## Appendix 2: Feedback from Voluntary and Community Sector

Disadvantage strategy development – responses from a 'call for assistance'

During January and February 2022, funding was offered to all voluntary and community groups in the city to participate in the development of the disadvantage strategy Framework and to ensure the voices of their communities were heard at this important stage.

A list of who responded is provided at the end of the summary. There were also contributions and interest from other groups who were not formally engaged in the activity. These thoughts have also been incorporated below.
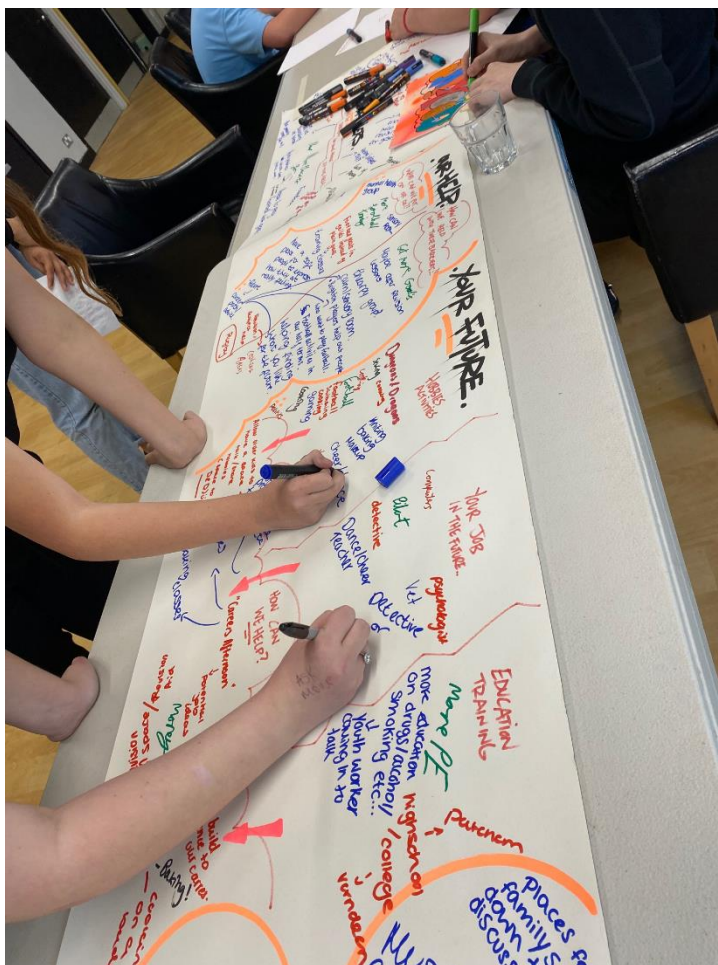
Summary of feedback / reflections

Question: What do we mean by disadvantage? How might it be described better?

Reflections on the potential negative connotations with the word disadvantage

- Disadvantage – isn't an identity I would like to be given. As a mother of a child with a disability I certainly don't think I am disadvantaged- far from it. However having a child with additional needs is expensive and needs to be adequately supported in order for us to have the same access and advantages as non SEND families
- Recognising disadvantage is an acknowledgement of a gap
- Disadvantage sounds negative, creates a negative stereotype of those who've fallen into that category. 'Disadvantage(d)' holds negative connotations
- Disadvantage should include anyone who doesn't fit into the 'norm', rather than specific categories being 'disadvantaged'.
- Associated it with negatively perceived terms such as 'lacking', 'restricted', 'poverty', and 'unable'
- Offensive to be considered disadvantaged because a child has additional needs or on free school meals
- Using the word disadvantaged perhaps puts the problem on the individual rather than the community?
- Language used is demoralising, unfriendly, exclusive, formal, simplify the wording
- Too often people 'with needs or differences' are seen as others and in the context of services, taking resources away from others eg SEND children. Stop putting the onus on the 'othered' to fit in.
- Some people feel like they have to 'be better, adapt to the system' / 'change and adapt to other people'
- Some people see 'disadvantage' as a stigma
- Recognition that some people who are experiencing disadvantage may not have the capacity (resources / energy / time) to fight their corner
- The whole system is set up to work with children who fit the idea of 'normal'. We need more awareness at every level and the system needs to work for everyone.

