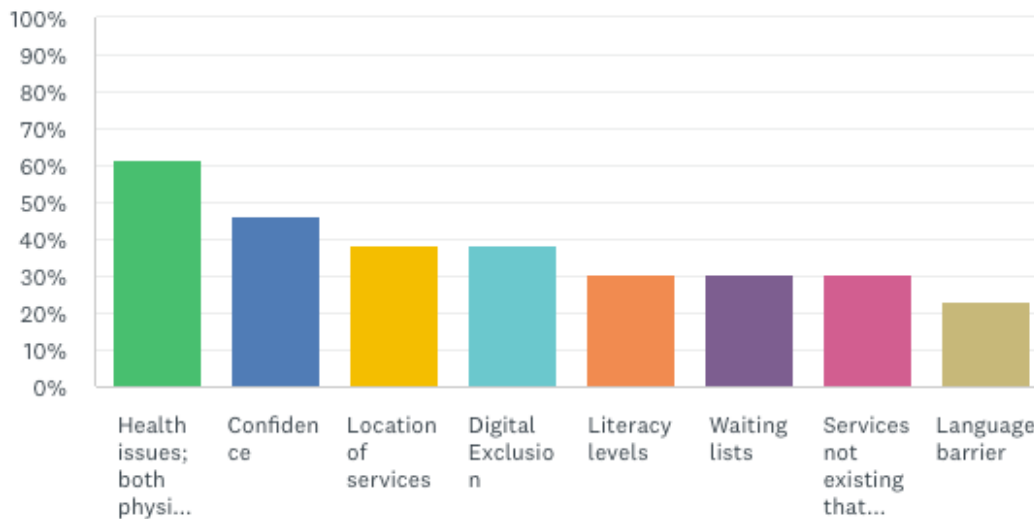
They said they were supporting an equal number of Single Adults and Families. 88% said the ranking of composition had not changed in the past year.

Our partners said their clients principle support was to those *employed receiving benefits*.

Thinking generally, how would you rank the employment status of those that you support?

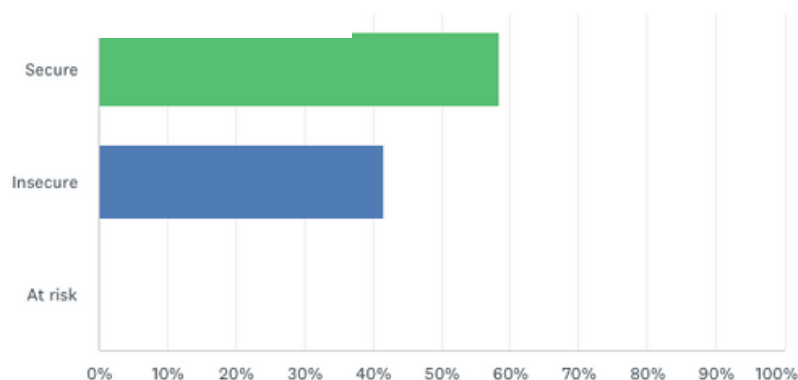


We asked partners the reasons why their clients may be struggling to access support from organisations such as them. They indicated the following:



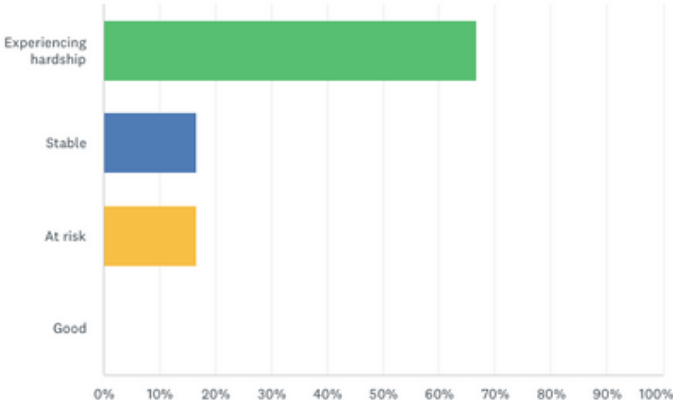
Charities said their clients were experiencing multiple challenges and had multiple reasons why they struggled. Clients had compounding factors: 68% said health issues, both physical and mental; 46% said confidence; 38% said location of services: 38% said digital exclusion; 31% said literacy levels; 31% said waiting lists; 31% said services not existing that they would benefit from and 23% said language barrier.

