Coastal ACTION

JULY 2025

TACKLING POVERTY IN A DEPRIVED COASTAL COMMUNITY

Addressing Poverty in Hastings & Rye

Identifying practical measures to address inequality facing coastal communities.



FINDING SOLUTIONS TO THE POLICY PROBLEMS HARMING COASTAL COMMUNITIES

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Addressing Poverty and Inequality in Hastings & Rye

The increase in the cost of living has devastated the living standards of the poorest. As Hastings has long been a town reliant on low-income jobs, this increase has shifted those who were just above the poverty line into various forms of deprivation. This has increased demand for charitable services like food banks, left increasing numbers of people without a permanent home and resulted in many being unable to pay essential bills (such as energy). The increase in homelessness, food insecurity and fuel poverty also raises questions over whether there is an adequate safety net and reveals the voluntary sector is now a key source of support for many on low incomes. This study outlines the current state of poverty within the Hastings area and outlines how it has increased in the last decade. It then moves on to the specific problems this rise in deprivation has created, specifically the issues of food insecurity, homelessness and fuel poverty. From this, the work highlights how the voluntary sector is increasingly trying to fill the gaps created by the cracks in the welfare state. It finishes by stating possible policy solutions that could better address the issues of growing poverty and explains why further cutting welfare is not an option.

Poverty in Hastings – The overview:

Hastings is the 13th most deprived local authority area in the country[1]. The indices of multiple deprivation demonstrate 35% of the borough to be living in multiple forms of deprivation, indicating 14,158 households now face multiple deprivation in Hastings. Just over 20% of all households are facing income deprivation, and a third are deprived of the education and training they need[2]. The town also scores way above average in health and disability measurements (scoring 65.3). Further, 27% of people are recorded as facing barriers to accessing services and housing, again well above the national average (+6%)[3]. These trends become even more disproportionate when

focusing on neighbourhood areas within the borough. All constituencies are divided into lower output areas (these are usually a third of the size of a single council ward). Output areas are used to show hyper-localised trends, and the latest reports demonstrate that 25% of all lower output areas within Hastings & Rye are categorised as the most deprived[4]. This means that a quarter of the constituency is more deprived than 90% of all areas within the UK.

Figure 8.1 demonstrates that nearly 60% of all local areas within Hastings fall within the bottom third of deprivation, meaning they are more deprived than 66% of the country[5]. 40% of these areas fall within the category that is used to describe localities that have the greatest proportion of income deprivation. 44% of these lower output areas are identified as having the greatest barriers to employment. 35% are recorded as being located in the worst health, and 30% are recorded as having poor housing and limited access to services[6]. Delving further into these numbers, it is revealed that there are pockets of extreme levels of deprivation. According to an East Sussex County Council report, Hastings has lower super output areas that are recorded as being in the top 100 areas for income, employment, education and training and health deprivation[7]. These areas are located in the poorest parts of Tressell ward, Broomgrove, Central St Leonards and the town centre of Hastings.

Focusing on the most deprived parts of the town, there are 12 areas where more than 50% of people are recorded as living in multiple deprivation. These areas reside with the poorer parts of Hollington, Wishing Tree, Tressell, Baird, Ore, Gensing, Castle and Central St Leonards. Particular hotspots are located around Hollington Old Lane, the Tilekin estate, the Hastings town centre, Churchill Avenue, Brightling Avenue, Malvern Way, Farley Bank, Stone House Drive, around St Leonards train station and Kenilworth Road[8]. The drivers for these concentrations of multiple deprivation are significantly higher levels of income deprivation, with half of these areas having more than 35% of people experiencing income deprivation, well above the average of 20%. Poor education attainment and barriers to skills training also appear to be another key driving force, with half of these areas having well over 50% of residents

registering this form of deprivation[9]. Within these localities, three areas had more than 75% of people being deprived of education and training. These areas also scored considerably higher in health deprivation, indicating that poor health and higher levels of disability may be preventing individuals from escaping income deprivation and accessing services that could help address these problems. However, it should be noted that due to services often being located near these areas, deprivation of services is roughly in line with the town's average.

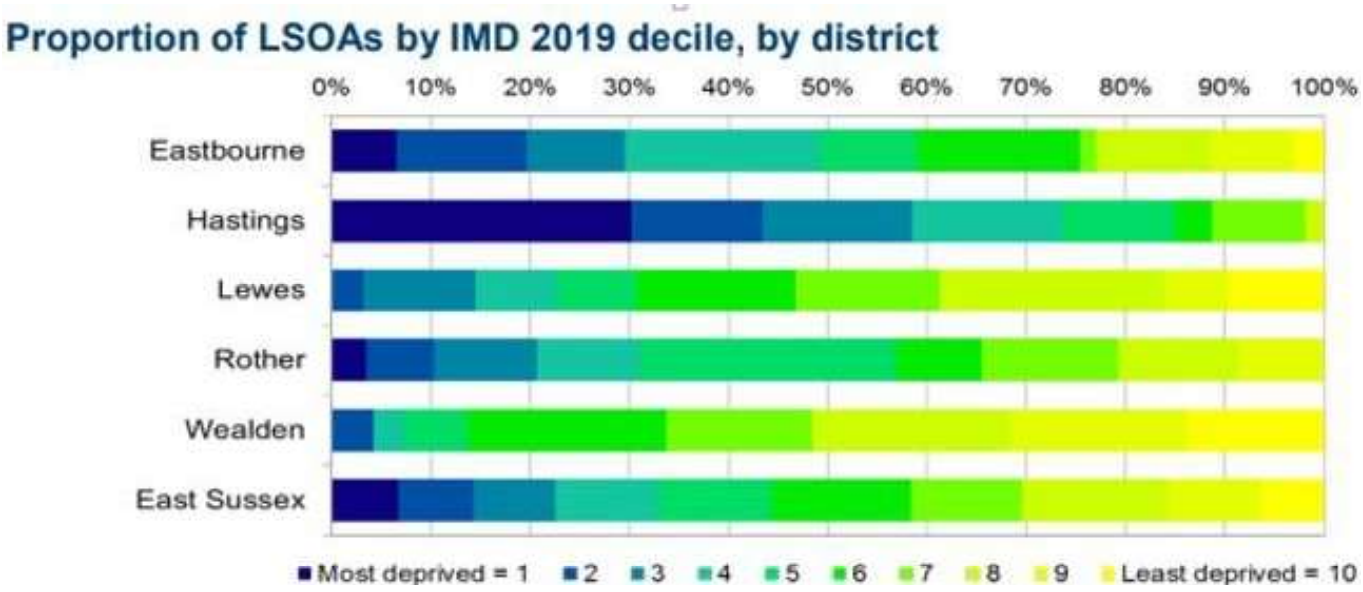

Figure 8.1: Proportion of local areas within each deprivation bracket. Source: Indices of Deprivation, 2019 – East Sussex report, page 6.