Reflections on what might be happening in someone's life to consider them to be at risk of disadvantage

- It means not being able to access the basics to meet your needs and / or the opportunities you should be able to
- Lack of time and / or money

- Disabilities - very clear links between disability and poverty
- Not being listened to contributes to disadvantage
- Individuals or groups of people who are systematically denied access to opportunities or support that stops them from achieving their full potential and live a fulfilled life.
- Services are a bit too far out for some people to get to and some parents don't have the money for them to travel on the bus or the time to take them there if the child is too young to go on their own.
- Lack of opportunity
- Not feeling good enough - Mental health and the stigma around it,
- Risk of suicide, depression, anxiety, feeling judged 24/7,
- Stuff for teenagers is underfunded,
- Not passing tests and GCSE's, pressure and not succeeding at school
- The space around here
- Not enough activities and football spaces
- Family poverty, insecure housing, mental health issues, parental mental health issues, SEND, ethnicity and race are also important, literacy barriers and learning difficulties, recognise mothers' inability to work
- Lower socio-economic groups
- When you haven't got emotional, practical and financial support.
- Combination of digital, language and money barriers makes things VERY hard
- Other barriers: education/lack of learning opportunities, no car, poor housing, environmental/ geographical, health/disability mental and physical. Results in fewer opportunities due to finance, location, mobility, education, employment
- Lack of chances – and having to work harder
- Not being on the same step as other people.
- No local facilities, nothing to go to that is free, nothing for my age, nothing that is interesting
- No external support

Thoughts on how it could be described differently

- A Life Boosting Strategy – to help you go forward. If you say we're here to push you forward, to help you advance, grow. That will give people more of a chance to put their chin up, to do it.
- 'People facing additional barriers' may be a more comfortable term
- Instead of BAME say 'disadvantage because of racism' to focus on racism rather than being in a specific group
- Disadvantaged people shouldn't be seen as 'outsiders' or 'on the margins'; if non-disadvantaged was a 'circle', the disadvantaged are those who are left outside the circle. Need to consider what is needed is for everyone to be inside the circle.
- It means not getting the services and opportunities that others get. 'Underserved' is a possible alternative.

- It's about choice – being able to act on choices you want to make with your life
- It is important to recognise this is not a 'static' position. But, equally, it must be acknowledged that for many, there lies a complex and additionally challenging path to whatever their version of 'advantage' may be.
- Geography plays a part – important to recognise what might not be available to some
- Advocating for those who are 'othered' can be difficult to and they can be easily labelled as difficult, especially if black or from a minority ethnicity.
- The disadvantaged would be better reframed as being about inclusion and the positive action the city needs to take to ensure equity of opportunity ie reframe strategy as Everybody's City. B&H Equal Playing Field / Equal Help / Positive Help / Positive Equalities / equity
- Maybe it should be described as those for whom the world has not been designed.

Question: What should be done better to support those at risk of disadvantage?

Timing of support

- Children and families need access to the right (sometimes specialist) support at the right time
- Early intervention
- There are still many barriers that need to be removed to improve access and early intervention
- Are the groups / services more focussed around caring not open yet from Covid?
- Home schooling was not possible for everyone because of disadvantage. Some children don't have their own rooms or have caring roles at home so for some it was impossible
- Some children haven't returned to schools, youth workers and school nurses are used to visiting children in their homes, there's too many children that need the service. Why wasn't the priority to get children back in school and instead getting people back in the office?
- More preventative work, rather than crisis response