We asked partners how they would describe the housing status of clients. 58% said secure, 42% said insecure.



We asked partners how they would describe their clients financial circumstances. 66% said experiencing hardship, 17% said stable, and 17% said at risk. No partner described those they are supporting as having good financial positions.

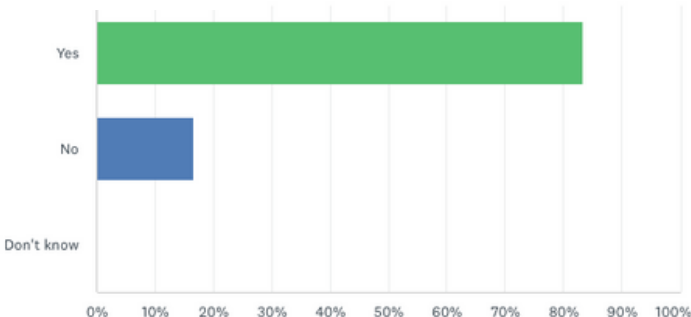
Generally, how would you describe the financial circumstances of your clients?



67% said their client had debts with 33% saying they were not sure. Two-thirds of which were accessing support for their debt, with the remaining third not getting support. A housing association recently stated in May 2023 that they are "seeing twice the clients with twice the debt" compared to the previous year.

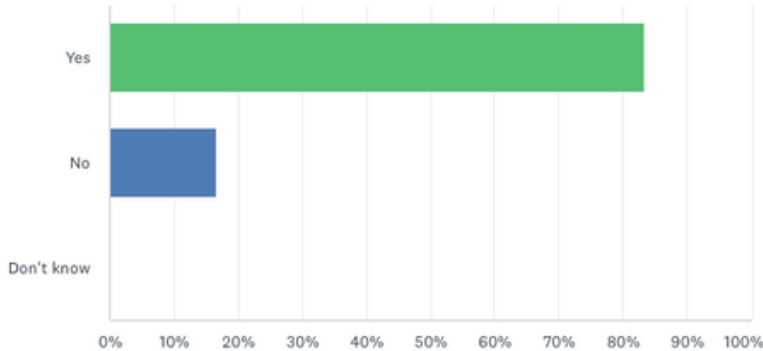
83% of partners said that their clients' health was a contributing factor to their clients needing support.

Thinking about the health of your client; is it a contributing factor to them needing your services?



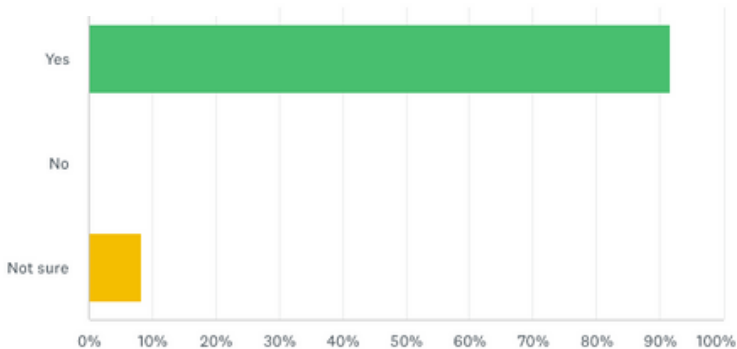
We asked partners if mental health is becoming a more prevalent factor in needing support. 83% said that it was, with 17% saying it was not.

Would you say that mental health is becoming a more prevalent factor in needing support?



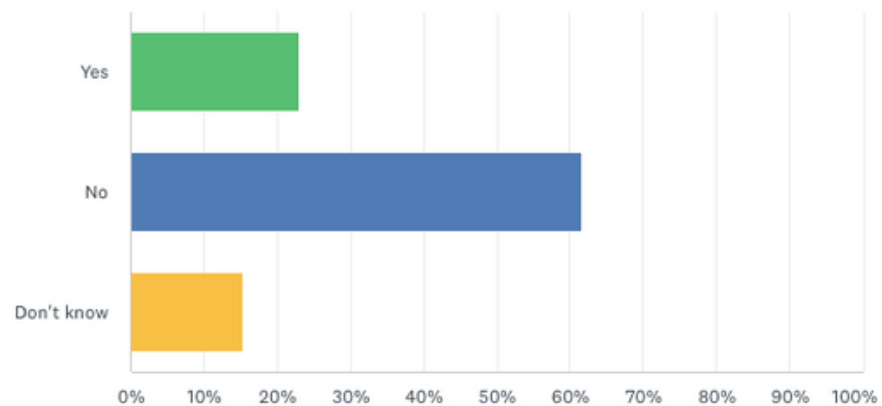
We asked if those without a supportive social network would benefit from one. 92% said that they would, with 8% saying they were not sure.