The groups most exposed to income deprivation and poverty:

Age cohorts:

With 40% of all areas within Hastings being in the highest decile of income deprivation in East Sussex, the town has been particularly exposed to the cost-of-living crisis. Indeed, the broad spectrum of people facing income deprivation may surprise people. For instance, even the older generation, who are associated with greater economic security, have been exposed to greater levels of income deprivation. 4,476 older people were recorded as being affected by income deprivation, 20% of all households[10]. This is much higher than the 14% of all households across England. Worryingly, children

disproportionately reside in low-income households, with 26% of all children in Hastings living in such households[11]. This is much higher than the regional average of 14%[12]. In terms of income, the number of children living in deprived households reached 4,524, 27% of all children[13]. Again, this is much higher than the national average of 17%.

This has made children particularly vulnerable to the increase in poverty. The data confirms this theory, with the rise in child poverty having been particularly stark. The 2011 Census enabled Hastings Borough Council (HBC) to report that an estimated 2,867 children experienced relative poverty[14]. In 2023, this had risen to 4,159, a 45% increase - see Figure 8.2. From 2015, there has been a 6% increase in the proportion of children living in relative poverty (17%-23%)[15]. This compares to a 2.5% regional increase and a 4.5% national increase, again demonstrating how poorer communities have been adversely affected by cost-of-living pressures.

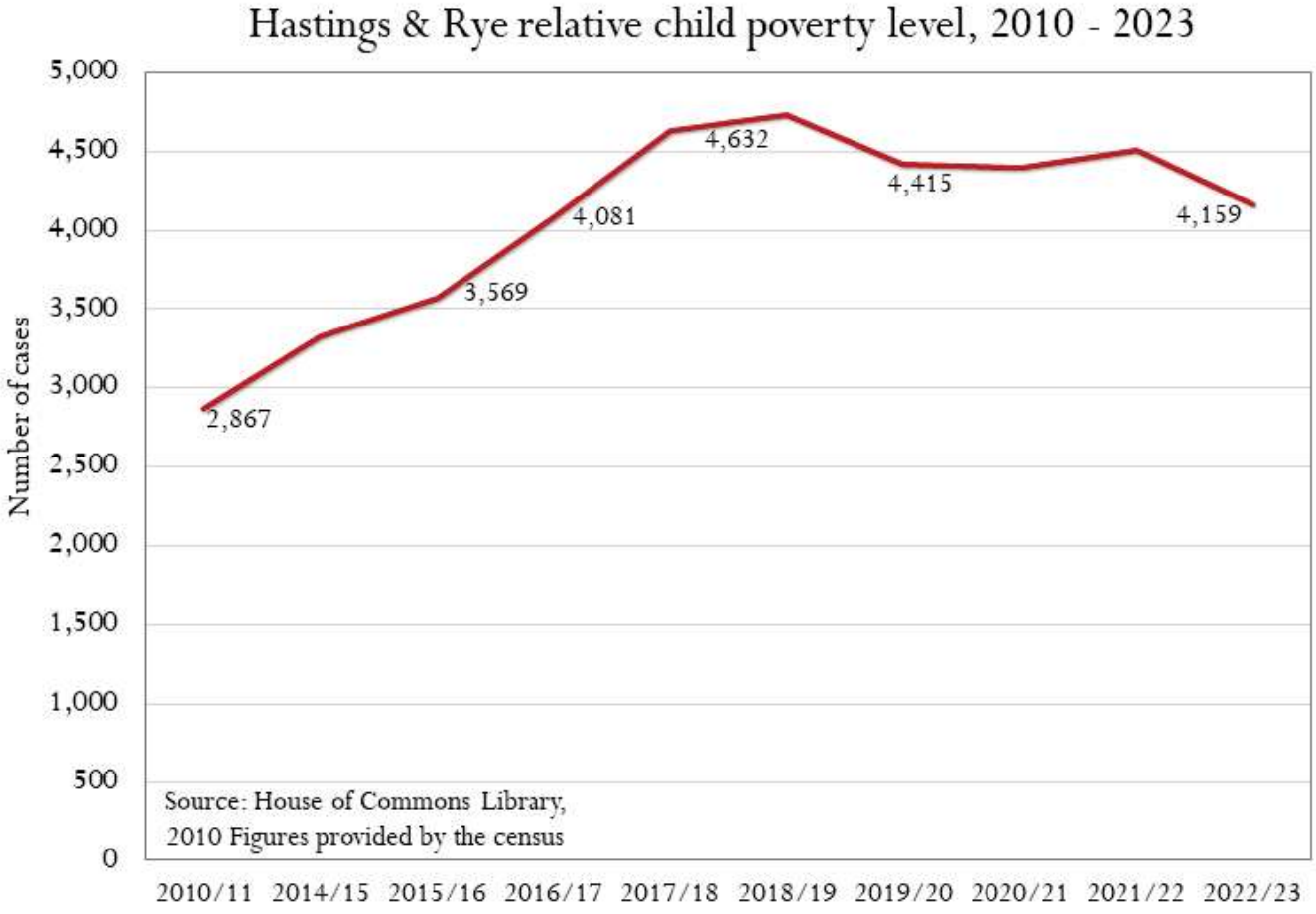

Figure 8.2: The number of children in relative poverty in the Hastings & Rye area. Source: House of Commons Library, HBC reports and the census.

Rural Poverty:

It is important to recall that more people will be living in low-income households in some of the rural areas within Hastings & Rother, meaning it is likely that poverty is hidden away in areas often thought of as affluent. Whilst parts of Rother are affluent and have relatively low levels of poverty, it is important to note that there are fairly high levels of poverty hidden amongst this. This is especially the case for the rural areas surrounding Hastings. The village of Iden is recorded as having over 41% of its population living in multiple deprivation. This is also the case for the poorer areas of Rye Village, with 43% of households in the Pottingfield Road area being identified as living in multiple deprivation. The Rye Harbour and Winchelsea beach area has a fairly high level of deprivation, with 30% of households being shown to live in multiple deprivation[16]. There are even some rural areas thought of as affluent that have nearly 25% of their residents living in multiple deprivation, such as Iklesham village. Peashmarsh village also has 20% of its population recorded as living in rural poverty. The part of Bexhill that connects to Hastings & Rye, Pebsham, also has a relatively high level of deprivation, with 30% of all households being categorised as living in multiple deprivation[17]. The town centre area in Bexhill also has 28% of households falling into this description. The main drivers for these isolated pockets of rural deprivation are mostly driven by barriers to accessing services and difficulty in obtaining required education and skills training. For instance, 70% of households in the Pottingfeild area of Rye are deprived of accessing education and training services, and over 40% of households in Rye Harbour and Iden Village struggle to access adequate housing and required services[18]. Therefore, whilst Rother mostly exhibits rural affluence, it is important to note that areas around Hastings and Rye do display disproportionate levels of poverty. This poverty is perhaps not recognised as much due to it being hidden away in more isolated areas that are stereotypically thought of as affluent.

An increasing problem:

The cost of living crisis, cuts to government services, and a lack of pay growth should have increased the number of people living in poverty within Hastings & Rye, especially considering the historically high level of income deprivation. In 2015, the constituency of Hastings & Rye was recorded as being the 91st most deprived constituency[19]. In 2019, it was registered as the 76th most deprived constituency, meaning poverty was more prevalent within the constituency than in 15 other places in the country[20]. As we already know, the number of children and older people living in poverty has increased, and the town's status of being more deprived has likely arisen through a rise in the number of people residing in poverty. This means the rise in poverty in Hastings in recent years is likely to be higher than elsewhere.

