Evaluation report

Project Title: Evaluation of NIWBH Impact and Outcomes

Organisation: The Network of International Women for Brighton & Hove (NIWBH)

Reporting Period: January 2026 – July 2026

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Weekly NIWBH drop-in at Brighton Library

1. Executive Summary

Brighton & Hove is becoming an increasingly diverse city, with growing numbers of migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, and racially minoritised communities. Despite this diversity, many women continue to experience significant structural barriers related to social isolation, insecure immigration status, language exclusion, poverty, housing insecurity, trauma, discrimination, and limited access to statutory and community support services. These challenges are often compounded by limited opportunities for social participation, culturally appropriate support, and trusted spaces where women feel safe, included, and understood.

The Network of International Women Brighton & Hove (NIWBH) hereafter referred to as **"the Network"** plays an important role in responding to these challenges through a wide range of community-based and culturally sensitive services and activities. These include weekly drop-ins and safe spaces, wellbeing and creative activities, casework support, referrals, information and signposting, volunteering opportunities, and partnership-based support aimed at improving women's wellbeing, confidence, inclusion, safety, and participation within the wider community.

As the Network activities and partnerships expanded across multiple service areas, the organisation identified a need to strengthen its Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems in order to better measure outcomes, improve evidence collection, capture organisational learning, and demonstrate impact more effectively to partners, funders, and stakeholders.

In response, the Network partnered with the University of Sussex to undertake a participatory evaluation project between January and July 2026. The evaluation aimed to assess the impact, effectiveness, and sustainability of the Network's work while also supporting the co-development of a more structured and sustainable Monitoring and Evaluation framework embedded within the organisation's day-to-day practice.

The key objectives of the evaluation were to:

- Assess the impact of the Networks activities and services on women's wellbeing, confidence, belonging, safety, social connections, and access to services;
- Strengthen organisational monitoring, learning, and reporting systems;
- Support the development of outcome indicators and referral tracking processes;
- Improve the organisation's ability to evidence impact and inform future strategic planning, funding, and service development;
- Capture the experiences and perspectives of members, volunteers, staff, and partner organisations;
- Contribute to wider learning around culturally responsive, relationship-based, and community-led approaches to support delivery.

The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods and participatory approach, combining qualitative interviews, stakeholder engagement, observation, review of monitoring data, and the development of outcome indicators and monitoring tools. Interviews were conducted with Network members and partner organisations working across housing, violence against women and girls (VAWG), wellbeing, economic abuse, and community support. The evaluation also involved an "Experts by Experience" group to ensure that women's lived experiences informed the development of indicators, findings, and recommendations.

The findings demonstrate that the Network plays a significant role in improving women's wellbeing, confidence, social connections, sense of belonging, and access to services. Across the evaluation, women consistently described the Network as a trusted, welcoming, and emotionally supportive environment where they felt respected, valued, and safe. Many participants highlighted the importance of relationship-based support, peer connections, and culturally inclusive spaces in reducing isolation and strengthening emotional wellbeing.

Creative and wellbeing-focused activities such as the sewing collective, Ecotherapy, walking groups, arts-based activities, and peer-led sessions were identified as particularly impactful. Women described these activities as therapeutic, empowering, confidence-building, and emotionally healing. Participation also

supported women to become more socially connected, engaged in community life, and involved in volunteering, mentoring, and leadership opportunities.

The findings further demonstrate that the Network's impact extends beyond individual outcomes. Partner organisations consistently recognised the Network as a trusted bridge between communities and formal systems, particularly for women facing barriers related to migration status, language, trauma, discrimination, or distrust of statutory services. The Network's community-led and partnership-based approach strengthened referral pathways, improved accessibility to services, and contributed to more culturally responsive and coordinated support across sectors.

The evaluation also identified broader systems-level value generated through the Network's preventative and relationship-based model. Providers highlighted the effectiveness of community-based, low-cost, and non-clinical approaches in reducing isolation, supporting wellbeing, improving engagement, and preventing escalation into crisis situations. The co-location of services and strong partnership working were viewed as contributing to improved coordination, earlier intervention, and more holistic responses to women's needs.

Alongside the positive outcomes identified, the evaluation highlighted several ongoing challenges affecting both women and service providers. These included: funding instability, limited organisational capacity, language and interpretation barriers, housing insecurity, digital exclusion, and difficulties accessing statutory systems for women experiencing insecure immigration status or No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). The findings also highlighted the importance of strengthening long-term sustainability, organisational infrastructure, and monitoring and evaluation systems.

The report concludes that the Network provides significant social, community, and systems-level value through its trusted, inclusive, and community-led model of support. The findings highlight the importance of continued investment in grassroots organisations that prioritise trust-building, lived experience participation, partnership working, and preventative approaches to wellbeing and inclusion.

Key recommendations emerging from the evaluation include strengthening long-term funding and organisational sustainability, expanding culturally responsive and language-accessible support, improving partnership coordination and referral

pathways, continuing investment in monitoring and evaluation systems, and supporting wider recognition of the value of community-led and preventative models of support for migrant, refugee, and racially minoritised women.

2. About the Organisation

The Network is a community-led organisation, founded in 2017, that supports women who self- identify as international women, including migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, and racially minoritised women across Brighton & Hove. The organisation works to reduce social isolation, improve wellbeing, strengthen inclusion and participation, and increase access to support, opportunities, and community life for women experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage.

The Network's work is grounded in principles of inclusion, cultural sensitivity, trust-building, and lived experience participation. Through relationship-based and community-centred approaches, the organisation creates safe and welcoming spaces where women can build confidence, develop social connections, access practical and emotional support, and participate more actively within the wider community.



Presenting one of the Banners of Sanctuary

Brighton & Hove is often perceived as an inclusive and progressive city; however, significant inequalities continue to affect many communities. The city is becoming increasingly diverse, with an estimated population of 283,870 people in 2024, of whom approximately 20% (54,343 people) were born outside the UK, exceeding both the South East regional average (16%) and the national average for England (17%). Over half of migrants living in the city are from non-European countries, reflecting the growing global diversity of Brighton & Hove.

This diversity is projected to increase further over the coming years. Net international migration is expected to contribute an additional 30,483 residents between 2022 and 2032. At the same time, the number of Black and Racially Minoritised residents increased by 35% between 2011 and 2021 and now represents approximately 26% of the city's population (72,272 people) (Brighton & Hove City Council, 2025).

Despite this diversity, research and local evidence continue to highlight the significant inequalities and barriers experienced by migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, and racially minoritised communities, particularly women. Many women experience social isolation, discrimination, insecure immigration status, poverty, trauma, housing insecurity, language exclusion, and limited access to culturally appropriate support services. These challenges are often compounded by wider structural inequalities and deprivation within areas such as Whitehawk, Moulsecoomb, Bevendean, and East Brighton, where significant disparities persist in relation to income, education, employment, health, and access to opportunities.

Target Group

The Network supports all 'international women'. In practice, this includes refugee women, asylum-seeking women, migrant women, women experiencing poverty or social isolation, women with limited English language skills, survivors of violence or trauma, and women facing barriers to accessing statutory or community services. Many members experience overlapping challenges linked to displacement, insecure immigration status, housing insecurity, discrimination, economic hardship, poor mental wellbeing, and limited social support networks.

The organisation works with women from a wide range of cultural, linguistic, faith, and migration backgrounds and supports women at different stages of settlement,

integration, and recovery. the Network's approach recognises the importance of culturally responsive and trust-based support models that reflect women's lived experiences and diverse needs.

Core Services and Activities

The Network delivers a broad range of community-based, culturally sensitive, and relationship-centred services and activities aimed at improving wellbeing, inclusion, confidence, participation, and access to support.

Core activities include:

- Weekly drop-ins and safe spaces;
- Wellbeing, social, and creative activities;
- Casework support and informal advocacy;
- Referrals and signposting to statutory and specialist services;
- English language and learning opportunities;
- Volunteering and peer support opportunities;
- Workshops and community engagement activities;
- Activities aimed at increasing confidence, independence, leadership, and participation in public and community life.



Annual Summer Picnic, Preston Park

The organisation also provides practical support related to health and wellbeing, fuel poverty, energy advice, cost-of-living pressures, housing support, and access to wider community resources and services.

Alongside direct support delivery, the Network works closely with local authorities, universities, community organisations, statutory services, and specialist providers to strengthen culturally appropriate referral pathways, improve accessibility to services, and enhance partnership working across Brighton & Hove.

Through its trusted, relationship-based, and community-led approach, the Network plays an important role in helping women build social connections, improve their sense of safety and belonging, increase confidence and participation, and navigate opportunities and support systems within the local community.

3. Evaluation Project overview

Purpose of the Evaluation Project

This evaluation project was undertaken to assess the impact, effectiveness, and sustainability of the work delivered by the Network in supporting migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, and racially minoritised women across Brighton and Hove.

The evaluation was developed in response to the growing scale and diversity of the Network's activities, partnerships, and support services, alongside the need to strengthen organisational systems for monitoring, learning, and evidence collection. As the Network continued to expand its work across multiple service areas, the organisation identified the importance of developing a more structured and sustainable approach to measuring outcomes, capturing learning, and evidencing impact.

The project aimed to strengthen the organisation's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems, improve qualitative and quantitative evidence collection processes, and better demonstrate the Network's contribution to reducing social isolation, improving wellbeing, strengthening social connections, increasing access to services, and enhancing women's confidence, safety, and participation within community life.

