



Public
Health
Annual
Report
2023

Poverty and
the cost of
living crisis
in Portsmouth
– Needs
Assessment

Executive summary

Public Health Annual Report 2023 Poverty and the cost of living crisis in Portsmouth – Needs Assessment

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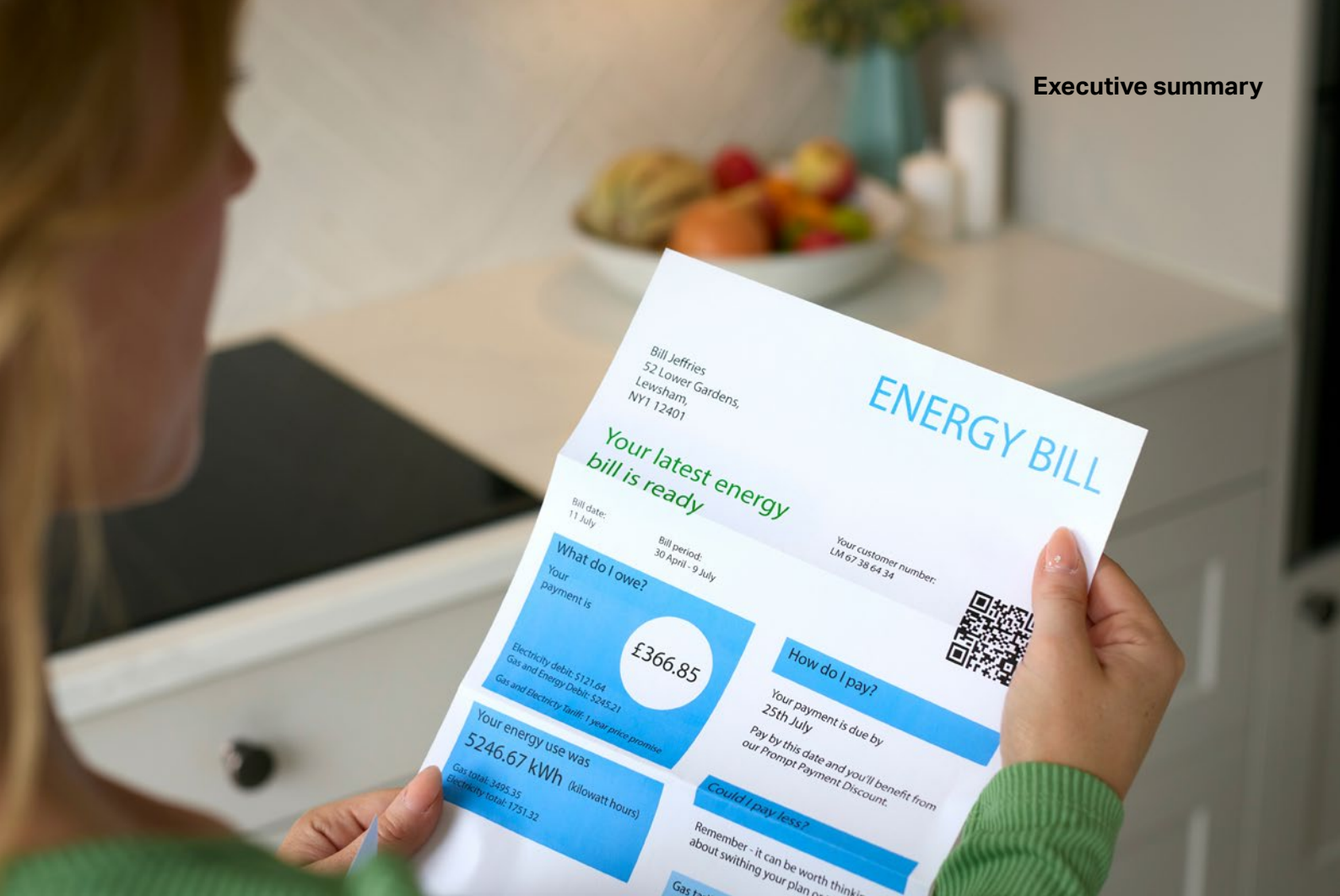