Changes in the indices of multiple deprivation support this theory. The overall percentage of households being recorded as living in multiple deprivation rose by 1.2%, meaning an additional 485 households are recorded as facing multiple deprivation[21]. Also, 0.4% more households were recorded as being deprived of education, skills and training, pushing an additional 190 households into this form of deprivation[22]. Overall, income and employment deprivation stayed at their 2015 level. The largest change occurred in the accessibility an individual has to housing and public services. From 2019 to 2024, an additional 6.2% of all households were recorded as not being able to access the housing and services they needed. This means that another 2,508 households are now exposed to this form of deprivation[23]. Therefore, a key driver of increasing poverty is likely to be related to the housing crisis and the decline in services available to the people most exposed to inadequate housing.

Yet, despite this obvious rise in poverty and it being announced that the borough of Hastings was the 13th most deprived local authority area in the country[24], issues around poverty and deprivation received little attention in the general election. Whilst issues like the cost of living and housing crisis received great political attention, many other problems caused by deprivation (such as insufficient welfare, increasing food insecurity, rises in homelessness

and growing fuel poverty) did not. This means that the consequences of rising poverty are mostly not being addressed. Yet, this overlooks how the voluntary and social enterprise sectors are working to address the problems caused by rising poverty.

The Consequences of Rising Poverty Levels

Food banks:

There is growing demand for foodbanks in Hastings. People who work for public health organisations, the Hastings Voluntary Association and individuals who manage food banks all say that demand is increasing from new sources[25]. Increasingly, people who were once managing and in comfortable occupations are more commonly using these charities. There is also a growing prevalence of older people using services food banks provide[26]. Therefore, demand is expanding mostly due to new groups being forced below the poverty line. Those who may be in comfortable jobs and are renting or paying for very costly mortgages are finding that their disposable income just isn't covering the essentials. Older people whose savings and pensions covered their cost of living are finding that with higher energy and rental payments, their only source of income doesn't provide all the basics[27]. In a town that has a very high number of pensioners reliant on energy support payments, the cutting of the winter fuel allowance will have only made this problem worse.

Whilst demand is growing for these charitable services, supply is falling. This is because maintaining the food supply for these charities is a tough challenge. It costs £6,000 per month to keep these charities going, and they are reliant on grants and individual donations[28]. The grants that foodbanks within Hastings were reliant upon are not as available as they once were and have less money to award. The supermarkets that once generated a surplus of food are less able to supply produce due to such outlets buying fewer goods post-Brexit[29]. Further, the donations gathered by the supermarkets are not as generous due to the cost-of-living crisis, causing many people to cut back on shopping trips[30]. Therefore, the model that Hastings' foodbanks based themselves upon is not sustainable and increasingly not viable. This explains

why, despite increased demand, one of the biggest foodbanks in the town, Dom's Food Mission in Ore Valley, has recently been forced to close[31].

Currently, there is no anti-poverty strategy in Hastings[32]. People who have worked in public health in the last decade within Hastings have stated that networks need to be created to better tackle these issues. Public health bodies are interested in tackling poverty because individuals living in the most deprived communities are 2 and a half times more likely to develop cancer, heart disease and obesity illnesses[32b]. Currently, five partnerships across Sussex tackle food insecurity, and there is a long-term strategy to connect groups. Yet, in Hastings, such a partnership does not exist. Instead, the Hastings Food Network works with the Tressell Trust, Feeding Britain and grassroots bodies to bring together local food organisations to provide foodbanks[33]. However, this is only a sticking plaster solution. This is because it is very difficult to provide foodbanks in the locations they are needed across the borough, and the number of foodbanks that can be sustained is very limited[34]. Additionally, maintaining these separate food-based groups can be a challenge, something that can make it harder to maintain local foodbanks. As mentioned, a foodbank that served pockets of severe deprivation in the east of the town, Dom's Food Mission, announced it had to stop its charitable work due to a lack of funding and the owners needing a change[35]. This highlights how reliant these services are on a small number of individuals who work incredibly hard, nearly always for free. Further, foodbanks can only provide a minimal number of services and can't address the wider problems that people in poverty often face.

Instead, individuals working with Hastings Voluntary Action and the local Food Network are seeking to build social supermarkets to address the wider problems of foodbank users[36]. Here is one of the clearest examples of the voluntary sector stepping in to cover where the welfare state is failing. The idea would be to provide all the services these individuals need to find a pathway out of poverty. Whilst this would obviously provide food donation services, it could also provide work advice for those out of employment. Such an organisation would also give support for claiming benefits individuals may

be entitled to and could create a buddy scheme to help those who have become socially isolated. These could also connect to local health services to guide people to treatment that could help them improve their general and mental health. These centres could also provide volunteers to help individuals fill in necessary forms and also provide links to professional support, such as legal advice for those facing problems with their landlord. These centres could also help with reporting crime and helping victims get access to justice. Such centres could also provide digital services for those who are digitally excluded[37].

Hastings Voluntary Action and the Hastings Food Network are seeking to pilot such a service and have explored areas where poverty rates are known to be high, such as Farley Bank, Broomgrove and Ore[38]. Additionally, they have also explored creating satellite services, where provisions can be taken to people in more rural, isolated areas in parts of Southern Rother. Yet, in their outreach work, these organisations have found that it is hard to create these institutions due to people being unwilling to come forward to access help. This is mainly because of the social stigmas around accessing help and a lack of trust towards institutions[39]. Those aiming to build this centre are seeking to overcome this problem by building relationships in these communities. They are also exploring methods of engagement, such as proposing the installation of a community café' to encourage those who need help to come forward[40]. They also want to work with local renewable energy providers to help create warm banks, something that would encourage elderly people not able to afford heating to engage with the community trust. These volunteers are also seeking to bring in trusted local charities, such as HARC, that help individuals fill in forms, connect people with professional advice and assist people in accessing legal aid. The body has also looked into working with Citizens Advice to assist people with problems in claiming benefits and providing legal advice[41]. They would also incorporate local charities focusing on food poverty and other public health problems. Leaders within the voluntary sector have also explored working with organisations that provide essential services, such as working with Southern Water to help those

struggling to pay their water bills. Therefore, these centres would provide a broad range of services that would be able to help people across a range of different poverty measures within one location. This would provide the broad multi-agency approach that is needed to address the complex issue of people living in poverty[42].

So far, these projects have not been able to fully develop due to a lack of funding. This lack of funding has again arisen due to grants being less numerous and generous. This has not been helped by charitable donations declining due to the cost-of-living crisis. Further, government support has been reduced due to the cuts from local government[43]. With the local council struggling to balance the books, the grants that help these charities provide services are now nearly all gone. Also, with the council facing a housing crisis that is threatening its financial viability, the authority has not had the time to develop an anti-poverty strategy that could help these voluntary bodies create a social supermarket. Therefore, these voluntary bodies are largely on their own and are struggling to sustain themselves, meaning they are finding it hard to set up advice and support hubs that could better address the poverty problems the town faces[44]. With further benefits cuts seemingly in the pipeline, the voluntary sector will likely continue to be needed to fulfil functions the welfare state should be providing.