Alongside assessing direct impact on women accessing the Network's services and activities, the evaluation also explored the wider systems-level value of the Network

within the local support landscape. This included examining partnership working, service accessibility, culturally responsive practice, referral pathways, and the role of trusted community-led organisations in supporting women facing multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage.

The evaluation further aimed to support organisational learning and long-term sustainability by contributing to the development of a more evidence-based and participatory approach to data collection, reporting, service improvement, and strategic planning. Particular emphasis was placed on ensuring that women's lived experiences and perspectives remained central to the evaluation process and future organisational development.

Project Objectives

The main objectives of the evaluation project were to:

- Assess the impact of the Network's activities and services on women's wellbeing, confidence, social connections, belonging, safety, participation, and access to services.
- Explore the experiences and perspectives of Network members, staff, volunteers, and partner organisations.
- Strengthen and further develop the organisation's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework, outcome indicators, and reporting systems.
- Support the implementation and development of a more structured Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to improve client data collection, referral tracking, monitoring, and organisational learning.
- Improve the organisation's ability to collect, analyse, and report both qualitative and quantitative evidence of impact and service delivery.
- Identify key lessons learned, challenges, examples of good practice, and recommendations to support future service development, partnership working, and organisational sustainability.
- Strengthen evidence generation to support future funding applications, strategic planning, advocacy, dissemination, and partnership development.
- Contribute to wider learning around participatory, culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and relationship-based approaches to supporting migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, and racially minoritised women.
- Develop a Theory of Change for the organisation (see appendix 1).

Timeline

The evaluation project was conducted between January 2026 and July 2026 under the leadership of the evaluation team from the University of Sussex in collaboration with the Network.

The project was implemented across several overlapping phases, including:

- Planning and scoping;
- Development of the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework;
- Stakeholder engagement;
- Data collection;
- Analysis and thematic review;
- Development of indicators and monitoring tools;
- Dissemination planning;
- Report writing.

The phased approach enabled ongoing reflection, participatory engagement, and continuous refinement of the evaluation process throughout the project period.

Key Activities

Key activities undertaken as part of the evaluation included:

- Development and refinement of the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework, outcome indicators, and reporting tools.
- Review, organisation, and analysis of existing monitoring information, paper-based records, referral information, and organisational documentation.
- Support for the implementation and development of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to strengthen data collection, referral tracking, evidence gathering, and reporting processes.
- Conducting qualitative interviews with Network members to explore experiences of wellbeing, belonging, confidence, social connections, safety, participation, and access to support.
- Conducting interviews with partner organisations and service providers to assess partnership working, systems-level impact, service accessibility, culturally responsive practice, and multi-agency collaboration.

- Facilitating participatory discussions and engagement sessions with the "Experts by Experience" group to support indicator development, reflection, and interpretation of findings.
- Facilitating stakeholder and advisory group discussions to support organisational learning, reflection, dissemination planning, and review of emerging findings.
- Undertaking thematic analysis of qualitative findings alongside integration of available quantitative monitoring and referral data.
- Supporting the development of recommendations, sustainability planning, dissemination materials, presentations, reports, communication outputs, and future evaluation planning processes.

4. Methodology

Evaluation Approach

The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact and effectiveness of the Network's work. The approach aimed to capture both measurable outcomes and the lived experiences of women accessing the Network's services and activities.

The evaluation placed a strong emphasis on participatory and relationship-based methods, recognising the importance of culturally sensitive, trauma-informed, and community-centred approaches when working with refugee, migrant, asylum-seeking, and racially minoritised women. Alongside assessing outcomes, the evaluation also focused on organisational learning, systems change, partnership working, and the development of sustainable monitoring and evaluation processes.

To protect participants' confidentiality, pseudonyms have been used throughout the report for members and interview participants, while partner organisations and service providers are identified by name where consent was provided.

Data Collection Tools

A range of qualitative and quantitative data collection tools were used throughout the evaluation, including:

- Semi-structured interviews with Network members.
- Semi-structured interviews with partner organisations and service providers.
- Focus group discussions and engagement sessions with the “Experts by Experience” group.
- Observation and reflective discussions during community activities and meetings.
- Review of existing monitoring data, paper-based records, referral information, and project documentation.
- Development and review of outcome indicators and monitoring tools.
- CRM-related data collection and referral tracking processes.
- Feedback and consultation sessions with staff, volunteers, and stakeholders.
- The use of multiple tools enabled triangulation of findings and helped strengthen the reliability and depth of the analysis.

Sample Size

The evaluation included qualitative interviews with 10 members of the Network, representing women from diverse cultural, linguistic, migration, and social backgrounds. Participants included refugee and asylum-seeking women, migrant women, long-term residents, mothers, older women, and women experiencing isolation, trauma, economic hardship, or barriers to accessing services.

In addition, 5 interviews were conducted with partner organisations and service providers working across areas such as housing, violence against women and girls (VAWG), economic abuse, wellbeing, and community support.

The evaluation also engaged members of the “Experts by Experience” group through a series of participatory discussions and indicator development workshops.

Role of the 'Experts by Experience' Group

Purpose

The "Experts by Experience" group was established to support the participatory development of outcome indicators and strengthen the relevance, inclusivity, and accessibility of the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework. The group played an important role in ensuring that the evaluation reflected the real experiences, priorities, and perspectives of women accessing the Network's services and activities.

The purpose of the group was to:

- Contribute lived experience perspectives to the evaluation process.
- Help identify meaningful indicators of change and impact.
- Ensure that outcomes and monitoring tools reflected women's realities, priorities, and language.
- Support the development of culturally appropriate and accessible evaluation approaches.
- Provide feedback on findings, themes, and emerging recommendations.

Selection Criteria

Participants were selected based on their experience of engaging with the Network's services, activities, or community spaces. Efforts were made to ensure diversity across cultural backgrounds, languages, migration experiences, age groups, and levels of engagement with the organisation.

The group included women with lived experience of:

- Women who have participated in, or are currently participating in, multiple Network activities and/or services.
- Women who have received casework support and those who have not received casework support.
- Women with visible successes (including those featured in previously collected success stories), as well as women who are still facing challenges.
- A diverse mix in terms of age (18–85), country of origin, length of time in the UK, language spoken, and socioeconomic background.
- Participants also included volunteers within the network.
- Selection aimed to ensure that the group represented a broad range of experiences and perspectives across the Network's membership.

Background on the Group

The “Experts by Experience” group consisted of women from diverse cultural and migration backgrounds who had direct experience engaging with the Network and navigating local systems and services. The group brought valuable insight into the practical realities, challenges, and strengths experienced by women accessing support in Brighton & Hove.

The group operated as a participatory advisory and reflection space, creating opportunities for women to share experiences, shape evaluation priorities, and contribute to decision-making processes related to monitoring and impact measurement.

To support meaningful participation and reduce barriers to engagement, practical support measures such as travel support, flexible participation arrangements, and vouchers were provided where appropriate.

Engagement Process

The group participated in a series of facilitated workshops and discussions throughout the evaluation period. Sessions focused on:

- Identifying meaningful areas of change and impact.
- Reviewing and refining outcome indicators.
- Reflecting on barriers, challenges, and service accessibility.
- Discussing wellbeing, belonging, safety, confidence, and community participation.
- Providing feedback on emerging themes and findings.
- Participatory methods were used to encourage inclusive discussion and ensure that women felt comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives.

5. Who Benefited

Direct Beneficiaries

The primary direct beneficiaries of the project were women accessing the Network's services and activities, particularly refugee, asylum-seeking, migrant, and racially minoritised women living in Brighton & Hove. This included women experiencing social isolation, economic hardship, insecure immigration status, housing insecurity, trauma, language barriers, or difficulties accessing statutory and community services.

Direct beneficiaries also included women participating in:

- Weekly drop-ins and safe spaces.
- Wellbeing, creative, and social activities.
- Workshops, learning opportunities, and community engagement activities.
- Casework, referrals, and support services.
- Volunteering and peer support opportunities.
- The "Experts by Experience" group and evaluation engagement sessions.



Bluebell walk in Stanmer Park

Through the evaluation project, beneficiaries contributed their experiences, perspectives, and feedback, helping shape the development of outcome indicators, monitoring tools, and future service improvements. Women also benefited indirectly from the strengthening of the organisation's monitoring, referral, and evidence collection systems, which aimed to improve service quality, accessibility, and responsiveness over time.

The project further supported staff, volunteers, and caseworkers within the Network by strengthening organisational learning, improving monitoring and reporting processes, and supporting the development of a more sustainable and evidence-based evaluation framework.

Indirect Beneficiaries

Indirect beneficiaries included families, children, and wider community members connected to women accessing the Network's support. Improvements in women's wellbeing, confidence, social connections, access to services, and community participation had wider positive effects on household stability, emotional wellbeing, social integration, and community cohesion.

Partner organisations and service providers also benefited from the project through strengthened partnership working, improved understanding of the needs and experiences of racially minoritised and migrant women, and increased insight into culturally appropriate and community-based approaches to support delivery.

In addition, the evaluation findings and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework are expected to benefit:

- Local statutory and third-sector organisations.
- Policymakers and commissioners.
- Researchers and academic partners.
- Community organisations working with migrant and refugee communities.