Executive summary

Why poverty is a problem in Portsmouth

Poverty is a problem because it limits the capacity of each individual to maximise their potential and negatively impacts the wellbeing of the city as a whole. There are significant numbers of people living in poverty across Portsmouth. People of all ages are affected, with impacts across the whole life course. Those who are already vulnerable or who face other barriers are more likely to be in poverty. This includes children, older people and those with disabilities. People living in areas and groups that experience the negative impacts of other social challenges – poor housing, lower educational attainment – are more likely to be in poverty.

- In Portsmouth, nearly a quarter of children live in families with income that is below 60% of the median income, with estimates that include housing costs suggesting nearly 1 in 3 children were living in poverty in Portsmouth in 2021/22.
- Groups at greater risk of poverty include families with a disabled member (27%), households headed by someone of Bangladeshi ethnicity (40%), and single older people who live alone.
- Life expectancy at birth is 10 years shorter for males and 5 years shorter for females in the most deprived parts of Portsmouth than in the least deprived parts, and a greater proportion of those years will be lived in poor health.
- The gap in attainment for pupils eligible for free school meals is greater than nationally, with FSM-eligible pupils' GCSE grades an average of 1.6 grades lower than non-FSM pupils in Portsmouth.
- Average weekly earnings in Portsmouth were £468 in 2021, lower than England (£496) and the South East (£530).



A cost of living crisis: compounding the challenges

The 'cost of living crisis' describes a set of circumstances linked in particular to high inflation that became increasingly apparent during 2022. Its effects continued to be felt during 2023:

- more than 9 in 10 adults said increasing cost of living was an issue in July 2023
- 60% reported higher living costs than the previous month

Cost of living pressures are expected to continue. Local data on the impact in Portsmouth can be found on the **[JSNA pages](#)**² of the council website.

Insight and analysis from local organisations highlights the difficulties people are facing, with benefits that are insufficient to meet daily needs driving increased reliance on foodbanks and rising debt. These challenges compound issues that have grown since the financial crisis in 2008 and which saw disadvantaged communities disproportionately impacted during the Covid-19 pandemic.

² **Poverty and the cost of living – JSNA report** – Portsmouth City Council – <https://www.portsmouth.gov.uk/services/health-and-care/health/joint-strategic-needs-assessment/poverty-and-cost-of-living>

Approaches to tackling poverty

Portsmouth's current strategy for tackling poverty comes under the umbrella of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy for 2022–2030. It builds on many years of work led by the council's Tackling Poverty Coordinator, bringing together statutory and VCS partners. 2022 saw the council launch a Cost of Living Hub that over 28,000 people had visited in its first 9 months, along with a telephone helpline and dedicated support worker.

We can learn from successful strategic approaches to addressing poverty and the social determinants of health in other places including the 'Wigan Deal' and the development of Marmot cities. The LGA's cost of living hub showcases other councils' approaches to the cost of living crisis, such as:

- Southampton City Council's food redistribution project – the 'Big Difference Scheme'
- Maidstone's data sharing partnership with South East Water to get low-income customers onto social water tariff
- Waltham Forest's Think Work Strategy to boost take-up of apprenticeships, encourage living wages with businesses, tackle unemployment and in-work poverty, and create good jobs for residents.



Stakeholder views

Tackling poverty and addressing the cost of living crisis are priorities for the city council, the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) and the Tackling Poverty Steering Group (TPSG) which has led the city's response to poverty for over a decade. Two cost of living conferences in 2022/23 brought a wide range of groups together to help shape the city's response.