Homelessness:

Rough Sleeping

Another consequence of people slipping through the safety net is the rise in homelessness. The most visible sign of this increase can be witnessed in the number of rough sleepers. In 2010, a total of 3 people were recorded as sleeping rough[45]. In 2016, it had climbed to 26, and in 202,4 it was shown to be 41[46]. Government figures now show that Hastings has the highest rough sleeper rate outside of London. People who work for local homelessness charities say that, due to hidden homelessness (where some people sleep rough in isolated, more rural areas), the actual numbers may be higher than this. One charity group estimates it could actually be above 50[47]. Indeed, on

a night when voluntary workers conducted a sweep of the Hastings town centre area, they found more than 40 people sleeping rough, with the true number only being realised once emergency winter protocols kicked in[48]. Some find themselves sleeping in caravans that are parked on main roads for months, something that has become a hot political issue due to the large number appearing near the park[49]. This sudden spike has occurred within the last year, and most of these people find themselves out of accommodation for months. This increase may have occurred within the last year, partly due to the cost of living crisis and local cuts around homelessness support, such as an 80% cut by the County Council on their support budgets[50]. It also may have occurred due to sudden spikes in section 21 notices[51], with local housing campaigners being aware of 7 such notices being used in one day. Indeed, during 2016-2023, the Ministry of Justice recorded a 103% increase in section 21 notices going to the Sussex County Court, a 129% increase from 2010 (see Figure 8.3).

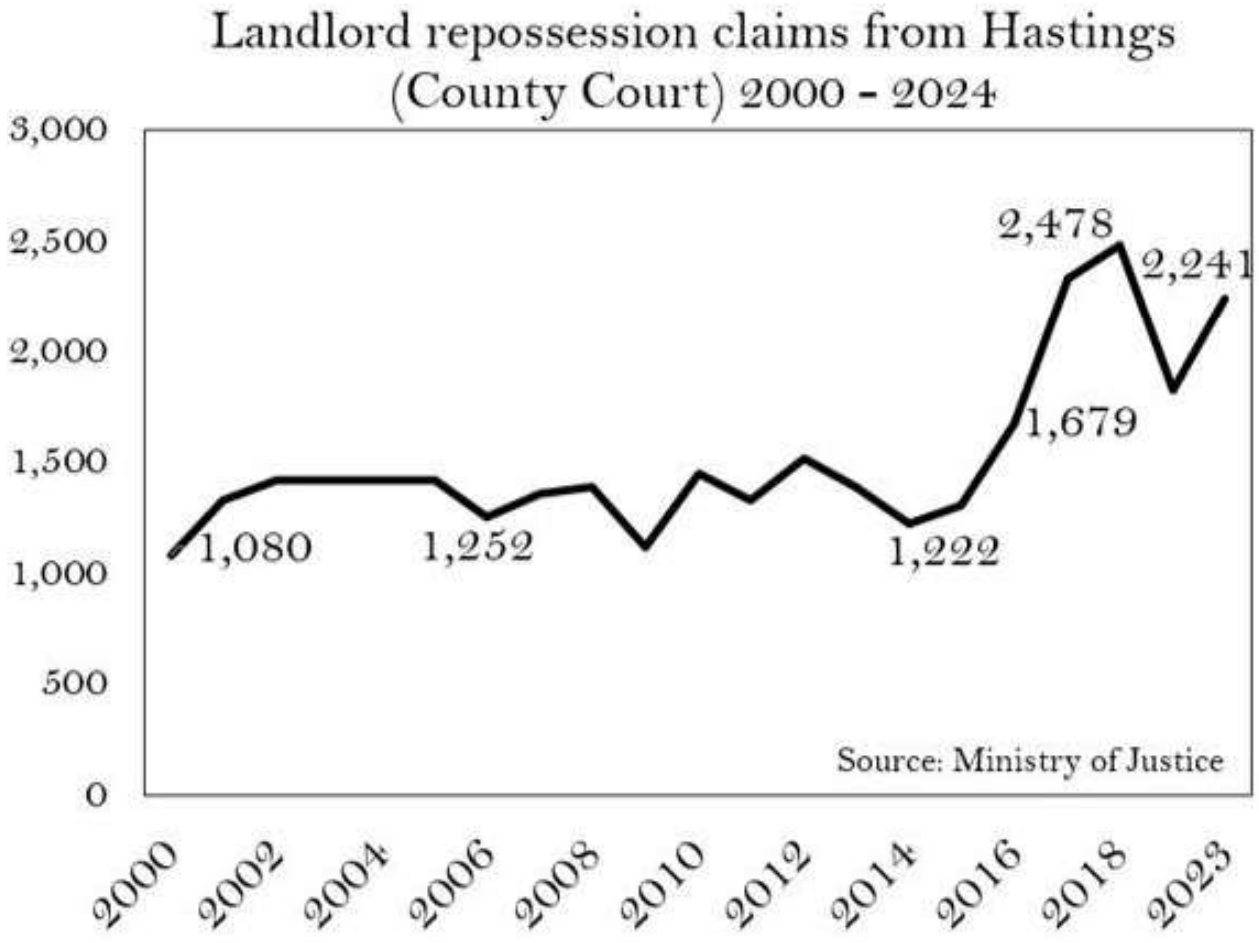

Figure 8.3: Landlord repossession claims from Hastings (County Court) 2000 – 2024. Source: Ministry of Justice.

A longer-term reason behind this problem is the freezing of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA). For those who need housing support, the amount they can obtain has been frozen since 2011. This has meant that housing support has not kept up with the cost of living increases and rapidly increasing house prices. This has been a particular problem in Hastings, where an acute housing crisis has caused house prices to rise within a relatively short time.

Currently, the LHA provides someone seeking a one-bedroom house within the Hastings borough £547.72 per month. The average one-bedroom rental price in Hastings is £790, a deficit of £242.28[52]. Since 2010, the LHA has not increased, but one-bed rental prices have increased by 98%. For a two-bedroom house, the LHA provides £690.40 per month. The average two-bedroom rental price is £859, a deficit of £218.60[53]. Since 2010, two-bed rental prices have increased by 65% whilst the LHA has stagnated. The LHA currently awards a family seeking a three-bedroom house £874.52 per month. The average three-bedroom rental price is £1,186, producing a shortfall of £311.48[54]. As the LHA has remained the same since 2010, three-bed rental prices have increased by 82%[55]. Therefore, one reason why the increase in rough sleeping may have occurred is because some people simply can't find somewhere affordable to live with the housing support payments they can access.

Due to large-scale cuts to homelessness support services over many years and an increase in people requiring support, local council services are struggling to cope. Local councils are exploring joining services to tackle the growing problem, but local campaigners feel there is a lack of action from borough councils across East Sussex[56]. Indeed, some go as far as to argue there is a lack of a homelessness support strategy, partly due to the council having to heavily focus on tackling the temporary accommodation crisis. Local campaigners have also argued that there has been limited councillor engagement in the past, something that has increased the burden on local homelessness charities[57]. Again, it could be argued that local voluntary

organisations are covering the work that government welfare should be undertaking. In fact, the charity sector is often directed by the government on how to carry out its services, often leaving it feeling constrained, as government involvement means help can only be provided in one specific way. Whilst the work the charity sector does is vital, it is important to note that the sector is small and fractured, meaning that sometimes people will not get the help they need.