For those without a supportive social network would they benefit from that?



We asked if their clients would know who to get help from. 62% said they did not, 23% said they did, and 15% were not sure.

Would you say that your clients know who to get help from?



We asked partners if they thought that where clients resided in Horsham District had an impact upon their organisation's ability to support them. 50% said yes, stating that *"it is harder for those outside the town centre to find support, particularly because of poor and expensive bus links, and/or difficulty in accessing advice digitally."*

One other stated, *"it is a big district and very rural, with areas with very little provision in terms of services and access."*

We asked partners if they rely on other organisations to support their clients. Partners ranked the support they relied on as:

1. charities/non-profits
2. public sector
3. private sector.

Finally, we asked our partners if they could identify any gaps in provision for residents. They identified the following:

- School uniform provision
- Affordable housing
- Support in making online applications for digitally excluded clients
- Respite care
- Lack of clinical provision
- Loss of employment benefits, resulting in increase in debt
- Language barrier
- Additional learning needs

Thank you to our partners for taking the time to fill out the survey. These included:

Ten Little Toes Baby Bank
Horsham Child Contact Centre
The Oasis Crisis Pregnancy Centre
Kingdom Faith Church
Citizens Advice
Carer Support West Sussex
Olive Tree Cancer Support Centre Horsham
St Margarets Church, Warnham
Family Support Work
Christians Against Poverty
Horsham District Wellbeing

INSIGHTS

Some of the topline insights that came across from our survey results include the following:

- Around a third of respondents stated that they were in poverty or had experienced poverty in the past. From our conversations with residents completing the survey they often did not feel that they were in poverty as there was someone worse off than themselves. Interestingly, some foodbank clients also thought that and selected that they were not in poverty.
- Residents of all ages and geographic locations expressed their isolation.
- As residents become older they gradually feel less able to rely upon organisations; there is a correlation with this and isolation and not having anyone to rely on in a crisis.
- A general theme was that residents did not know how or where to access advice; this was regardless of their geographic location.
- Mental health was a factor in a third of the households responding to the survey; diagnosed or otherwise
- This was also the case regarding access to services. Transportation and costs were factors to residents not accessing services including specialist medical services and general groups, etc.
- Compounding factors created a complex knock off effect for residents – isolation, lack of support, cost of services, distance to services, etc. One issue exasperated by many other challenges.
- 40% of residents not working had someone with a disability in their household. 65% of those cited health and disability as a reason for being unemployed, with a further 17% stating that their mental health has impacted their ability to work.
- For those in work just over half did not have any training opportunities offered by their employer and a similar level stated that there was no career progression available.
- Just over a third of respondents stated that there were barriers to accessing further education with nearly half of them stating that cost was a factor.

- Residents showed an increasing level of anxiety relating to housing security which increased from 6 month's time to a year's time.
- The cost of food was a prevalent factor in what residents were able to eat, with the next main factor being knowledge of food and then cooking skills.
- Confidence to report crime was an interesting response; the main age group not confident to report crime was in the 40s bracket.

Some of the topline insights from our partners include:

- All partners have seen an increase in the demand for their services.
- Their capacity is being stretched and limiting how many people they can support.
- They are seeing much more complex needs in their clients, with a dramatic increase in mental health issues, and a third stating they were not equipped to deal with these complex needs.
- 100% felt they could signpost their clients to other charities who could help them.
- Almost half of our partners said they were concerned about the safety of their clients.
- Partners have seen an increase in the number of families needing support.
- The main category of clients that partners were seeing were in employment and receiving benefits.
- Partners noted that both physical and mental health issues were a reason their clients were struggling.
- Almost half of their clients felt that their housing was insecure with increases both in private rentals and mortgages.
- More than half our charity partners stated that their clients did not know where to get help.
- Our charity partners stated, much like our individual survey results, that people living in the surrounding villages felt more isolated and had more difficulty accessing services.
- Charity partners were more like to rely on other charities to support their clients.

SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

ACCESS TO SERVICES

One of the prevalent issues that came out of the survey was that residents did not know how and where to access services. 36% of respondents said they did not know who to go to for immediate crisis support.

There was a correlation between residents who lived in the surrounding villages not being able to access services easily and also feeling isolated.

24% of respondents said that the distance to services was a barrier for them to access them. Some of the older respondents said that they had trouble accessing services because they did not drive anymore and had to rely on public transportation or friends and family for support. They mentioned transport links being poor and expensive. Those that drove mentioned that the cost of parking was becoming an issue.

It is important that residents in the surrounding villages are able to access affordable, reliable, dependable and frequent transport.

Whilst there exist issues with transport, services need to reach out into the community, e.g. the most vulnerable need to have access to free transport for medical appointments.

Our residents need to access health services; it is clear there are households with complicated health factors. Of those receiving ongoing medical treatment, 30% said they had someone in the household with a disability or underlying health condition that impacts them day to day. These situations can only make it more challenging for residents to access support, particularly in more rural areas.

Our charity partner survey highlighted that respite care was an issue with clients, as many families were not receiving this support, the strain upon these households will be considerable.

Continuing with access to health support; it is clear there is a lack of knowledge relating to existing provision.

A third of respondents said they did not know who provides mental health support in their area and how to access these services.

This is a huge concern as the number of people experiencing mental health issues increases; a rise especially seen among young people. According to the charity Mind, *the cost-of-living crisis, on top of the long lasting impact of the pandemic, is affecting people's ability to make space and manage their mental health. The mental health of nearly 8 in 10 Britons (78 per cent) surveyed has been affected by the cost-of-living crisis.*

Our charity partners stated that they are seeing far more complex needs in their clients, with a dramatic increase in mental health issues.

A third of our partners said that they are not equipped to deal with these complex needs. Almost half of our partners also said they were concerned about the safety of their clients.

More than a third of respondents said that they, or someone in their household, had been either diagnosed or was dealing with a mental health issue.

17% of respondents stated that their mental health had impacted on their ability to work.

The lack of knowledge about the provision of services needs to be addressed. Services, including the benefits system and cost of living support, mental health and GP services, need to be easier to access with better information and easier channels of communication, regardless if people are online or not.

As a charity, we understand the impact of poor mental health, especially upon those facing poverty. The strain, distress and desperation of our clients has increased over the past 18 months.

Recommendations

- Take services back whenever possible to rural and isolated communities.
- Map existing transport links such as community cars, village transport and identify gaps; as well as effective promotion of existing services.
- Programme of District-wide mental health first aider training to ensure that key service providers, including charities, are offering the best support they can in the course of their contact with residents.

- Promotion of existing mental health services, including support groups and telephone services.
- District Council scheme to encourage organisations to become mental health kite marked. Similar schemes exist in Hertfordshire with education establishments and in Shropshire with employees giving the best support to those with mental health issues so they are able to return to work as appropriate.

As a charity, we are considering setting up a mobile advice hub. This would travel to the surrounding villages on a regular schedule to help increase awareness of services available to residents.

ISOLATION/LONELINESS

Another area highlighted in our survey, was the number of people that felt isolated; with a third of respondents saying they felt isolated. This was across the board from the young to the elderly. This is a serious public health concern which can affect a person's mental and physical health. Studies show that loneliness can increase the risk of premature death by 30%. Research by the Campaign to End Loneliness and Age UK shows that taking action to address loneliness and isolation can reduce the need for health and care services in the future.

The residents we spoke to were dealing with:

- Caring responsibilities
- Poor physical and mental health
- Low household income or people who are unemployed
- Expectant and new parents
- Digital exclusion
- Transport connectivity issues

22% of respondents also said that they did not have anyone that they could rely on for help. These respondents also said they felt more isolated.

Those residents living in the surrounding villages seem to have a greater tendency toward feeling isolated due to lack of a support system and poor transport links.

The community needs to get back to looking after each other as they did in Covid-times when people would check on their vulnerable neighbours.

This type of neighbourhood-level response to loneliness is vital to reach the most hidden vulnerable.

Some organisations, including ourselves, have established a Befriending Programme. However, organisations need to be more proactive in addressing this issue. They might support individuals but this issue is much broader; there are whole isolated communities in our District.