The project contributes to wider learning around inclusive service delivery, participatory evaluation approaches, and relationship-based community support models for women experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage and exclusion.

6. Key Findings / Outcomes

Quantitative Findings

Key Statistics at a Glance

- 700+ women supported through NIWBH membership
- 78 countries represented
- 69 languages spoken
- 46 new members joined during the evaluation period
- 49 community sessions delivered
- 1,323 attendances recorded across Wednesday Library and Friday Sanctuary sessions
- 34 women received one-to-one casework support
- 96 referrals received from internal and external sources
- 118+ referrals and signposting actions provided through Cost of Living support
- 36 collaborative activities delivered with partners
- 16 organisations referred women to NIWBH
- 45 women attended dedicated health and wellbeing activities

The quantitative data gathered for this evaluation spans a six-month period, from December 2025 to June 2026.

It was extracted from organisational records, attendance registers, referral data, activity records, and client information held by the Network of International Women Brighton & Hove (NIWBH). Collectively, these data provide evidence of the scale, reach, diversity, and engagement associated with the Network's activities and services.

While historical monitoring systems were primarily designed to support service delivery rather than impact measurement, the available data demonstrates the significant contribution made by NIWBH to supporting migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, and racially minoritised women across Brighton & Hove.

Reach and Diversity

At the time of the evaluation, NIWBH had a membership of more than 700 women. During the six-month evaluation period, 46 new members registered with the Network, demonstrating continued demand for its services and activities.

Organisational records indicate that the Network's membership represents women from at least 78 countries and territories and includes speakers of 69 languages. Recorded countries of origin included Syria, Sudan, India, Iran, Iraq, Bangladesh, Yemen, Spain, Morocco, Egypt, Brazil, Turkey, Italy, and many others, reflecting the broad diversity of communities engaged with the Network.

Language data similarly demonstrates significant linguistic diversity. Frequently recorded languages included Arabic, English, Spanish, Bengali, Farsi, French, Cantonese, Mandarin, Turkish, Kurdish, Portuguese, Japanese, and Urdu. This diversity highlights the importance of culturally responsive approaches, interpretation support, multilingual communication, and peer support within the Network's service model.

Age information was available for a limited proportion of members. Among those recorded, women were represented across all adult age groups, including women aged 70 and over. The largest recorded age groups were women aged 30–39 (31 women) and 40–49 (29 women), followed by women aged 50–59 (17 women), 60–69 (12 women), and 70+ (6 women). However, age data was unavailable for the majority of members, limiting further demographic analysis.

Participation and Community Engagement

Attendance data demonstrates sustained engagement with NIWBH's regular activities and community spaces throughout the evaluation period.

Between December 2025 and June 2026, NIWBH delivered 25 Wednesday Library drop-in sessions. Attendance records were available for 22 sessions, during which a total of 712 attendances were recorded, with an average attendance of 32 women per session. Attendance ranged from 20 to 48 participants per session. In addition, 48 anonymous attendances were recorded, reflecting engagement from women who were either new to the Network or had not yet completed registration.

During the same period, the Network delivered 24 Friday Sanctuary sessions at All Saints Church, Hove. Attendance records show 611 attendances across 22 recorded sessions, with an average attendance of 28 people per session and attendance ranging from 10 to 48 people per session.

Combined, the Wednesday Library and Friday Sanctuary programmes recorded 1,323 attendances across 49 sessions during the evaluation period. These figures demonstrate the significant reach of NIWBH's community-based activities and the ongoing demand for safe, welcoming, and culturally responsive spaces where women can access support, build relationships, and participate in community life.

Access to Support and Services

Between December 2025 and June 2026, 34 women received one-to-one casework support through NIWBH. Of these cases, five were closed following triage and three remained in the triage process at the time of data collection.

The Network received a total of 96 referrals during the reporting period, comprising:

- 51 referrals from external organisations and professionals;
- 45 referrals generated internally through NIWBH services and activities.

Referrals were received from at least 16 organisations and agencies, including Brighton & Hove City Council teams, Brighton Women's Centre, RISE and Safe in Sussex (domestic violence and abuse charities) , Sussex Interpreting Services, Brighton Housing Trust, NHS services, Victim Support, Southdown (specialist care, support and housing), and other specialist support providers.

The breadth of referral pathways demonstrates the Network's strong reputation among local service providers and its role as a trusted access point for women requiring support.

Information, Advice and Signposting

The Network provided extensive information, advice, and signposting support through its Cost of Living (COL) programme and Information, Empowerment and Inclusion (IEI) activities.

Recorded referrals through Cost of Living support activities included:

- 41 referrals to CAB EnergyWorks;
- 35 referrals to Welfare Rights services;
- 32 referrals to Southern Water support schemes;
- 2 referrals to Money Advice Plus;

Additional referrals to Energy Reach, Flexible Fund, MoneyWorks, Job Centre services, Age UK, Bramber Bakehouse, Pelican Parcels, and other specialist support organisations.

Overall, at least 118 documented referrals and signposting actions were recorded through Cost of Living support activities alone.

Information, Empowerment and Inclusion sessions provided women with information relating to economic abuse, debt advice, employability, skills development, and wellbeing support. Across the reporting period, participants received:

- 17 instances of information relating to economic abuse support;
- 16 instances of debt advice and financial guidance;
- 17 instances of employability and skills-related information;
- 17 instances of wellbeing-related information.

Several participants subsequently progressed into casework support and specialist advice services, demonstrating the effectiveness of these activities as pathways into further support.

Wellbeing and Community Activities

NIWBH delivered a range of activities designed to improve wellbeing, reduce isolation, and strengthen social connections.

Attendance records indicate that:

- 45 women attended a health and wellbeing session focused on ageing well;
- 43 women were reached through Cost of Living outreach sessions;
- 7 women attended dedicated Cost of Living appointment sessions;
- 6 women participated in an Information, Empowerment and Inclusion session.

Many additional activities incorporated wellbeing elements, including creative workshops, peer support activities, social gatherings, walks, arts-based sessions, cooking and community events. While these activities were not always formally categorised as wellbeing interventions, qualitative findings indicate that they contributed significantly to participants' mental wellbeing, confidence, and sense of belonging.

Volunteering, Leadership and Participation

Available monitoring data on volunteering and leadership participation remains limited due to historical recording systems. However, records indicate that 12 members and one volunteer participated in the Network's sewing collective during the evaluation period.

Qualitative findings suggest that volunteering, peer leadership, and active participation represent important pathways through which women build confidence, develop skills, contribute to the community, and take on leadership roles. The introduction of the new CRM system is expected to strengthen future monitoring in this area.

Partnership and Systems Impact

The Network worked extensively in partnership with local community organisations, statutory agencies, and specialist support providers throughout the evaluation period.

Between December 2025 and May 2026, at least 36 collaborative activities were delivered with partner organisations, including:

- 19 art group sessions;
- 9 partner-supported Wednesday Library activities;
- 4 Plot 22 sessions;
- 2 organised walks and trips;
- 1 Ecotherapy activity;
- 1 Ceyda Tanc dance activity.

In addition, NIWBH delivered multi-agency activities through Friday Sanctuary, Cost of Living sessions, Information, Empowerment and Inclusion activities, and outreach events.

These partnerships expanded access to specialist expertise and strengthened referral pathways into housing, wellbeing, domestic abuse, financial advice, employability, and community support services.

Monitoring and Evaluation Development

The evaluation identified limitations in historical monitoring systems, particularly regarding the consistent collection of outcome data related to wellbeing, social connection, volunteering, leadership participation, and longer-term service outcomes.

To address these gaps, NIWBH has introduced a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and developed a revised Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. The new system includes improved recording of referrals, participant demographics, support provided, and outcome measures relating to wellbeing, feeling supported, and community connectedness.

These developments represent an important step towards strengthening evidence collection, improving organisational learning, and enabling the Network to demonstrate its impact more effectively in the future.

Qualitative Findings

The evaluation findings demonstrate that the Network plays a significant role in improving wellbeing, reducing isolation, strengthening confidence, and increasing community participation among migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, and racially minoritised women across Brighton & Hove. Across both member and service provider interviews, the Network was consistently recognised as a trusted, culturally responsive, and community-led organisation that provides safe and accessible spaces where women can build relationships, access support, and participate more actively within the wider community.

Wellbeing, Confidence, and Emotional Support

Across all member interviews, women consistently linked involvement in the Network with improvements in emotional wellbeing, confidence, motivation, and overall quality of life. Many participants described the impact of participation as transformative, particularly following experiences of migration, trauma, social isolation, or major life transitions.

Women frequently described the Network as a welcoming and emotionally supportive environment where they felt accepted, respected, and valued regardless of their language level, cultural background, religion, age, or migration experience. For example, Amy described the atmosphere as “almost a rainbow of comfort,” while Sara explained that “the people in charge are respectful in their interactions, so you feel like it’s your second home.”

Several women described how participation reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation. Basma explained that before joining the Network her life had become centred around home responsibilities and isolation, but that “I literally look forward to Wednesdays because I feel like I belong somewhere now.” Similarly, Basma reflected that “I don't feel alone anymore,” highlighting the importance of regular community engagement and peer support.

Women also described improvements in confidence, independence, and emotional resilience. Laura explained that “since I joined this network, I can think more positively. I can be more independent,” while other participants described feeling

more motivated to leave the house, engage socially, and participate more actively within community life.