With street homelessness, this can lead to devastating consequences. Sometimes people can be homeless for long periods before anyone can help them. Occasionally, these people drop off the grid and set up their shelter in more rural areas, meaning their needs go completely unnoticed. This has coincided with a recorded increase in the number of people dying on the streets, with 3 dying in the last year in Hastings[58]. Yet, perhaps the most alarming thought is that without these voluntary organisations existing, this figure could have been higher. Therefore, until the number of people sleeping rough is reduced, people will continue to fall through the cracks. With the welfare system having such gaping holes between the level of support needed and the amount of assistance given, it is unlikely these numbers can be reduced without increasing welfare payments relating to housing support. This means it is likely that the voluntary sector will continue to be needed to fix problems the welfare state should be preventing.

Temporary accommodation

Yet, this is only part of the homelessness crisis. Whilst rough sleeping is the most visible part of housing poverty, the most common form is people who cannot find a long-term place to live. Instead, these people face a precarious state where they often are placed in temporary accommodation for long periods before they can find a longer-term rental option. Indeed, for many, temporary accommodation becomes a long-term place of residency, meaning they know they face precarious housing for an extended time.

Currently, 1,135 people are living in temporary accommodation within the Hastings borough[59]. This represents one in 79 people. Out of this group, 508

are children, comprising roughly 45% of all homeless people[60]. This means that 1 in 28 children are effectively homeless[61], and this places Hastings in the top 5 local authorities (outside of London) in terms of the overall rate of homelessness[62].

Figure 8.4 demonstrates this has been a rapidly growing problem for the council, with cases doubling in a 3-year period. To reduce these numbers, the council needs more units in use and ideally marketed at an affordable rent. Currently, one in 38 homes in Hastings is sitting empty, meaning this is not an issue that will likely go away any time soon[63]. There are a variety of reasons for this, Air B & B, probate (where change of ownership occurs due to a will being enacted), poor maintenance and owners living in a care home. Whilst the council cannot address all these issues in the past, it would have taken action on poor maintenance[64].

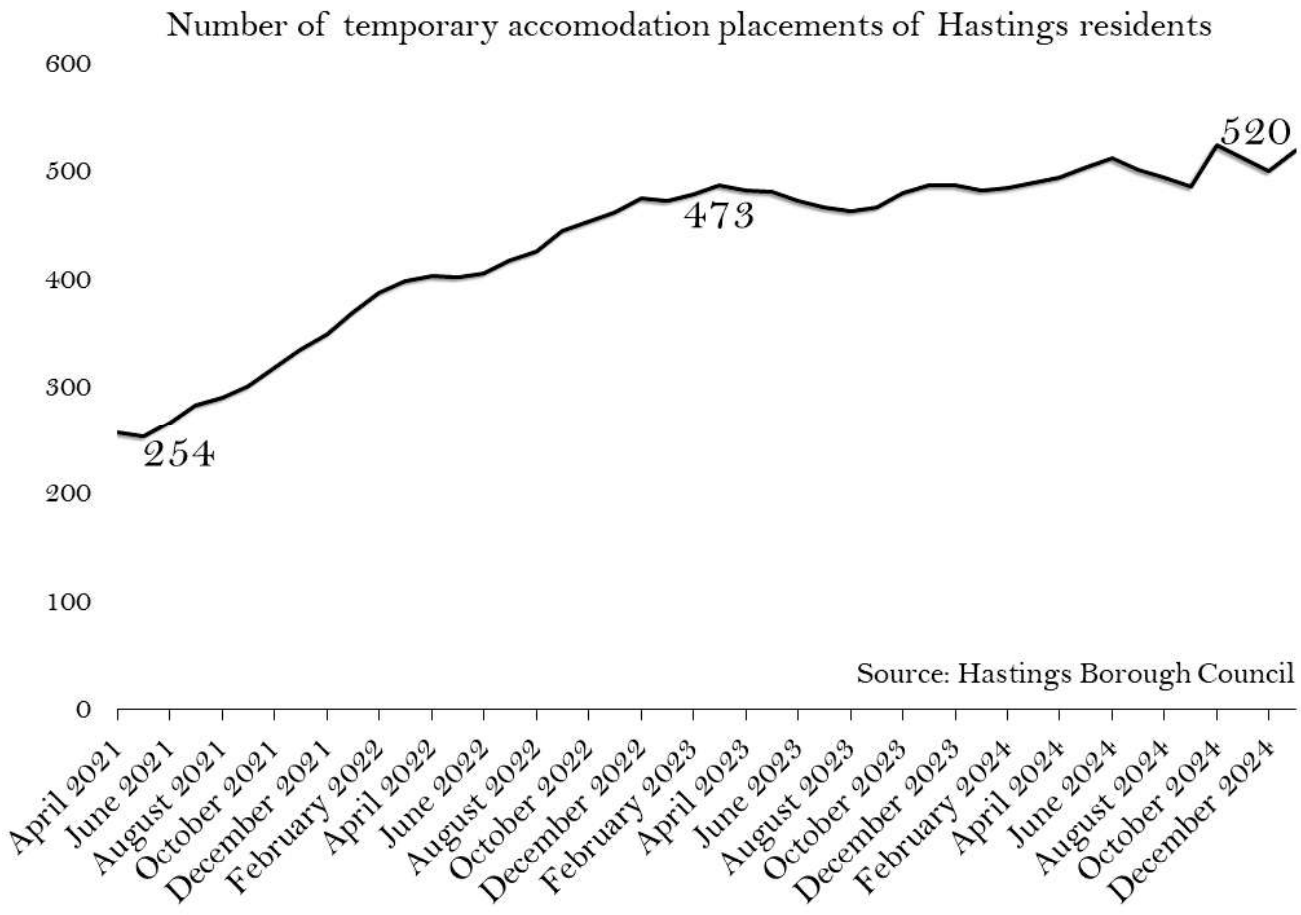

Figure 8.4: Number of temporary accommodation placements for Hastings residents. Source: Hastings Borough Council.

Whilst the local authority is in charge of housing and planning, they have been unable to build enough affordable housing units. This is mostly because authorities rely upon private companies to build units and have not been able to convert empty units into affordable accommodation. The low conversion rate is partly due to cuts imposed on Hastings Borough Council. These cuts have meant that they have not been able to continue their “grotbusters” scheme (where empty, degraded units were brought back into use in the form of social housing). Additionally, the council have lost dedicated staff to deal with this issue, such as having no empty homes officer for two years[65]. Such an officer is required due to the large amount of work involved in compulsory purchasing empty homes. Councils have to fulfil key legal criteria and must show it has the funds to pay for the building if an owner mounts a legal challenge or can’t sell the property (despite the fact councils can easily sell such units to social housing companies)[66]. Without this essential work, the number of empty properties that were converted declined. More recently, Hastings Borough Council has been able to fill some of these units with a government grant[67]. Yet, when these grants run out, the council will be back to the same position of not being able to increase the proportion of affordable housing within the town.