Where services are and how they are designed

- Systems are so complex and need to be more accessible. Information is not easy to find and not clear. The process needs to change fundamentally to enable people to access what they need
- Better provision and opportunities need to be physically available where the people are at, services need to come to the community (eg via a befriending group/social prescribers visit), more outreach, doorstep knocks
- Services and support need to be more joined-up, more collaboration
- Needs to be more community-led consultations and action, co-production of support
- Change the one-size-fits-all attitude: services/support needs to be person/family-centred

- Have more community navigators, points of contact. Tackle "no-one ever gets back to you"
- Funding cuts means there are more community projects to deliver services but do commissioning arrangements set groups against each other? There is enough need for all.
- Those who make decisions on service provision to have an in-depth understanding of what are the actual difficulties faced by people at risk of disadvantage.
- This means ease of access to high quality and impartial information, advice, guidance, support / more joined-up delivery of services/ better co-production more person-centred responses / more preventative work, rather than crisis response
- Examining unconscious bias to counter racism, classism, sexism, ableism. Discrimination awareness for students, staff at school, college, community groups, council, businesses, employers etc.
- Many communities we were seeking to speak with experience disadvantage in many ways. This experience is further heightened when needs intersect with other measures of disadvantage. The voice of these people or their families can be harder to hear the more disadvantaged they are.
- There needs to be more information available so they know what's there if they need help.
- To be creative, they haven't tried everything yet . Services reflect what the Council can offer, rather than being creative
- It's often the case, that those who are at risk of disadvantage are more likely to face struggles in more than one socio-economic factor thus its paramount that there is a link and a corroborative approach among those departments that provides support in education, employment, health, housing and social opportunities.
- Services / support networks work when they are better informed about the support available to them, feel better in themselves and more resilient to deal with the challenges they face and are more connected with people and services in the wider community.
- To have their voices and experiences heard and to work closely together to help improve services and support

Types of services people like and want more of

- Have an advocate/personal advisor to help individuals access services, for life admin and practical support, to help with everything, holistically eg getting your phone sorted, setting up phone to make online payments
- Have someone to come to you – more time and space to offer a person, to teach them skills, not just do it for them. Focus on empowerment (have control of decisions/take actions), upskilling/capacity building/resilience – could be a Time Bank
- Need good representation in leadership so communities can see themselves in that across the city - the need to "see yourself" to feel fully welcome.

- Better supported living. More sustainable living – costs are going up, energy bills, water bills – the average wage a person can pull in is not affordable to keep up with demands.
- help them, to step in, to take the load off.
- People need better understanding. People think they're just this, they're just that, but if you look at them, take the time to sit there, talk to the people, you'll get a better understanding about the area, the people themselves, what's going on. You've then got more of a chance to do better for the area, do better for the people.
- Pool of people parents can contact for help
- Properly funded community projects are needed. It would be good to have a network of community projects. They are all working towards the same goal but can be against each other at the same time.
- Advocating for them. When a family is fighting multiple battles, they need someone to fight for them sometimes.
- Joined up service delivery to achieve an integrated approach on supporting disadvantaged members of society
- Provide reliable and on-going support to those at risk of disadvantage.
- Appropriately resourced public spaces, e.g. wheelchair friendly pavements, disabled parking, toilets and changing facilities.
- More mentoring and support opportunities – plus physical activities to use energy and volunteering opportunities to get work experience
- Digital training for all – it's crucial
- Better financial planning/debt advice after separation and/or setting up new home. Better housing support before evictions & loss of tenancies when whole families are uprooted and are in emergency housing affecting education, mental health etc   Rent to buy on benefits.
- Provide an independent advice centre with advocacy to communicate with organisations on behalf of single parents. Inform single parent families about how to access free and low cost events, activities, training to increase quality of life and reduce isolation. Explicit advertising of single parent discounts at venues and activities throughout the city.
- Zero tolerance with penalties for non-payment and avoidance of child maintenance. Access to free legal services including support to navigate Child Maintenance Options.
- Need accessible, free mental health support for all – urgently
- Workers need to be culturally competent and ideally with lived experience of the situations of the families being supported.
- Services need to listen and understand what the challenges are for families, and work collaboratively to make their services more welcoming and accessible.
- Outreach support is also essential as it can start earlier, reach those furthest from services and those with multiple disadvantages/
- Increase the use of equalities impact assessments across services, including schools and colleges, and ensure challenge on these and meaningful mitigation of impacts
- Listen to families and children, at strategic and individual level, and recognise that they are not to blame for the difficulties they are facing.
- Don't move everything online – people still need meaningful connections face to face