Organisations need to work together to provide accessible and consistent support, ensuring that they reach the most vulnerable.

Recommendations:

- Taking services into more rural areas.
- Encourage client facing organisations to continue to identify people's wider wellbeing needs, signpost accordingly for support and return to face to face services.
- Organisations and charity partners to work together to encourage the most vulnerable to develop relationships with others, attend groups, volunteer, etc.
- Use digital and non-digital means to promote support that is available to residents in order to make it more accessible
- Maximise the use of parks, libraries, GPs and other local community venues to provide support.

EMPLOYMENT/TRAINING

Our data shows that people are insecure about their job and have a lack of training opportunities. Almost a quarter (23%) said they expected their employment circumstances to change in the next 12 months and 54% said they had no training opportunities.

In work poverty has increased over the last two decades according to The Health Foundation which leaves us with a labour market that is not working for a lot of people.

Locally, we have a skills gap that needs to be addressed by employers investing in the training and development of their employees. Despite this, research shows that employers in the UK are investing less in their workforce with smaller employers investing even less.

According to data published in 2022 by ONS, Horsham District is the base for 20 large, 100 medium-sized and 600 small businesses.

According to FE News, *small business employers face greater barriers to accessing training due to lack of knowledge about what is available, its potential benefits, and financial barriers, especially with first COVID and now the cost of living crisis.*

This leaves workers in small businesses particularly disadvantaged when it comes to training, as this lack of training, and therefore career progression, is one way in which people remain in low paid roles, as well as rely upon in work benefits.

Our survey results show that 54% said there were no training opportunities and 43% said there was no career progression available to them. Our charity partners report that the majority of their clients are *in work receiving benefits*.

Horsham District Council has started a Business Training Programme which is targeted at small business owners, which is only digital, which may be a barrier to access for some small businesses.

The other issue that is clear in our results is that people find the cost of training an issue and that there is a lack of awareness of free or low- cost learning opportunities.

The loss of adult learning providers, like Aspire Sussex, is a major loss to the community, particularly for the most vulnerable who would benefit from this support.

There was mention of future plans for a sustainable adult learning programme that would help residents to fulfil their potential but nothing has been announced and our survey reflects that this is very much needed.

The council needs to develop a locally driven plan for employers to train their workforce, focusing on small businesses, to help people progress and increase their income potential.

Belgium developed a training vouchers scheme targeting small (and especially micro) firms. Vouchers purchased on-line (matched by the government up to a €6000 maximum) are used by employers to purchase training from accredited providers.

Our recommendations:

- Council to establish a local training programme that focuses on closing the skills gap.
- Establish free or low-cost training available to everyone; focusing on career progression and increasing earning potential.
- Target small businesses to ensure the development of their workforce.
- Develop training partnerships between larger and smaller businesses.
- Make training inclusive, focusing on both the younger demographic that may not have much work experience and the older demographic that may be nearing retirement.
- Ensure training is available in different formats to ensure digital inclusion.

Housing is a huge issue for our community. The Office of National Statistics reports that *private rental prices continued to grow at record high rates in all UK counties in the year to April 2023. More than two in five adults (44%) currently paying rent or mortgage payments are finding it very or somewhat difficult to afford them.*

Our survey results show that 33% of respondents stated their rent or mortgage had increased in the past 6 months and they are worried about further increases.

According to Shelter, 1 in 3 people spend at least half their income on rent. This leaves the most vulnerable likely to fall into further debt to pay for other essentials.

36% of respondents said given a choice, they would like to move but were unable to due to moving or rent costs and affordability in the area.

Some in social housing said they were on a waiting list for a suitable home but were told it could take years due to lack of availability.

This undersupply of social housing, combined with the lack of affordable renting options in the private rented sector, is leaving people at risk of homelessness.

This is affecting people in a range of circumstances, including young people leaving the care system, people fleeing domestic abuse, refugees, and people leaving healthcare settings.

Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows there has been an increase in demand for private rentals as households struggle to access mortgages or have to sell their mortgaged properties. This has caused a rise in rents as demand increases.

Recommendations:

- Locally, the council needs to build more housing.
- Government needs to provide further support for first-time home buyers.
- Make housing more affordable, by setting rental caps on both private and social rentals.
- The government needs to provide adequate housing benefits to protect the most vulnerable renters and prevent homelessness.