Instead, within the Hastings Town Centre, this action has been taken by social enterprises. The most visible example of this is the social enterprise The Hastings Commons, which has renovated a large empty building that was once used for producing and printing the Hastings Observer Newspaper. This has led to empty units being converted into 12 affordable housing units, a community space on the ground floor and a shared workspace for those who work remotely[68]. Further down the road, more empty units have been converted into functional uses that benefit the community. At the back of the building, a café’ and more workspaces for businesses have been created. This regeneration project has secured many grants, replacing a small proportion of the funding the council once would have had available[69]. Whilst this project has been extremely successful and is admirable, it would be hard to replicate across a wider area and at a scale the council once did. Therefore, whilst the

voluntary sector has picked up the work the council once did, it can't be expected to fully plug the gap. To fully address the empty home problem, greater council action and funding would be required.

Action is also being taken by local housing groups, such as the Hastings Housing Alliance. Here, a group of local housing campaigners are using online surveys to gather information on housing costs, the number of empty units, potential building sites for affordable housing and the quality of housing[70]. They will then pass this information on to the council and encourage the council to develop a new housing strategy based on local data that describes the needs of its residents. They hope this will lead to the council identifying new land where affordable housing can be built and will target areas for improvements where housing quality is particularly poor[71]. This would involve the council putting more pressure on social housing units to sort out poor-quality units (something it is obligated to do under the Decent Homes Act). It would also involve getting social housing companies to use more of their emergency accommodation to ease the growing temporary accommodation crisis[72]. Currently, turning empty social housing units into occupied accommodation can take a long time, occasionally leaving blocks of needed units empty.

Therefore, putting pressure on these companies to produce a quicker turnaround is also needed. Action could also be brought against bad tenants quicker to stop housing degrading before a change of occupancy has to occur. Again, voluntary organisations should not be the ones undertaking such work, as there is a government regulator for social housing (RSH) that should be doing this[73]. But the regulator is weak, underfunded and understaffed, again meaning the campaigning and voluntary sector picks up the slack. Once more, whilst some of this work can be covered by the voluntary sector, not all of it can, meaning central and local government will be required to force social housing companies to improve their performance.

Fuel Poverty:

To summarise, previous research has found that fuel poverty in Hastings is well above the national average and is on the rise[74]. Since this research was published, the government has outlined cuts to winter fuel payments. As Hastings has a high reliance on these payments, with over 500 fuel vouchers (worth over £31,000) being handed out each year[75], the problem of fuel poverty has likely increased in the colder months of the last year. Whilst the government is withdrawing these measures to cut fuel poverty, not-for-profit companies within East Sussex are seeking to fill this new void.

One such company is Energise Sussex Coast. This is a not-for-profit company that provides a free advisory service on how to increase energy efficiency within the home and install renewable energy for people likely to be in fuel poverty. They also work with local foodbanks to identify people who need to save money. Recently, the company estimated that 80% of its 7,000 customers live in fuel poverty, 82% rent, and more than 70% cannot work and have a disability[76]. Although most of their clients are between 50 and 60-years old, their clients also have outstanding energy and water debts. The help they provide to these people covers insulation methods, loft insulations, wall cavity measures, floor heating and solar panel options. They have 16 people working part-time and seek to save local services money by using renewables[77]. Recently, they have experienced higher demand due to higher energy costs and have noticed a slight uptick in demand as people adjust to winter fuel payment support cuts.

The company also engage in big energy installations that are designed to cut energy bills and keep money in the local area. One project involved installing large solar panels in 7 schools. The school agrees to buy their energy from Energise Sussex alone, and this allows it to buy a Trilowhat of energy for 24p, a third of the market price. Since completion, this project has saved these schools £82,000 per year (a figure generated from average energy prices)[78]. This large saving is therefore reducing waste and helping the school fund other essential items, such as keeping staff. Another project focused on

installing solar panels on a community centre. This project has saved the community centre a great deal of money on energy costs and has helped to ensure its long-term viability. This type of project also worked for the Bexhill Bowles Club, where 720 solar panels enabled the centre to save enough money to stay open[79]. It will also protect it against future energy price shocks as the energy costs are locked in at a standard rate for 20 years. As Energise Sussex projects are community-owned owned they also do not have to worry about their supplier changing or going out of business.

They have also installed panels in Crowhurst Solar Farm, which generates 6.3 megawatts of electricity and supplies 2,500 homes[80]. In Battle, a similar project has saved residents £250,000 a year and has cut Co^2 emissions by 450 tonnes for 575 homes. Such sites also have increased biodiversity (measured by the number of wildlife habitats) by 900%[81]. It also makes use of land that contains poor soil quality due to over-farming. Through these projects, the not-for-profit has been able to produce £438,959 for its 100 investors, which has resulted in investors seeing a good return on their investment[82]. Currently, the company is exploring sites for larger-scale renewable projects, such as possible solar and wind farm sites in the Rye area.