- Free travel for children and young people
- More small funded groups / support services for families
- Access to provision across all sectors could be developed through improved, co-ordinated promotion and by enhanced cultural understanding
- There is an acute awareness that services for support with disability and mental health are overwhelmed
- Can't afford to get to the better parks further away from home
- More football training, sensory room, mental health group, training classes, have a safe space for people to express how they are really feeling, future and career path advice
- Older kids to have a space to talk/share hobbies, space to play games like Dungeons and Dragons, offer professional trainer for nurse training, make up classes, baking classes, careers afternoon, potential job ideas, money and support, revision space for school work,
- Music events, challenges, after school activities, A young people's panel, kids bingo, support around staying in school, surveys to work out what to do in the future, support for LGBTQIA+, more football goals to go in the fields, different activities to fill in the gaps that school doesn't cover in PHSRE, more things to do outside of school, separate clubs for juniors and seniors, team up with the kids who use 'The Bridge' support around all the school worries, revision, exam stress, worries about leaving.
- Family gatherings for all ages, disability support, gardening classes, Quiz nights, a safe space for whole families to go and sit down and discuss issues, SEND activities, linked to the park, toy drives for Christmas, karaoke nights, community base for cooking, game show nights, community feedback box, food bank and cooking classes and cooking on a budget, confidence to help build our careers and confidence
- An evening session a few days a week working with children of all ethnic backgrounds, especially teenagers and things that would bring the teenagers together.
- Youth group, youth café, a good productive space for young people to hang out- do things.
- Support for people who have left school
- More trips for teenagers,
- Astros, football pitches and football lessons,
- Not enough help revising for GCSE'
- Free spaces for families to exist without having to spend money on expensive food/drinks
- A place where they can meet up and talk and chat with services for the 16-18 year olds. Based on college, jobs, or for when after school has ended. Some support for the kids to make friends and feel less isolated and learn some new skills.
- Childcare for single parents needs to reviewed – ie free childcare for single parents before 2 years. Widen access to 30hr free childcare. Consider the increased costs of one-to-one childcare for disabled children
- Provide specialist single parent job centre support with onsite childcare that includes volunteering to build skills, experience and make connections for employment. Suspend job-seeking conditions for single parents with pre-school children. Review the higher risk of unfair sanctions on single parents.

- Support for the health & wellbeing of single parents who struggle with their mental and physical health. Advice regarding parenting apart, shared parenting and use of Parenting Plans/Agreements. Free mediation, counselling, bereavement counselling, family therapy.
- There's not enough education and knowledge on youth suicide and bullying. There needs to be classes/lessons so that people understand and have more knowledge on this subject

Question: What works well currently?