Creative and wellbeing-focused activities such as sewing, embroidery, storytelling, arts-based workshops, walking groups, and Ecotherapy were consistently described as therapeutic, empowering, and emotionally healing. Several women explained that these activities helped them reconnect with themselves, rebuild confidence, and regain a sense of purpose following difficult life experiences.

Ecotherapy emerged as one of the most valued activities across both member and provider interviews. Women described spending time outdoors and engaging with nature as calming, restorative, and stress-relieving. Liz Ingram from the Centre for Ecotherapy similarly explained that the sessions supported women in “building confidence in navigating outdoor spaces and public transport independently,” demonstrating the wider confidence-building impact of non-clinical wellbeing approaches.

The findings suggest that the Network provides important preventative wellbeing support through accessible, low-cost, and community-based activities that strengthen emotional resilience, confidence, and social connection before needs escalate into crisis situations.

Social Connections, Inclusion, and Sense of Belonging

The evaluation consistently demonstrated the important role the Network plays in reducing social isolation and strengthening women's social connections and sense of belonging within Brighton & Hove.



Cooking together

Many women described how their lives before joining the Network were largely centred around childcare, work, or home responsibilities, with limited opportunities for social interaction, creativity, or community participation. Through weekly drop-ins, social activities, creative programmes, and community events, women reported building meaningful friendships and developing stronger connections within the local community.

Participants repeatedly highlighted the importance of the Network's culturally diverse and inclusive environment. Amy explained that "no matter what colour, religion or orientation… you are welcome," while several women described how meeting women from different cultural and migration backgrounds broadened their perspectives and reduced feelings of isolation.

Women also emphasised the importance of peer support and friendships developed through the Network. Rama reflected that “the Network is the only family I have in Brighton,” highlighting the emotional significance of these community relationships for women experiencing displacement, loneliness, or limited family support locally. The findings additionally suggest that participation supported wider integration into community life. Jade explained that involvement in the Network helped her become more engaged in Brighton through participation in local activities, walks, and community events while also increasing her confidence interacting with women from different cultural backgrounds.

Service providers similarly recognised the Network’s role in creating trusted and culturally safe spaces where women feel comfortable engaging with services and community activities. Several providers highlighted that women were often more willing to seek support and participate within informal community-based settings than through formal institutional environments.



Ecotherapy Centre in Stanmer Park

Access to Services, Information, and Support

The findings demonstrate that the Network provides much more than social activities alone. Women consistently described the Network as an important source of practical guidance, referrals, emotional support, information, and access to wider services and opportunities.

Participants referred to receiving support related to housing, wellbeing, volunteering opportunities, cost-of-living concerns, utility bills, energy advice, community resources, and access to specialist or statutory services. Women valued being able to ask questions and seek support informally within a trusted and non-judgemental environment.

Service providers consistently described the Network as an important bridge between communities and formal support systems. Tess Michaels from the Violence Against Women and Girls Team explained that the Network provides “a really good opportunity for services to kind of reach out to people who have no recourse,” highlighting the organisation’s role in improving access for women facing immigration-related exclusion and barriers to statutory support.

Providers additionally highlighted the effectiveness of the Network’s hub-based and co-located delivery model. Ruth Britsch from Brighton Women’s Centre described the partnership model as “that ideal model of sharing both ways… women don’t just get us and the Network, they get so much more,” reflecting the benefits of coordinated and multi-agency support approaches.

The findings suggest that the Network plays a critical role in helping women navigate systems and services that may otherwise feel inaccessible due to language barriers, trauma, migration experiences, discrimination, or distrust of formal institutions.



The Weekly art group held in Albion Life Community Centre

Participation, Volunteering, and Empowerment

The evaluation findings demonstrate that the Network supports women not only as recipients of support, but also as contributors, volunteers, leaders, and active members of the community.

Many women described progression from attending activities to later volunteering, organising projects, supporting peers, mentoring others, facilitating activities, or contributing to exhibitions and community initiatives. Participants valued opportunities to shape activities, contribute ideas, and participate actively rather than only receiving support.

The sewing collective emerged as one of the strongest examples of empowerment identified across the evaluation. Women described how participation developed into a community-led initiative where members learned practical skills, worked collaboratively, produced handmade products, and supported one another's confidence and creativity. The sewing collective also created opportunities for women to showcase and sell their products at exhibitions, markets, and community events, enabling some participants to generate income and contribute to their household finances. Several women explained that participation in sewing activities

increased confidence, independence, leadership skills, and opportunities for both social and economic participation.

Volunteering and peer-led opportunities additionally supported women in developing communication skills, confidence, leadership, and employability. Several participants described becoming more socially engaged, motivated, and confident participating in activities outside the home.

Service providers similarly highlighted the value of the Network's participatory and community-led approach. Partners noted that involving women directly in activities, projects, and decision-making processes strengthened confidence, ownership, relevance of services, and community engagement.

The findings suggest that opportunities for participation, creativity, volunteering, and peer leadership are central to the Network's impact and contribute significantly to women's empowerment, confidence, independence, and sense of purpose.

7. Impact on Systems & Services

Feedback from Partners

Across all partner interviews, the Network was consistently recognised as a trusted, culturally responsive, and community-based organisation that plays a critical role in engaging migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, and racially minoritised women who may otherwise face barriers to accessing support services.

Partners described the Network as an important bridge between communities and statutory or specialist services, enabling women to access support within safe and trusted environments. Tess Michaels from the Violence Against Women and Girls Team (VAWG) explained that the Network is "a really good opportunity for services to kind of reach out to people who have no recourse," highlighting the organisation's role in improving access for women experiencing immigration-related exclusion and barriers to support.

Providers consistently highlighted the strength of the Network's relationship-based and community-led approach, particularly in building trust among women who may distrust formal systems or experience barriers related to language, trauma, immigration status, discrimination, or economic hardship.

The partnership model was repeatedly described as collaborative, flexible, and grounded in co-production and mutual learning. Ruth Britsch from Brighton Women's Centre described the model as "that ideal model of sharing both ways… women don't just get us and the Network, they get so much more," emphasising the value of coordinated and holistic support approaches.

Partners also highlighted the importance of the Network as a multi-agency hub connecting housing, wellbeing, VAWG, legal, immigration, and community support services. Mark Hastings additionally described the model as "a great networking opportunity, for us to liaise with other organisations assisting the clients that we are also helping with," highlighting the role of the Network in strengthening coordination between services.

The findings further suggest that the Network's trusted position within communities enables more meaningful engagement with women whose experiences are often underrepresented within policy, commissioning, and service development processes.

Changes in Service Delivery

The evaluation findings demonstrate that partnership working with the Network contributed to important changes in organisational practice and service delivery across partner organisations.

Several providers reported becoming more culturally responsive, reflective, and flexible in their approaches following collaboration with the Network. This included increased awareness of migration-related barriers, economic abuse, housing insecurity, and intersectional inequalities affecting women accessing support.

Partners additionally described improvements in understanding the importance of culturally responsive and trauma-informed practice, including greater consideration of language accessibility, trust-building, lived experience, and informal engagement approaches.

Several organisations adapted their service delivery models to better meet women's needs through embedding link workers within trusted community settings, increasing outreach activities, strengthening informal engagement methods, and improving coordination between services.

Tess Michaels explained that the Network acts as “a bit of a friendly face of the council as well, and of statutory bodies,” demonstrating how informal and trusted engagement models can reduce barriers and improve women’s confidence engaging with formal systems.

Providers also highlighted the value of group-based and non-clinical wellbeing approaches. Liz Ingram from the Centre for Ecotherapy explained that activities supported women in “building confidence in navigating outdoor spaces and public transport independently,” demonstrating how community-based wellbeing activities can contribute to wider independence and participation outcomes.

The findings suggest that the Network contributes not only to improved access to services for women, but also to wider systems learning and service improvement across partner organisations.

Evidence of Cost Savings or Efficiencies

Partners consistently described the Network model as highly cost-effective and impactful, particularly in the context of increasing demand and limited resources.

The community-based hub model in both library drop-ins and the Friday sanctuary project was viewed as an efficient and accessible way of reaching people who may otherwise not engage with formal support services. By co-locating services within trusted community settings, the Network reduced barriers to access, strengthened coordination between organisations, and enabled women to access multiple forms of support within one environment.

Providers highlighted several efficiencies associated with the model, including reduced duplication between services, improved referral coordination, earlier intervention, stronger partnership working, and increased engagement among women who may otherwise remain isolated or disconnected from support systems.

Partners also emphasised the value of preventative and relationship-based approaches in reducing longer-term pressure on statutory and crisis services. Group-based wellbeing activities, volunteering opportunities, peer support, and informal engagement approaches were viewed as relatively low-cost interventions that

generated significant social value through improved wellbeing, inclusion, confidence, and community participation.

At the same time, providers consistently highlighted that funding instability, limited staffing capacity, translation costs, and infrastructure limitations remain significant barriers to sustaining and scaling the model effectively.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the Network contributes significant social and systems-level value through trusted, community-led, and preventative approaches that strengthen accessibility, inclusion, coordination, and partnership working across Brighton & Hove.