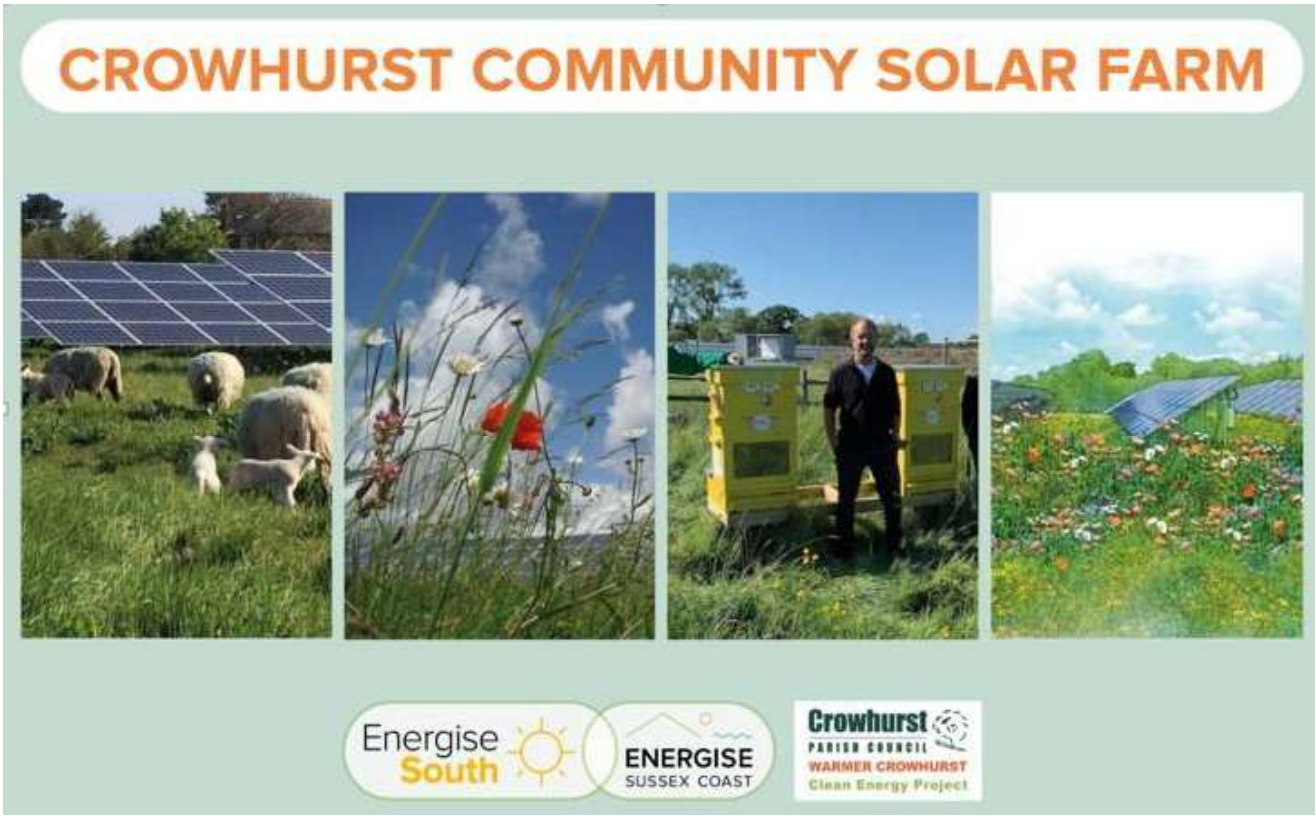

Figure 8.5: Energise Sussex Coast outlining their community solar farm project. Available at: https://www.energisesussexcoast.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Title-board.jpg

As this community decarbonisation business works across East Sussex, they have noticed growing fuel poverty in rural communities, even in the areas often characterised as affluent[83]. This is mostly due to rapidly rising energy costs and older, less energy-efficient households being reliant on gas boilers. Indeed, they even found fuel poverty within rural areas associated with affluence[84]. This highlights the growing burden of energy costs and how many older people, in particular, are falling through the safety net. Again, this weakening of the welfare state has been covered by social enterprises and charities, but as already stated, this sector's work can only go so far and doesn't fully address the problem.

Addressing growing poverty:

The problem of growing poverty is limiting our town's potential. So many being unable to afford basic accommodation costs has left the town's council

almost bankrupt, leaving little money for other essential services. A rising number of individuals not being able to afford their weekly shop or their mounting energy bills only results in fewer people having a disposable income in the town, meaning local businesses suffer from declining demand. This lower demand decreases employment opportunities and weakens the economy for everyone. Crucially, this means it will be difficult to solve other problems, like poor local government finances, a weak local economy, low wages and a lack of opportunity until increasing poverty levels can be halted. To tackle growing poverty levels, the following policies could be implemented:

Food poverty & poverty in general:

A core feature of poverty in Hastings is rising levels of relative poverty, with food poverty being a visible outcome of this trend. To address this, such action could involve:

- Creating a localised poverty strategy within the Hastings and Rye area. This is particularly needed in Hastings, where local poverty strategies have not yet been fully developed. This is something that could be developed and implemented by the new unitary authority.
- Developing a stronger safety net – such as creating social centres.

This idea is taken from the social supermarket initiative. Here, people would be able to get support for a range of problems that prevent people from securing work and escaping the poverty trap. Such support could include:

- Helping with searches for employment.
- Supporting people who need retraining to gain employment.
- Providing assistance in filling out essential government forms – such as helping apply for benefits they may be entitled to. These places could also bring in charities that have experience in helping others to fill out forms.
- Creating a place for food banks to operate and providing government grants to help sustain foodbanks. It could also be a place to encourage others to donate to the foodbank.
- Creating links with local health services to help tackle health problems that increase unemployment (such as linking with mental health support groups).

- Creating a network of local charities and social enterprises that aim to assist people in poverty and help individuals out of poverty.
- Providing basic Legal advice for those facing a legal problem (such as a housing problem with their landlord). This could also be used as an opportunity to give experience and training to young people looking to gain a career in the legal sector.

Tackling deprivation in education and skills/ training.

A key factor that causes multiple deprivation in Hastings is barriers to obtaining education, skills and training. To address this, such action could involve:

- Improving attendance amongst those who are persistently absent.
- Free Breakfast clubs.
- Extending free school meal provision in schools.
- Creating more adult learning centres - encouraging the principle of life-long learning.
- Linking skills and training with job centre support.
- Improving the quality of provision – especially at the secondary school level.
- Adapting the curriculum to create greater flexibility, such as allowing more focus on subjects that students enjoy during GCSE years. There could also be a greater focus on vocational subjects for students who do not enjoy academic settings.
- Creating pathways for school leavers – ensuring that all those who leave go on to employment, training or further education.
- Tackling rapidly rising home schooling numbers.
- Creating more apprenticeships and training programmes for in-demand skills.

More details on improving education provision can be found in Chapter 5.

Tackling income deprivation:

Another key factor that drives poverty in Hastings is income deprivation. Action to address this could involve:

- Increasing in-work benefits.
- Eliminating the two-child benefit cap (especially for those in work).

- Reintroducing a strong tax credit system. This would be designed to increase incomes for those in work. This could be done through redistributive taxation.
- Decreasing the cost of living - such as housing, renting, mortgage and energy costs.
- Improving the local economy to increase wages and reduce unemployment. See chapter 3 for more detailed policy solutions.
- Reducing the number of empty shops in the town and improving high street areas in general. Again, see chapter 3 for more details.
- Improving infrastructure to increase economic investment and opportunity in the town. See chapter 4 for more details.
- Securing business investment, once new in-demand skills have been created.
- Growing the local economy in general and increasing productivity will also help reduce income deprivation.
- Increasing diversity within the local economy by training people for in-demand skills - especially those that Hastings is short of.

Tackling rough sleeping, temporary accommodation living and housing deprivation:

Deprivation of adequate housing is another key driver of deprivation. To address this, a localised housing strategy could be formed: This will allow the town to identify localised trends in housing and identify unique local challenges that have been created by the housing crisis. This strategy could also identify land to build more housing on, as well as calculate how many affordable homes need to be built.

More detailed policy solutions can be found in the housing chapter. But, in short, this involves:

- Building more affordable homes.
- Securing more temporary accommodation.
- Building more social and council homes.
- Maintaining and improving housing quality.
- Combating empty homes.
- Protecting and helping renters – including extending rental agreements.
- Increasing incentives to rent (such as reviewing taxation around landlords and renting property).
- Reviewing the local housing allowance

Specifically, action to end rough sleeping could involve:

- Providing mental health support for rough sleepers (when required).
- Providing drug rehabilitation services (when required).
- Providing newly built temporary accommodation services for rough sleepers (if housing affordability were the main cause of homelessness).
- Providing newly built temporary accommodation services for rough sleepers (if domestic violence main cause of homelessness. Also, increase the number of hostel spaces.
- Providing greater support to get those made homeless back into work. Helping those made homeless to access welfare services.
- Providing local government with greater homelessness support, such as providing revenue to hire more officers specialising in homelessness.
- Directing those in need to medical services that focus on helping those who have been made homeless.
- Addressing the prison problem, where those released can sometimes be released homeless (see Chapter 7). Providing temporary accommodation for these cases could help reduce homelessness and reoffending.

Lowering energy bills.

Rising energy bills are helping to increase the cost of living and increasing poverty levels. More detailed policy solutions to this problem can be found in the climate and pollution chapter. But, in short, this involves reducing our reliance on gas, which is increasing in price. This would involve:

- Building large-scale renewable energy projects and supporting smaller, more localised projects better.
- Installing offsetting projects – such as localised woodland creation.
- Replacing gas boilers and converting households to electric.
- Providing better insulation for housing, especially in parts where old heat heat-inefficient homes are plentiful.
- Building a small nuclear power station within East Sussex.