The council's Big Portsmouth Survey in autumn 2022 showed the scale of the challenge:

- The vast majority of residents stated that their cost of living had increased over the last few months (94%), largely attributed to the rising cost of their food shop (97%) or an increase in their gas or electricity bills (88%).
- As a result of their cost of living increasing, over half of residents were spending less on non-essentials, using less fuel in their home, or spending less on food shopping and essentials.
- Just over half of residents (52%) reported being less able or unable to meet the day-to-day costs of living as a result of this increase.

Conclusions and recommendations

Poverty continues to impact on a significant proportion of Portsmouth's residents. The cost of living crisis has added to these challenges, and brought financial pressures to bear on many households that would not meet previous income-based definitions of poverty. National evidence makes clear the impact these issues can have on people's health and the wellbeing of communities across the city. It is a major driver of poor health outcomes in Portsmouth and negatively affects other key outcomes such as educational attainment. This relationship is two-way, e.g. with poor health and education outcomes in turn increasing the risk of poverty.

This report therefore recommends that the system-wide focus on poverty and inequalities needs to be maintained and enhanced. These issues are long-standing and yet to be resolved, with the specific pressures in the short term around food and energy costs likely to continue. The recommendations set out below aim to identify ways in which the work already underway can be maintained, enhanced and extended. They are themed under four areas of action recommended by the Royal Society for Public Health in 2022, adapted to reflect a local focus.

Recommendations

1. Adequate financial support for families and services – targeted support for those most at risk and appropriate funding as an investment in the future health and prosperity of Portsmouth.

- Maintain the targeting of support where it is most needed e.g. through the allocation of Household Support Fund (HSF) and the provision of schemes like Holiday Activities and Food (HAF Fun Pompey).
- Enhance the system wide support to fund the work, recognising that the issues impact on partners across the city.
- Extend the support that is available by supporting campaigns such as the 'essentials guarantee' which would make sure the Universal Credit basic rate is always at least enough for people to afford the essentials.

2. Champion policy innovation to maximise available supports. As many in society – including businesses, local authorities and central government – navigate a resource-constrained environment, greater innovation in policy and practice is needed across our entire societal infrastructure.

- Maintain a partnership approach, through the key role of the TPSG to challenge the system, including the HWB.
- Enhance the work with system partners to sustain the focus on poverty whilst responding to the immediate issues presenting, building on the role of anchor institutions in promoting social value.
- Extend the support available in innovative ways e.g. piloting 'warmth on prescription' with primary care to reduce cold-related hospital admissions; building on work already underway at Portsmouth City Council (PCC) to embed mental health support into the council's approach to debt management.

3. Monitoring the long-term health impacts of poverty and the cost of living. Data on the impacts of financial security and wellbeing are crucial to drive the development and delivery of local support.

- Maintain the reporting through the HWB of how work on the causes of the causes, including poverty, is impacting on health and wellbeing.
- Enhance the availability of data to the wider system through the cost of living dashboard and related resources, including as part of the TPSG's monitoring of its action plan.
- Extend the system-wide awareness of the impacts of poverty by supporting the inclusion of inequalities data in key planning and reporting tools.

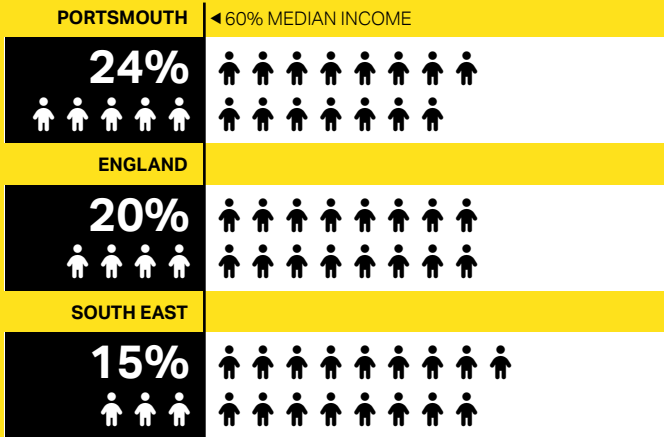
4. Support and empower the workforce so they can support us all.