- The SEND Strategy is doing much to work on areas particularly affecting SEND CYP and their families but there is always more to do
- Where Pupil Premium / FSM identification is used well to target resources and support for SEND CYP in poverty
- Specific counselling offer in 'deprived neighbourhoods'
- Ethnic Minority Achievement Service support for schools
- School nursing
- Brighton Youth Centre
- Brighton Table Tennis Club
- Support for LGBTQIA+ from Allsorts
- Having places to go, having people they trust
- Pride in where you live – yes there are issues but little things you accomplish give you pride, even if you got help doing it
- A sense of belonging
- Empathic school staff who show how to support the child and the parent
- Services and schools that offer a flexible approach
- People rely on community connections and activities to meet their needs
- Supportive projects where beneficiaries can feel involved in delivery and organisation reduce the stigma of receiving things for free
- When it works well, EMAS and schools are leveraged effectively to reduce barriers for those with English as an additional language
- Person centered and asset based approaches, supporting families to build on their own strengths and find their own solutions
- Peer advocacy and support, self-advocacy, groups and organisations who give choice or options that wouldn't otherwise exist e.g. affordable food schemes, holiday schemes, youth sessions, 'Chomp' (Food project). Community connections and sharing localised/relevant information
- Financial support, peer support, accessible childcare, training and employability support, local and free neighbourhood based activity that supports emotional wellbeing
- Value the breakfast club at the school, but it doesn't align well with nursery times which was challenging if you had to walk any distance to get there. This illustrated an issue with a service-led approach to offering something without discussing it with parents, and that often the actual service is good, but there are little issues with delivery like this preventing people using them.

Question: What plans / initiatives etc should we be aware of when developing this new Framework?

- SEND Strategy and Adult Learning Disability Strategy
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Early Help Transformation Programme
- Foundations for our Future Strategy
- High Needs Block Review
- Youth Services Strategy
- Community Engagement Framework
- Social Value Framework
- Pan-Sussex health strategies
- Physical Health Strategy
- Community Gardens
- Volunteer networks
- Listening to communities – via links to Neighbourhood Action Plans
- Area-based Community Development
- Area-based Youth Work
- Outreach across the city
- Social prescribing
- Whole Family approach
- We recognise there are already projects and services available for people who are disadvantaged and there needs to be continuing support to those projects that are already helping

Summary reflections – important to take forward in the disadvantage strategy framework

Things we hear repeatedly from families and front line workers:
- Their needs are often not understood, acknowledged or provided for
- Their voices are often not heard or understood and they are not involved in making decisions which affect them
- Many are unable to access good quality and impartial information, advice and support
- Service pathways are not clear, accessible or equitable, eligibility thresholds too high/waits too long etc
- Services are too often limited, inflexible, unresponsive to needs, staff lacking training, are not welcoming or inclusive
- CYP often can not fulfil their aspirations because of a lack of opportunities/support
- Pathways to adulthood are unclear for some disadvantaged children, and there is a lack of expertise in schools and colleges to guide and prepare them for these, compared to peers who are going down the 'standard' route to further and higher education.

Who responded

- Trust for Developing Communities
    - Co-production workshops at Manor Gym and Hawks Café
    - Session with Noor-ul Huda – Muslim women and children group in Moulsecoomb
- Parent and Carers Council

- Dedicated coffee morning to work through questions with Moulsecoomb-based Sunflower Peer Support Group for parents and carers of children with SEND
- aMaze
  - Facilitated workshop with their teams
- Whoopsdaisy (support children with physical disabilities)
  - Under 5s group, 5-12 group and then parents/carers
  - Information collected through observations, questionnaires and interviews with staff, children and parents/carers
- Hangleton & Knoll Project
  - Youth workshop and Adult workshop
- Fresh Youth Perspectives (Parents and Carers of diverse children and young people) - part of PaCC Partnership
  - Facilitated intersectionality workshops – exploring links for their young people between criminal exploitation with additional needs / education / social exclusion and exit strategies from exploitation
- Mothers Uncovered/Livestock – creative support courses
  - Mothers of SEND children workshop and mothers of teens workshop
  - Staff Session
- Old Boat Corner Community Centre – Hollingbury (who provided the pictures – thank you)
  - Survey at open community day, facilitated youth workshops
- SPIN (Single Parent Information Network)
  - Focus Group and Survey across full membership

A big thanks also to A Seat at the Table and Class Divide who spent time sharing their thoughts, reflections and challenges on some of the ideas being explored in this call for assistance.

Other community and voluntary sector organisations have expressed an interest in being involved in the further development of this framework and will be included in this work.