More detailed policy solutions can be found in Chapter 9.

Why cutting welfare won't work:

At the time of writing this, the government has recently announced plans for further cuts to the benefit system. The idea behind cutting welfare is that it will both save the money government needs to balance the books, whilst encouraging people reliant on welfare to go back to work. Once these

individuals enter the workforce, this is projected that poverty levels will decrease and economic activity will increase, something that would help to address the problems discussed. Yet, there are two key problems with this argument. The first is that due to declining living standards, the proportion of people who are either just over the poverty line or have already fallen through it is currently at a very high level. Therefore, further decreases in the cost of living caused by shrinking the welfare state will only push more people into poverty, making the problems of poor local government finances and a weak local economy even worse. Additionally, the assumption that any losses could be recuperated through higher employment levels may be a wrong one. This is because recently there has been a slight uptick in unemployment. From February to April, another 55 people registered as unemployed – bringing the unemployment rate to 5.0% (+0.1%)[85]. This is considerably above the county rate of 3.2%, a trend that has made job searching more competitive and employment harder to come by. Further, the proposal to cut PIP, a benefit that supports disabled people into employment, might also result in further unemployment. Indeed, Figure 8.6 highlights how DWP data shows a clear majority of people whose PIP benefits are withdrawn (72%[86]) are reinstated on appeal, indicating most on support need assistance. Therefore, withdrawing support for those who most require it at a time when gaining employment is becoming harder might result in more people being out of work and falling into the poverty trap. Again, this will only increase dependency on government services, worsen local government finances and prevent economic growth. Consequently, although the argument of cutting welfare might sound logical, it should be a policy that is resisted.

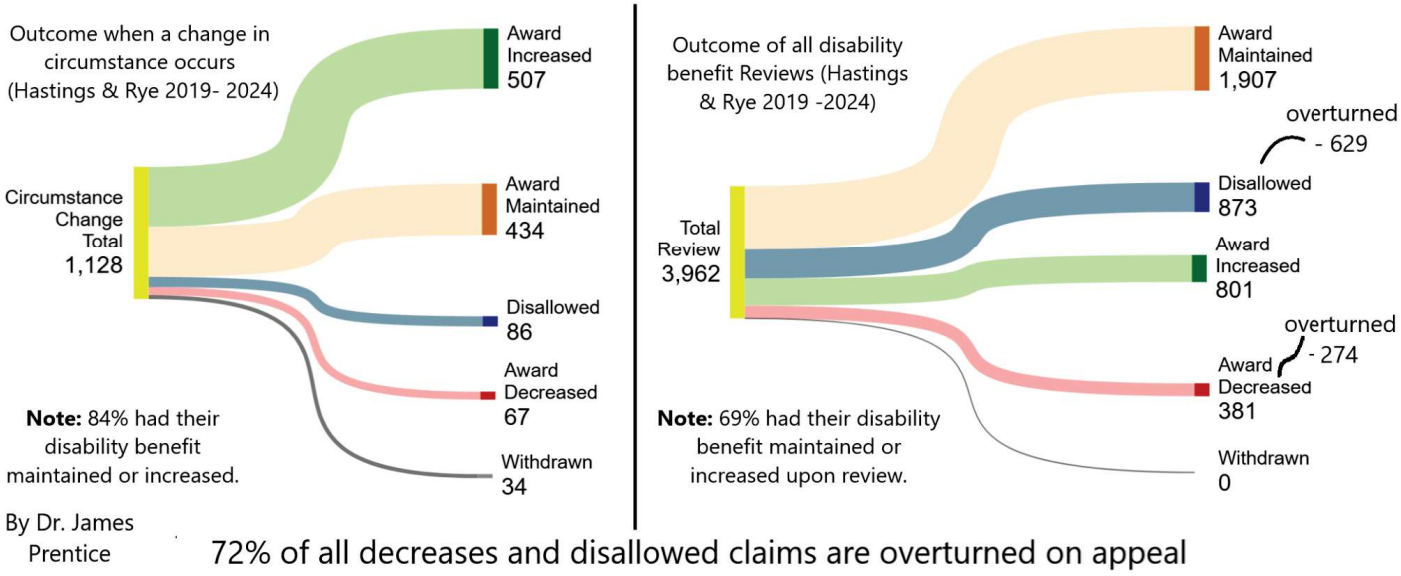

Figure 8.6. A figure showing that most disability sanctions and reviews get overturned on appeal. Source: Department of Work and Pensions dataset.

Chapter Endnotes:

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[16] Taken from the indices of deprivation 2019 dataset. Found at:
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[18] Taken from the indices of deprivation 2019 dataset. Found at: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019
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[20] Indices of Deprivation, 2019 – East Sussex report – page 10 https://www.eastsussexjsna.org.uk/media/0qbp5oov/indices-of-deprivation-2019-final.pdf
[21] Calculated from the changes in the 2015 and 2019 indices of deprivation. Data can be found in the government statistics of deprivation: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015
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[24] East Sussex in Figures Multiple Deprivation statistics, printed in .....
[25] Information gathered from foodbank volunteers within the Hastings & Rother area.
[26] Information gathered from foodbank volunteers within the Hastings & Rother area.
[27] Information gathered from foodbank volunteers within the Hastings & Rother area.
[28] Information gathered from foodbank volunteers within the Hastings & Rother area.
[29] Information gathered from foodbank volunteers within the Hastings & Rother area.
[30] Information gathered from foodbank volunteers within the Hastings & Rother area.
[31] Social Media message confirming the Foodbank closing and the reasons for this: https://www.facebook.com/domsfoodmission/posts/pfbid0jFor2pVVjng13dKVHs7CcKjqGTApS65d8GQmEpk4nvDskSGTQJpP1WUMJBozL2Pdl
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[33] Information gathered from foodbank volunteers within the Hastings & Rother area.

[34] Information gathered from foodbank volunteers within the Hastings & Rother area.
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https://www.facebook.com/domsfoodmission/posts/pfbid0jFor2pVVjng13dKVHs7CcKjqGTApS65d8GQmEpk4nvDskSGTQJpP1WUMJBozL2Pdl
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[37] According to an interview in late 2024 with a HVA and local public health worker in the Hastings area.
[38] According to an interview in late 2024 with a HVA and local public health worker in the Hastings area.
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[40] According to an interview in late 2024 with a HVA and local public health worker in the Hastings area.
[41] According to an interview in late 2024 with a HVA and local public health worker in the Hastings area.
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[50] An interview with volunteers from a local homelessness charity.
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[52] Data taken from a presentation given by Hastings Borough Council to councillors in March 2023.

[53] Data taken from a presentation given by Hastings Borough Council to councillors in March 2023.
[54] Data taken from a presentation given by Hastings Borough Council to councillors in March 2023.
[55] Data taken from a presentation given by Hastings Borough Council to councillors in March 2023.
[56] An interview with volunteers from a local homelessness charity.
[57] An interview with volunteers from a local homelessness charity.
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[81] A presentation by Energise Sussex Coast – Delivered at Hastings College in March.
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