DEBT

Our survey results show that the amount of personal debt is increasing; more and more residents are struggling to pay their bills and falling into a negative budget for the first time or deepening an existing debt issue.

It is no surprise that as financial pressures rise, more people are struggling to keep up with payments, and falling into debt. Housing insecurity is a big concern for many as their rent and mortgage cost continue to increase.

Pre-Covid, our food bank has supported single males, but since then there has been a change in demographic as we support more families. The cost of food has been consistently increasing (annual food inflation is at 19%) adding additional pressure to multiple occupy households.

Our charity partners are seeing the same trend as the cost of living crisis is causing more families to stretch their budgets, with increasing levels of debt, or arrears, or they are forced to go without the essentials. An unexpected expense can leave a family completely vulnerable.

Financial stress and strain has an impact on resident's mental and physical health.

Making debt advice more widely available is crucial to facilitate assistance at the earliest opportunity. As well as working with individuals who are in debt to consolidate their debt and put together a payment plan that is realistic, to ensure they do not keep incurring penalty fees.

Ultimately, the government must ensure that people's incomes are adequate so that they can afford the essentials and people are able to weather a storm by ensuring that our security system is enough to cover the essentials.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that there is sufficient debt provision across the district.
- Implement strategies to provide advice at the earliest opportunity to those accruing social housing and private rental debts, as well as those in council tax arrears.
- Campaigns to encourage residents to seek help with financial worries.

DIGITAL EXCLUSION

According to the Good Things Foundation, there are 2 million households that struggle to afford internet access in the UK today, and 10 million adults lack the most basic digital skills.

Research shows that a lack of digital skills and access can have a negative impact on a person's life, including increased loneliness and social isolation, as well as less access to jobs and education opportunities. It can also mean paying more for essentials, financial exclusion, and an increased risk of experiencing poverty. We know it is those already at a disadvantage - through age, education, income, disability, or unemployment - who are most likely to be missing out, further widening the social inequality gap and compounding problems.

In an increasingly digital world, and as government services increasingly move online, more and more people are being left behind. Studies show that 6.9 million people in the UK will remain digitally excluded if nothing is done to help them (Cebr, 2018).

Our survey results showed that digital exclusion was an issue with

residents mostly due to a lack of confidence, a lack of digital skills, poor access to appropriate broadband, and affordability preventing access to equipment or internet access.

Our charity partners also noted that this was an issue with their clients and that support in making online applications for digitally excluded clients should be a priority.

As a charity, we are hoping to work with the Good Things Foundation to set up a digital inclusion hub in Horsham District. They partner with organisations to reach the digitally excluded and have already helped millions of people to gain digital confidence.

Recommendations:

- Offer easily accessible training and advice to boost residents online skills and knowledge.
- Offer an alternative to digital communication, whether a phone number or in paper form.

THANK YOU!

We are grateful to all of the groups that allowed us to attend their sessions enabling us to speak with residents. From Storrington to Billingshurst, from Pulborough to Henfield, we attended Coffee Mornings, Lunch Clubs, Toddler Groups and more. Residents spoke openly and candidly about their situations which gave us so much more information beyond the survey data.

We want to thank the following groups for their hospitality in allowing us to attend their groups:

Wednesday Lunch Club, Village Hall, Pulborough
Kinder Playgroup, St John's Church, Broadbridge Heath
Friday Cafe, Village Hall, Cowfold
Rainbow Toddler Group, Community Centre, Billingshurst
Parent and Toddler Group, Village Hall, Storrington
Coffee Morning, St Mary's Church, Storrington
Thursday Club, The Haven, Henfield
Lunch Club, Lavinia House, Horsham
Lunch Club, St John's Church, Broadbridge Heath
Self Help Group, Henfield Hall, Henfield
Positive Play, The Hub, Upper Beeding
Hub Cafe, The Hub, Upper Beeding
Coffee Morning, St Margaret's Church, Warnham
Bambies Toddler Group, St Margaret's Church, Warnham
St Peters Little Fishes, St Peters Church, Henfield
Potter's Pantry, Village Hall, Southwater
Church Mice Stay and Play Toddler Group, Village Hall, Cowfold
Senior Coffee Morning, St Marys's Church, Billingshurst

We also spoke with clients attending our network food banks, our Hub on the Move and Connecting Cafe.

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