Syrian cooking evening

8. Success stories

> When Amal arrived in the UK in 2019 after being displaced by conflict in Syria, she faced the challenge of starting a new life in an unfamiliar country. Like many newly arrived women, she was learning how to navigate everyday systems, support her family, and adjust to a completely different environment. At the time, she knew very few people and had limited opportunities to build social connections.

Everything began to change when she was introduced to the Network of International Women Brighton & Hove.

Initially, the Network was a small group focused mainly on sewing and embroidery. What stood out most to Amal was the warm welcome she received. From her first visit, members made her feel included, valued, and part of the group.

"They made me feel like I was one of them. I didn't feel like a stranger."

Over the years, Amal became a regular participant in a wide variety of activities. She enjoyed sewing, arts sessions, walking groups, cultural visits, and trips to museums and local landmarks. These activities gave her opportunities not only to learn new things but also to explore Brighton and develop a deeper understanding of the history and culture of her new home.

The greatest impact, however, came through the friendships and connections she built. When she first arrived, she knew very few people. Through the Network, she met women from different countries, cultures, and backgrounds. These relationships helped reduce feelings of isolation and created a strong sense of belonging. Today, she describes many members as friends and feels connected to a supportive community that she can rely on.

The Network also provided practical support. Through information sessions, referrals, and advice, Amal became more aware of the services and resources available to women facing challenges such as housing difficulties, financial pressures, or social isolation. Knowing that support was available gave her reassurance and confidence.

What makes the biggest difference for Amal is the genuine care shown by the Network. During periods when family commitments prevented her from attending regularly, members stayed in touch, checked on her wellbeing, and made sure she felt remembered and included.

"I am in a foreign country, and it means a lot to have a group that cares about you and asks how you are."

Today, Amal sees the Network as much more than a place for activities. It is a community where she feels welcomed, respected, and connected. Her journey shows how safe and inclusive spaces can help women rebuild confidence, form meaningful friendships, and create a sense of home in a new country.

Before joining the Network, Hana's life in the UK was stable but limited. As a newcomer, she faced the usual challenges of settling into a new country—navigating daily life, raising children and adjusting to a different environment. Her routine revolved around home and school runs, with only occasional outings. While she described this period as "normal," it lacked opportunities for growth, connection and personal development.

Everything began to change when she decided to attend a session at the network. What started as simple curiosity quickly became a turning point. Through regular participation, Hana gradually built confidence, developed new skills and expanded her social world. The network provided courses, activities and opportunities that introduced her to new experiences—from learning practical skills like sewing to exploring her local community in ways she hadn't before.

As her involvement deepened, so did her sense of purpose. She moved from being a participant to an active contributor, eventually volunteering and taking on more responsibility. Over time, she became involved in leading activities and even took ownership of a growing sewing project. Her journey continued as she stepped into leadership roles, joining the steering group and later being encouraged to take on a trustee position.

"I feel like my life changed—maybe by 50–70%."

This transformation was not only external but deeply personal. Hana describes a significant shift in her mindset, confidence and outlook on life. She became more proactive, more socially engaged and more open to learning. Even challenges such as language barriers, which once felt limiting, became less significant as she gained confidence and found herself in a supportive environment where she felt understood and valued.

Today, Hana sees herself as a completely different person—more confident, more active and more connected. The impact of her journey extends beyond her personal growth; it has influenced her home life and inspired those around her. What began as a small step into a community space has evolved into a powerful story of empowerment, growth and leadership. Her experience highlights the lasting impact of inclusive, supportive spaces—where women not only learn and connect but also rediscover their potential and reshape their futures.

9. Learning & Reflection

What works well:

The evaluation identified several strengths within the Network model and approach. Across both member and partner interviews, the Network was consistently described as a welcoming, trusted, and culturally inclusive space that enables women to access support in a safe and non-judgemental environment. Women frequently referred to the Network as a “second home” and highlighted the importance of feeling accepted, respected, and emotionally supported regardless of their cultural background, language level, migration experience, religion, age, or personal circumstances.

One of the strongest findings across the evaluation was the value of relationship-based and community-led support. Participants described how informal engagement approaches, regular weekly activities, and the consistent presence of staff, volunteers, and partner organisations helped build trust over time and encouraged women to seek support, develop friendships, and participate more confidently in community life. Women repeatedly described the importance of having a reliable and welcoming space where they could socialise, ask questions, share experiences, and feel emotionally supported without pressure or judgement. Service providers similarly highlighted that women were often more willing to engage in community-based environments than through formal institutional settings associated with statutory systems.

The holistic and integrated nature of the Network model was also identified as highly effective. The combination of emotional support, practical guidance, referrals, wellbeing activities, creative programmes, and opportunities for volunteering and participation enabled women to access support in ways that felt flexible and responsive to their needs. Partners particularly valued the co-location of services and the Network’s role in connecting women to statutory, third-sector, wellbeing, housing, legal, and specialist support services. This integrated approach reduced barriers to access, strengthened referral pathways, and improved coordination between organisations.

Creative and wellbeing-focused activities emerged as particularly impactful across both member and provider interviews. Activities such as sewing collectives, cooking, Ecotherapy, storytelling, arts-based workshops, walking groups, and peer-led sessions were consistently described as therapeutic, confidence-building, socially

meaningful, and empowering. Women reported improvements in emotional wellbeing, reduced isolation, stronger social connections, and increased confidence to participate in wider community life. Several women also explained that creative activities helped rebuild confidence, identity, and purpose following experiences of trauma, migration, displacement, or prolonged isolation.

Ecotherapy and outdoor activities were particularly valued for their positive impact on wellbeing and confidence. Participants described nature-based activities as calming, restorative, and emotionally healing. Providers additionally highlighted that these activities helped women build confidence navigating public spaces, travelling independently, and engaging more actively with the local community and environment.

The evaluation also demonstrated the importance of peer support, intercultural learning, and collective participation. Women valued opportunities to meet others from different cultural backgrounds, exchange experiences, and build friendships across communities. These relationships helped reduce loneliness, strengthen belonging, and improve confidence engaging with life in Brighton & Hove more broadly.

Another significant strength was the emphasis on lived experience, participation, and co-production. Women valued opportunities to shape activities, contribute ideas, volunteer, mentor others, and participate in leadership and community initiatives.

Several women described progression from initially attending activities to later volunteering, facilitating sessions, organising activities, contributing to exhibitions, supporting peers, or participating in leadership structures. This participatory approach strengthened women's confidence, ownership, independence, and sense of purpose while also improving the relevance and accessibility of services delivered.

Strong partnership working also emerged as a key success factor. Partner organisations described the relationship with the Network as collaborative, flexible, and grounded in mutual learning. The partnership model strengthened multi-agency coordination, improved referral pathways, and contributed to more culturally responsive and inclusive service delivery across sectors. Providers also valued the Network's deep understanding of community needs and its trusted position within communities that may otherwise remain disconnected from formal support systems.

The findings further suggest that the Network successfully creates spaces where women are recognised not only as service users, but also as contributors, volunteers, leaders, and active members of the community. This shift from passive support towards participation and empowerment emerged as one of the most significant strengths of the Network's approach.

What are the challenges:

Despite the significant strengths identified throughout the evaluation, several ongoing challenges were also highlighted by both members and service providers.

Funding instability and limited organisational capacity were consistently identified as major concerns affecting sustainability and future growth. Participants highlighted concerns regarding the continuation of successful programmes such as Ecotherapy, creative activities, specialist workshops, outreach work, and community-based wellbeing initiatives due to short-term funding cycles, staffing limitations, and restricted infrastructure resources. Partners also noted that demand for support frequently exceeded available staffing, casework, and link worker capacity.

Language and communication barriers remained significant challenges for some women. Limited English language confidence, literacy barriers, and inconsistent access to interpretation affected some women's ability to engage fully in activities, navigate systems, understand rights, access services, or advocate for themselves confidently. Service providers similarly raised concerns regarding the availability, confidentiality, consistency, and cultural appropriateness of interpretation services.

Several women and providers described broader structural barriers linked to migration status, housing insecurity, discrimination, poverty, trauma, and limited awareness of available support systems. Women experiencing insecure immigration status, No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), or experiences of violence and abuse were often identified as facing additional barriers to accessing statutory services and specialist support.

Trust in formal systems also emerged as an ongoing challenge for members. Some women described fear of not being believed, fear of consequences, uncertainty regarding reporting systems, or distrust towards institutions, particularly in relation to discrimination, abuse, immigration processes, and housing concerns. Providers

similarly noted that stigma surrounding abuse, mental health, and formal support services sometimes affected women's willingness to seek help.

The evaluation also identified operational and accessibility challenges. Caring responsibilities, transport difficulties, timing of activities, and confidence barriers occasionally affected women's ability to attend sessions consistently. Some participants noted that while the Network helped build strong friendships and support networks, social integration beyond the Network itself could still remain limited for some women.

Infrastructure limitations were also highlighted by several providers. Community delivery settings could at times lack sufficient privacy for confidential conversations and were occasionally described as noisy or overcrowded. Outdoor and group-based activities also presented some logistical limitations related to accessibility, weather, transport, and safeguarding considerations.

In response to a recent incident on the Network members' WhatsApp group, some concerns were raised by one interview participant and several members of the Experts by Experience group regarding organisational communication, decision-making processes, and inclusivity. Although these views did not emerge consistently across the wider participant group, they highlighted the importance of maintaining transparent communication and inclusive dialogue within community organisations.