- Maintain the support for the cost of living and wider determinants of health workforce that the council provides e.g. by protecting the budgets for these areas.
- Enhance the use of Make Every Contact Count (MECC) and systems thinking methodology to give staff in all organisations the systems, skills and support to provide assistance that responds to the impact of poverty and the cost of living crisis and delivers what matters to residents.
- Extend the work with individuals and communities to recognise the role each can play in supporting themselves and one another.

Poverty and cost of living in Portsmouth

The picture in Portsmouth

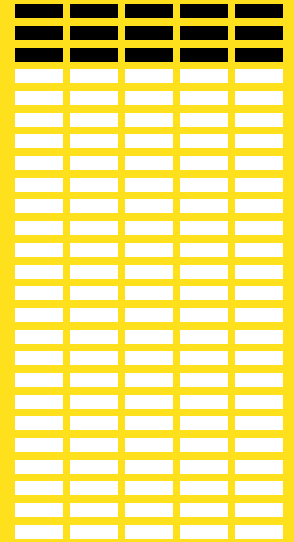
Children living in relative low income families¹



Deprivation

15

of Portsmouth's 125 small areas are within the most deprived 10% of small areas in England.



Life expectancy



Life expectancy at birth is 12% shorter for males and 6% shorter for females in the most deprived parts of Portsmouth than in the least deprived parts, and a greater proportion of those years will be lived in poor health.

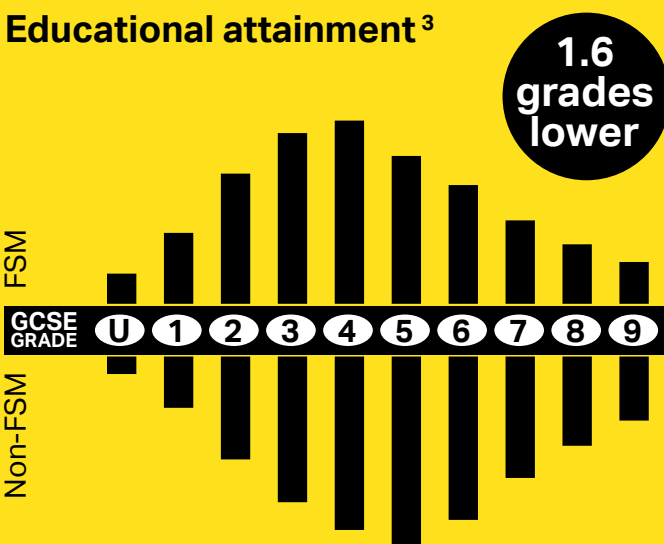
Earnings²

Average weekly earnings in Portsmouth were

£468,

lower than England (£496) and the South East (£530)

Educational attainment³



1. **Children living in relative low income families:** 2021/22 figures
2. **Earnings:** 2021 figures
3. **Educational attainment:** The gap in attainment for pupils eligible for free school meals is greater than nationally, with FSM-eligible pupils' GCSE grades an average of 1.6 grades lower than non-FSM, Graphic is pictorial only, does not represent actual data.