The evaluation also highlighted ongoing challenges related to monitoring and evaluation processes. Difficulties in collecting consistent and accessible data, tracking referrals, measuring longer-term outcomes, and capturing qualitative impact across multiple programmes limited the organisation's ability to fully evidence its impact. Providers also identified challenges related to digital exclusion, inconsistent data systems, and limitations in referral tracking across organisations. These findings reinforced the importance of continued investment in the CRM system and embedded monitoring processes.

Lessons learned:

The evaluation identified several important lessons for future practice, service delivery, organisational development, and partnership working.

A key lesson from the evaluation is that trust-building and relationship-based approaches are fundamental to effective engagement with migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, and racially minoritised women. Women appeared most likely to engage, participate, and seek support within environments that felt culturally safe, informal, welcoming, flexible, and community-led. Consistent presence, emotional safety, and long-term relationship building were all identified as essential foundations for meaningful engagement and empowerment.

The findings demonstrate the importance of holistic and flexible support models that combine emotional wellbeing, practical guidance, creativity, social connection, volunteering, peer support, and access to services rather than relying on narrow or single-issue interventions. Women benefited most from approaches that recognised the interconnected nature of wellbeing, safety, belonging, confidence, participation, and independence.

The evaluation also highlighted the value of preventative and community-based approaches. Low-cost, non-clinical, and group-based activities were shown to play an important role in reducing isolation, strengthening emotional resilience, improving wellbeing, and preventing escalation of need or crisis. Creative and collective activities additionally supported healing, self-expression, confidence-building, leadership development, and social participation.

Another key lesson relates to the importance of visibility and outreach. Several women explained that they had not previously known such support existed locally. This demonstrates the importance of community outreach, trusted referrals, informal engagement methods, and partnership working in reaching women who may otherwise remain isolated or disconnected from support systems.

The findings also reinforced that cultural competence must go beyond translation alone. Effective culturally responsive practice requires understanding migration experiences, trauma, lived realities, stigma, trust barriers, faith and cultural dynamics, and the wider structural inequalities affecting women's lives. Providers highlighted the importance of organisational flexibility, reflective practice, and adapting services to meet women's diverse needs.

Partnership working and co-located delivery models emerged as particularly effective in improving accessibility, coordination, and continuity of support. The

findings demonstrate that trusted community organisations such as the Network play a critical role in bridging gaps between women and formal systems, particularly for those who may distrust or feel excluded from statutory services. The evaluation further suggests that integrated and partnership-based approaches are more effective than siloed or fragmented service models in responding to complex and overlapping needs.

The evaluation also highlighted the importance of lived experience and participatory approaches. Involving women directly in shaping activities, contributing feedback, participating in leadership opportunities, and supporting the development of indicators and evaluation processes strengthened both the quality of services and the relevance of the evaluation itself. Community-led and peer-led approaches appeared particularly empowering when women were trusted, supported, and encouraged to contribute actively rather than positioned solely as recipients of support.

Another important lesson concerns sustainability. The findings highlight that trust-based and preventative models require long-term investment and stability to remain effective. Short-term funding cycles can undermine continuity, relationship-building, staff retention, and long-term impact, particularly for organisations supporting women facing multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage.

Finally, the evaluation reinforced the importance of strengthening monitoring, referral tracking, and evidence collection systems. The development of a more structured Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework and CRM system represents an important step towards improving organisational learning, strengthening reporting processes, evidencing impact more effectively, and supporting future sustainability and funding opportunities.

10. Development of Evaluation Systems

CRM Outcomes

As part of the evaluation project, significant progress was made towards strengthening the Network's data management and monitoring systems through the development and implementation of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. The CRM was designed to improve the recording and tracking of member engagement, service delivery, referrals, and outcomes across the organisation.

The CRM development process supported the transition from fragmented monitoring approaches and paper-based records towards a more structured and centralised system. The system aims to strengthen evidence collection, improve referral tracking, support organisational learning, and enhance the Network's ability to report on impact to funders, partners, and stakeholders.

The CRM also provides opportunities to capture disaggregated data and better understand who accesses services, who benefits from activities, and whether outcomes are equitable across different groups of women, including refugee, asylum-seeking, migrant, and racially minoritised women.

Indicators Developed

A participatory process involving staff, volunteers, and the Experts by Experience group was used to co-develop outcome indicators that reflect women's lived experiences and priorities. The indicators were designed to be practical, measurable, and embedded within routine monitoring systems.

Outcome indicators were developed across five key areas:

1. Access to information, services, and support;
2. Confidence, empowerment, and community participation;
3. Health and wellbeing;
4. Social connections, belonging, and inclusion;
5. Trust, safety, and access to support systems.

The framework combines quantitative indicators (such as attendance, referrals, and participation) with qualitative evidence, including participant feedback, case studies, and success stories, to provide a more holistic understanding of impact.

Improvements in Monitoring and Evaluation

The evaluation contributed to strengthening the Network's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) capacity by developing a structured M&E framework aligned with organisational priorities and activities. Improvements included:

Development of a comprehensive outcome measurement framework;

Introduction of standardised indicators across programmes and activities;

Strengthening referral tracking and data management processes;

Integration of CRM and existing records to support ongoing monitoring;

Increased use of qualitative evidence alongside quantitative data;

Enhanced capacity to evidence impact, inform service improvement, and support future funding applications.

The framework was designed as a living document that can continue to evolve as the Network's services expand and organisational learning develops. The evaluation therefore laid the foundations for more sustainable, evidence-based, and participatory monitoring and evaluation practices within the Network.

11. Sustainability

How Findings Will Be Used

The findings from this evaluation will be used to strengthen the ongoing work of the Network by improving monitoring, learning, service delivery, and strategic planning processes. The evaluation provides an evidence base demonstrating the impact and value of the Network's work in supporting migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, and racially minoritised women across Brighton & Hove.

The findings will support the organisation to:

- Improve and refine services, activities, and referral pathways based on participant and partner feedback.
- Continue developing and embedding the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework and outcome indicators into day-to-day practice.
- Strengthen internal data collection, reporting, and learning systems through the continued use and development of the CRM system.
- Demonstrate impact and organisational value to funders, partners, commissioners, and stakeholders.
- Inform future strategic planning, partnership development, and service design.
- Support advocacy and awareness raising around the needs and experiences of migrant, refugee, and racially minoritised women.
- Contribute to wider learning on culturally sensitive, relationship-based, and community-led approaches to support delivery.

The findings and recommendations will also be disseminated through reports, presentations, workshops, success stories, communication materials, and stakeholder engagement activities to support knowledge sharing and future collaboration.

Future Funding Plans

The evaluation is expected to strengthen the organisation's ability to secure future funding by providing clearer evidence of impact, outcomes, and community need. The development of structured indicators, improved monitoring systems, and qualitative evidence will support stronger funding applications and reporting processes.

Future funding efforts may focus on:

- Sustaining and expanding core support services, drop-ins, and safe spaces.
- Developing long-term wellbeing, community engagement, and social integration programmes.
- Strengthening casework, referral, and advocacy support.
- Supporting staffing capacity, volunteer coordination, and organisational infrastructure.
- Expanding culturally appropriate and language-accessible services.
- Further developing digital systems, monitoring processes, and impact reporting capacity.

Supporting participatory approaches, including the continued involvement of women with lived experience in programme development and evaluation.

The organisation also aims to continue strengthening partnerships with local authorities, universities, charitable foundations, community organisations, and specialist service providers to support collaborative funding opportunities and shared delivery models.

Scaling Opportunities

The evaluation identified opportunities to strengthen and potentially scale elements of the Network's community-based and relationship-centred model. Partner organisations highlighted the value of the Network's trusted position within

communities and its ability to engage women who may otherwise face barriers to accessing formal services.

Potential scaling opportunities include:

- Expanding outreach and engagement activities to reach a wider number of women across Brighton & Hove and surrounding areas.
- Replicating elements of the Network's culturally sensitive and trust-based approach within other community settings or partnerships.
- Strengthening multi-agency collaboration and referral pathways across sectors such as housing, wellbeing, VAWG, economic inclusion, and community support.
- Developing additional learning, volunteering, mentoring, and peer-support opportunities for women.
- Enhancing digital monitoring and referral systems to improve service coordination and evidence collection.
- Sharing learning, tools, and participatory evaluation approaches with other organisations working with migrant, refugee, and racially minoritised communities.

The evaluation findings suggest that the Network's model has wider relevance for community-led support approaches that prioritise trust, accessibility, inclusion, and lived experience participation within local support systems.

12. Recommendations

Recommendations for the Network

The evaluation findings highlight the importance of sustaining and strengthening the Network's trusted, community-led, and culturally responsive model of support. Participants and partner organisations consistently valued the Network's relationship-based approach, safe spaces, and holistic support model. The following recommendations emerged from the evaluation findings:

- Continue maintaining and strengthening safe, welcoming, multilingual, and culturally inclusive spaces where women feel emotionally supported, respected, and able to participate without fear of judgement or discrimination.
- Secure sustainable and long-term funding to maintain and expand successful programmes and activities, particularly Ecotherapy, sewing collectives, creative

wellbeing activities, community outreach, volunteering opportunities, and English language support.

- Strengthen organisational capacity, including staffing, volunteer coordination, outreach, casework, and link worker provision, to respond to increasing demand and ensure continuity of support.
- Continue developing opportunities for volunteering, peer leadership, mentoring, and community participation to support women's confidence, leadership development, independence, and sense of purpose.
- Expand opportunities related to employability, enterprise development, accredited learning, skills-building, and partnerships with colleges, training providers, and employment support organisations.
- Strengthen awareness raising and accessible guidance related to discrimination reporting, safeguarding, housing rights, immigration support, violence against women and girls (VAWG), and available statutory and specialist services.
- Continue improving outreach and visibility to ensure isolated women and women who may not yet know about the Network are able to access support and participate in activities.
- Improve accessibility through continued development of multilingual communication, interpretation support, simplified information, and culturally appropriate engagement approaches.
- Continue strengthening the organisation's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems, including the CRM system, referral tracking processes, and outcome monitoring tools to improve evidence collection, organisational learning, and reporting.
- Strengthen systems for collecting feedback and capturing women's lived experiences in accessible and participatory ways, including continued involvement of women through "Experts by Experience" and co-production approaches.
- Improve infrastructure and delivery environments where possible to ensure privacy, confidentiality, and accessibility for women engaging in sensitive discussions or casework support.
- Continue strengthening transparency, communication, and opportunities for participation in organisational decision-making processes to ensure women continue feeling included, informed, and represented.

Recommendations for Partners

The findings demonstrate the importance of strong partnership working and culturally responsive approaches in supporting migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, and racially minoritised women. The following recommendations were identified for partner organisations and service providers:

- Continue strengthening collaborative and partnership-based approaches that enable women to access coordinated and holistic support through trusted community settings.
- Invest in high-quality, culturally appropriate, and confidential interpretation and translation services to improve accessibility and reduce communication barriers.
- Strengthen staff understanding of migration experiences, trauma, cultural barriers, housing insecurity, economic abuse, and violence against women and girls (VAWG) through ongoing training and reflective practice.
- Embed culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and intersectional approaches across service delivery, organisational policies, and communication methods.
- Maintain flexible, relationship-based, and informal engagement approaches rather than relying solely on rigid referral pathways or institutional systems.
- Increase outreach and engagement through trusted grassroots organisations and community hubs to improve access for women who may distrust or feel excluded from formal systems.
- Strengthen communication, coordination, and referral pathways between organisations to improve continuity of care and reduce fragmentation across services.
- Improve accessibility of information and services through simplified communication methods, alternative formats, multilingual materials, and community-based engagement.
- Continue recognising and valuing the role of lived experience, co-production, and community participation within service design, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation processes.
- Develop more inclusive and accessible monitoring and evaluation systems that better capture qualitative outcomes, lived experiences, and long-term impact for women facing multiple barriers.
- Support preventative and non-clinical approaches to wellbeing, including community-based, creative, peer-led, and group-based activities that strengthen social connection, confidence, and resilience.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The evaluation findings highlight the wider importance of investing in community-led, culturally responsive, and preventative models of support for migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, and racially minoritised women. The following recommendations emerged for policymakers, commissioners, and wider practice:

- Increase long-term and sustainable investment in grassroots women-led organisations and preventative community-based support models that strengthen wellbeing, inclusion, safety, and social cohesion.
- Recognise trusted community organisations such as the Network as essential components of local support systems rather than supplementary or short-term providers.
- Move away from siloed and single-issue service models towards integrated, holistic, and partnership-based approaches that reflect the complex and overlapping realities women experience.
- Improve coordination and communication between statutory systems, including housing, immigration, asylum accommodation, wellbeing, safeguarding, and VAWG services.
- Address structural barriers affecting women with insecure immigration status, No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), housing insecurity, language barriers, and experiences of discrimination or exclusion.
- Embed cultural competence, trauma-informed practice, intersectionality, and lived experience participation across policy, commissioning, and service delivery frameworks.
- Invest in early intervention and preventative approaches that reduce isolation, strengthen resilience, improve wellbeing, and prevent escalation into crisis situations.
- Increase support for community-based wellbeing programmes, peer-led activities, volunteering opportunities, and creative initiatives that strengthen women's confidence, participation, leadership, and independence.
- Improve accessibility of statutory and specialist services through multilingual communication, culturally appropriate engagement approaches, and trusted community partnerships.

- Support the development of participatory monitoring, evaluation, and learning approaches that involve women directly in shaping services, indicators, and policy discussions.
- Strengthen recognition of the social and economic value generated through community-led and relationship-based approaches, including their contribution to reducing pressure on crisis and statutory services.
- Support the scaling and sharing of effective community hub models that combine wellbeing, practical support, partnership working, and lived experience participation within accessible and trusted environments.

13. Conclusions

This evaluation demonstrates that the Network of International Women Brighton & Hove provides significant social, community, and systems-level value for migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking, and racially minoritised women across the city. Through its trusted, community-led, and culturally responsive approach, the Network has created spaces where women can access support, build meaningful relationships, develop confidence, improve wellbeing, and participate more actively in community life.

The findings show that the Network's impact extends far beyond the delivery of individual activities or services. Women consistently described the Network as a safe, welcoming, and supportive environment that helped reduce isolation, strengthen emotional wellbeing, increase confidence, and foster a stronger sense of belonging. Participation in creative activities, wellbeing programmes, volunteering opportunities, peer support, and community engagement enabled many women to develop new skills, build social connections, and contribute more actively to their communities.

The evaluation also highlights the important role the Network plays within the wider support landscape of Brighton & Hove. Partner organisations consistently recognised the Network as a trusted bridge between women and formal services, particularly for those facing barriers related to language, migration status, trauma, poverty, discrimination, or limited trust in statutory systems. Through strong partnership working, community-based delivery, and relationship-centred support, the Network

contributes to more accessible, coordinated, and culturally responsive services across the city.

The quantitative findings further demonstrate the scale and reach of this work. With a membership of over 700 women representing 78 countries and speaking 69 languages, alongside more than 1,300 recorded attendances across community sessions during the evaluation period, the evidence demonstrates both the breadth of the Network's engagement and the continued demand for its services. The findings also highlight the value of preventative and community-based approaches that support wellbeing, social connection, and early intervention before needs escalate into crisis.

Alongside these achievements, the evaluation identified ongoing challenges affecting both the Network and the women it supports. Funding insecurity, increasing demand, language barriers, housing insecurity, digital exclusion, and wider structural inequalities continue to shape women's experiences and create pressures on community organisations. Addressing these challenges will require sustained investment, strong partnerships, and continued recognition of the essential role played by trusted grassroots organisations.

A significant outcome of this project has been the strengthening of the Network's Monitoring and Evaluation systems through the development of a new CRM system, outcome indicators, and a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. These developments provide a strong foundation for future evidence collection, organisational learning, service improvement, and sustainability, enabling the Network to better demonstrate its impact and respond to emerging needs.

Ultimately, this evaluation reinforces the importance of community-led, relationship-based, and participatory approaches to supporting women experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage. The success of the Network lies not only in the services it provides, but in the trust it builds, the opportunities it creates, and the sense of community it fosters. As Brighton & Hove continues to become more diverse, organisations such as the Network will remain essential to promoting inclusion, wellbeing, participation, and social justice. Continued investment in this work is therefore not only beneficial for individual women, but for the strength, resilience, and cohesion of the wider community.

14. Appendix 1

NIWBH Theory of Change

What is the problem we are trying to solve?

The Network of International Women for Brighton & Hove (NIWBH) began in 2017 in response to women in the City who had come together following the loss of children to radicalisation and travel to Syria. The women, most from refugee and migrant backgrounds, had lived in the City for years, but spoke poignantly of the everyday barriers they and their families face in gaining access to essential services and local communities. They struggled to rebuild their lives using their past work experience and qualifications, achieve their potential and ambitions, and make the contribution they wanted to make to the life of the City. Research highlights the isolation and multiple disadvantages experienced by those not born in the UK, and the impact this has on women and their families. Research also highlights the fundamental importance of social networks to linking women to entitlements, resources, services and opportunities, which ultimately leads to successful integration. While services exist, they are often fragmented, inaccessible, or culturally unsafe for international women, particularly those with limited English or insecure status.

The problems the NIWBH aim to solve are:

- Marginalisation and isolation of international women in the city, particularly 'newcomers' to the City and those whose first language is not English
- Barriers to education and to employment opportunities commensurate with women's skills, qualification and past experiences.
- Lack of inclusion of women's voices in community dialogue and civic life, particularly in relation to exclusion, racism, inequality and gender-based discrimination
- Low confidence, low mental well-being, often resulting from trauma, which women who have experienced forced migration have to overcome before they can start rebuilding lives for themselves and their families
- The complex impact of poverty, inequality and the ongoing hostile environment on the lives of women and their families
- The multiple challenges facing asylum seekers and refugees dispersed to hotels and other accommodation in the city.
- Barriers women face to accessing early intervention support, services and opportunities for themselves and their families

Who is our audience?

The 2021 Census shows that one in five residents in Brighton & Hove were born outside of the UK (54,343 people). That is 20% of the total population, higher than that in the Southeast (16%) and in England (16%). There are currently some 130 people in asylum accommodation, including families in hotels and other dispersal accommodation. The city has received 211 refugees resettled from Syria and Afghanistan, and an estimated 683 Ukrainian nationals and 795 Hong Kong British Nationals (Overseas) in the last few years (Wilding et al 2024).