The cost of living crisis

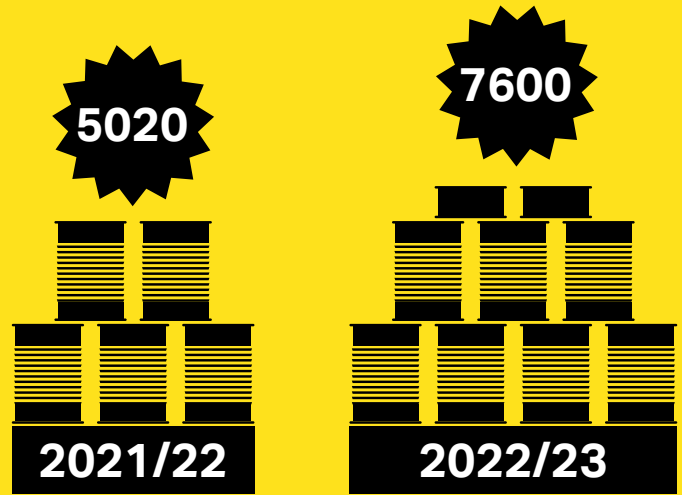
The Big Portsmouth Survey ⁴

In 2022 more than

90%

of people said their cost of living had increased.

Food bank vouchers ⁵



Housing ⁶

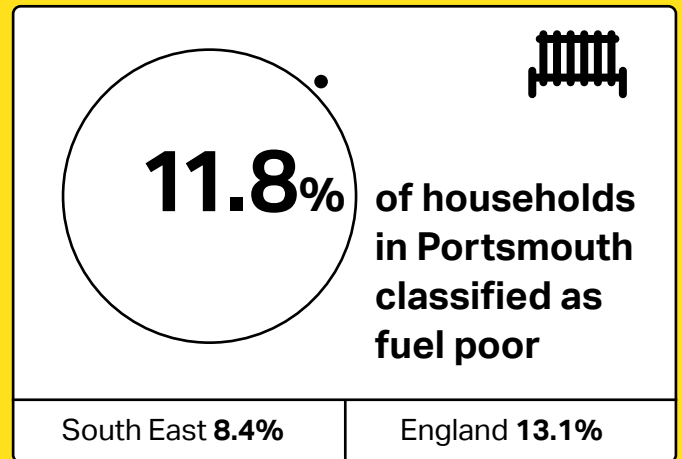
£895

Average rent for a 2 bedroom property in Portsmouth (2023/24)

£705

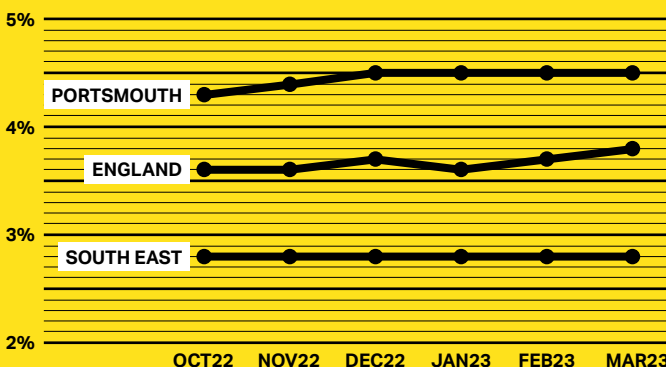
Maximum housing allowance towards renting a 2 bedroom property in Portsmouth (2022/23)

Fuel and energy ⁷



Skills, employment and benefit ⁸

Percentage of people aged 16–64 claiming unemployment-related benefits



- The Big Portsmouth Survey:** November 2022.
- Food bank vouchers:** In 2022/23 7,600 vouchers were fulfilled at Portsmouth Food Bank. This is an increase of 51% from 2021/22 when 5,020 vouchers were fulfilled.
- Housing:** The maximum monthly amount of Local Housing Allowance that an eligible resident can claim (through Housing Benefit or Universal Credit) towards the cost of renting a 2 bedroom property is £725 in 2023/24. The average rent for a 2 bedroom property in Portsmouth in 2022/23 was £895.
- Fuel and energy:** Based on 2021 data, 11.8% of households in Portsmouth were classified as fuel poor, based on having low income and high cost.
- Skills, employment and benefits:** The number of people aged 16–64 claiming unemployment-related benefits began to increase in November 2022 and stood at 6,350 in March 2023.



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Braille, audio or in another language by
emailing publichealth@portsmouthcc.gov.uk