While we acknowledge that the different life histories, material realities and legal categories of these groups, the NIWBH works in a unique way with these groups. Through an intersectional approach which recognises the specific disadvantages faced by 'newcomers' and those in the asylum system, also acknowledges that many experiences and situations caused by poverty, racism, abuse and low mental well-being, are also experienced by long settled communities and British women. NIWBH believes that sharing experiences within and across diversity enables the social connectivity critical to achieving successful social integration.

Our audience is women who self-identify as 'International Women'. This is not defined by immigration status, and there are no barriers to participation, including none for white British women. We are truly an international network as our membership of nearly 600 women is made up of women from 56 different countries speaking 44 different languages.

Broadly, our target audience is:

- Women who feel marginalised and whose voices are seldom heard, particularly women who speak English as an additional language
- Women who don't have access to the support and resources to enable them to navigate their lives and to flourish in the cultural context in which they are living

How do we reach and engage with our audience?

NIWBH has well-established partners in the city and in academic fora, these include Violence Against Women & Girls, Refugees and Migrants, Cities of Sanctuary, University of Sussex. We also provide weekly outreach, sanctuary, advice and support sessions for newly arrived asylum seekers and separately for those arrivals from Ukraine.

Engagement is based on values of:

- Celebrate **diversity** of cultures and experiences through resourcing individual and shared **creativity**
- Reduce social isolation and achieve social **inclusion**
- Trusted and compassionate **support**
- Informed and knowledgeable **advocacy**

What are the activities to be carried out?

1. Building relationships based on trust through providing a weekly, accessible, 'safe space' and drop in, open to all, including our holistic, one to one, confidential casework service.
2. Creative group and individual projects, including some with professional tuition, is our 'shared language'; this allows women to 'tell their story' as well as a route to showcasing their work.
3. Targeted individual support and programmes, including access to specialist services and partner organisations – Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), Economic Abuse and Independence, Cost of Living, Physical and Mental Health Care services, Immigration/legal services, Food Bank and others. Plus signposting to comprehensive city wide services (statutory and third sector provision)
4. Volunteer programme, which has links to both the Council's Apprenticeship Scheme and the Chamber of Commerce, we offer training and access into the employment sector.
5. In partnership with the City Council and Sanctuary- Sea, provision of weekly drop in, welcome sessions for asylum seekers (mostly placed by Home Office) in hotels and dispersal accommodation.
6. Food, friendship, legal and housing advice is provided by council officer, Voices in Exile and other agencies while our volunteers provide food, friendship, practical help including with clothing, personal hygiene products etc. Follow up work on individual cases and referrals across to the Casework service as needed as well as access into wider Network activities.
7. Active participation into city wide strategic policy forums, ensuring women's voices are heard and their lived experience influences service design and delivery arrangements.

What are the steps needed to bring about change?

- A ‘safe space’ for international women to meet, share experiences, knowledge and skills, support one another and build the social bonds and friendships that transcend differences of culture and language.
- Provide access to, without barriers, to ‘learning by doing’ with crafts, cooking, gardening, then building into those activities, volunteering and other more formalised support and learning opportunities.
- Respond to the needs and interests of the women to develop a range of weekly activities and in doing so provide the bridges and links to resources and opportunities.
- Respond to needs, requests for help and disclosures through confidential support from a caseworker
- Equipping women with experience of volunteering and leadership, offering employability support, CV writing advice and references for employment
- NIWBH host a range of activities including our weekly open arts and craft sessions in the city library, Ecotherapy and Outdoor living walks in the city and on the South Downs, Cost of Living support and cooking sessions.

The dedicated objectives are:

1. Reduce isolation and improve wellbeing – Provide safe, inclusive spaces where international women can build relationships and support networks.
2. Increase access to support and services – Help women navigate health, housing, legal, and welfare systems.
3. Develop confidence, skills, and agency – Offer creative, practical, and learning opportunities to strengthen personal and professional capabilities.
4. Support pathways to volunteering, employment, and education – Equip women with experience, guidance, and recognition for progression.
5. Amplify women’s voices and influence – Ensure international women shape community dialogue, services, and decision-making.

What are the measurable effects of our work?

Short-Term Outcomes (Immediate changes for women)

- Women feel safe, welcomed, and included in NIWBH spaces

Indicator: % of participants reporting feeling safe and supported (via survey or feedback forms)

- Reduced isolation and loneliness

Indicator: # of women attending weekly sessions; self-reported social connectedness

- Development of trust, peer support, and meaningful relationships

Indicator: Number of new social connections formed; qualitative feedback on peer support

- Improved emotional wellbeing and sense of belonging

Indicator: Self-reported wellbeing scores; participation in group activities

- Increased awareness of services, resources, and opportunities

Indicator: # of women accessing information or referrals; % able to name local services

Medium-Term outcomes (Knowledge, skills, and behaviour changes)

- Increased confidence, personal agency, and self-esteem

Indicator: Pre/post participation self-assessment scores; qualitative testimonials

- Improved communication and social skills

Indicator: Observation of engagement in group activities or workshops

- Development of transferable skills and volunteering experience

Indicator: # of women completing volunteering placements; completion of training programs

- Greater ability to navigate services and advocate for themselves

Indicator: # of successful referrals; # of women reporting independent use of services

- Enhanced participation in education, learning, or employment opportunities

Indicator: # of women enrolling in courses, apprenticeships, or employment

- Strengthened leadership skills and civic engagement

Indicator: # of women taking leadership roles within NIWBH or participating in community forums

Long-Term Outcomes / Impact (Wider social and systemic change)

- International women are socially connected, economically active, and able to influence decisions

Indicator: # of women reporting participation in civic activities or influencing community decisions

- Statutory and voluntary services are more culturally responsive

Indicator: Evidence of policy or service adaptations based on NIWBH input; feedback from service providers

- Stronger social cohesion and integration across Brighton & Hove

Indicator: Community cohesion survey results; participation in mixed-community events

- A city culture that values diversity, inclusion, and international women's voices

Indicator: Stakeholder recognition, awards, or media coverage highlighting inclusion; women represented in decision-making bodies

What are the wider benefits of our work?

- Statutory services which are better able to respond to the needs of the city's diverse women
- Greater integration of 'newcomers' and long-term residence
- Developing a model of working which can be replicated in similar cities across the U.K.

What is the long-term change we see as our goal?

- Improved social cohesion in the city and more equipped statutory services
- A city which is welcoming to all, including newcomers.
- Where international women have a voice in decisions which effect their lives and the lives of their families

What are the assumptions to what change look like?

1. **Participation and engagement** – Women from diverse backgrounds will feel safe and motivated to attend NIWBH activities and engage fully in social, creative, and learning opportunities.

2. **Social connection leads to change** – Building friendships, networks, and peer support will contribute to increased confidence, personal agency, and wellbeing.

3. **Access to resources** – Women will be able to access the learning, volunteering, and employability opportunities offered, and these will improve skills and opportunities for work, education, and civic participation.

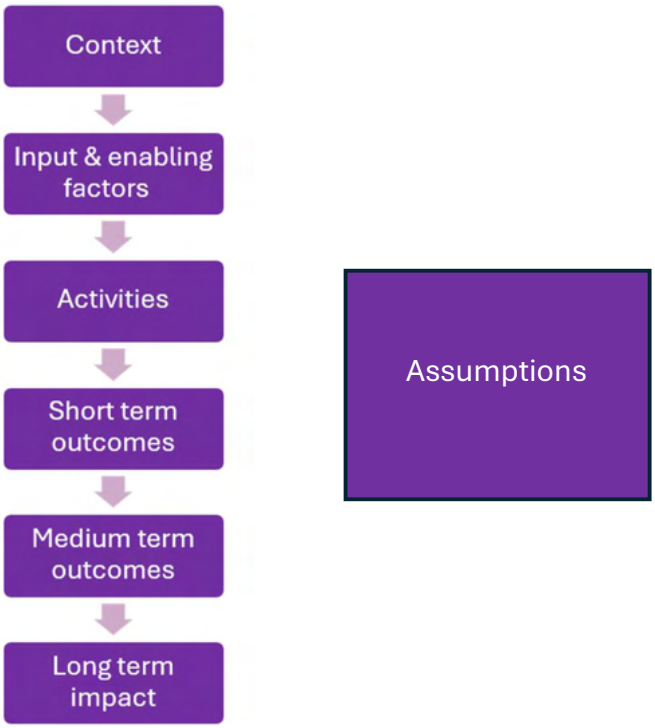
4. **Support systems** – Statutory services, local partners, and community organisations will respond positively to advocacy and referrals, enabling women to access broader support when needed.

5. **Cultural and language barriers** – Language and cultural barriers can be mitigated through trusted, inclusive approaches.

6. **Sustainability and replication** – The model of social support, networking, and skill-building can be maintained over time and adapted to other cities without significant loss of effectiveness.

7. **External environment** - Wider policy and socio-economic conditions may influence outcomes for international women. NIWBH assumes that these factors will be tracked and reflected on, and that programme design will be adjusted where necessary.

Theory of change flow chart



Reference

Brighton & Hove City Council (2025) *Brighton & Hove Population JSNA July 2025*. Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). Available at: https://infogram.com/1pgdggzx63p3xda9p9yn3v6qr7swq3wrl6l (Accessed: 24 June 2026).