

## City Centres: Past, Present and Future, Centre for Cities and George Capital, 2019

### Brighton & Hove Summary

The report prepared by Centre for Cities and George Capital, identifies the cities with the strongest economies in the UK and their common features.

The report finds that successful city centres feature fewer shops but are supported by 'knowledge-based' office jobs (e.g. marketing, finance and law). Online retailers take customers away from traditional shops, whereas higher paid jobs in knowledge-based industries create a market for restaurants, bars and other leisure activities.

Brighton & Hove, along with other cities such as Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool, has performed well by growing the city centre workforce and creating a strong economy.

### The size and make-up of the exporting base in city centres



The report finds that strong city centres such as Brighton & Hove generally have access to a more highly-skilled workforce and contain a greater density of jobs. However they also have more expensive commercial space and clearly the businesses there are willing to pay a premium to access these benefits of a strong economy. However, councils with strong city centres need to ensure a continued pipeline of high-quality office space to sustain the demand for bars, restaurants and other leisure venues.

In contrast, the challenge for poorly performing high streets is not the internet but the lack of skilled workers. They also face a lack of demand to move away from retail to high-knowledge and leisure services.

Because retailers and other high street businesses are local services businesses, the performance of the high street is a reflection of the strength of the city centre economy.

The report finds that 'despite high profile closures in 2018, high street retail is not struggling everywhere. It is certainly true that retail is struggling in some city centres - in Newport 24 per cent of units were empty in 2017-18 but in city centres such as Brighton and Birmingham, just 8 and 10 per cent of units (respectively) stood empty'.

Brighton & Hove is also among the cities with the fewest empty commercial units in their city centres. London and strong regional cities such as Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and Reading also have fewer commercial unit vacancies in their city centres than average.

*Cities with the fewest high street vacancies 2017/18*

Rank	City	Percentage vacant
1	<b>Cambridge</b>	6.9%
2	<b>York</b>	7.0%
3	<b>London</b>	7.4%
4	<b>Exeter</b>	7.6%
5	<b>Brighton</b>	7.9%

Cities with the highest vacancy rates include Newport and Bradford. They have too many cheap retail units and a lack of quality office space, restaurants, cafes and bars. These cities have an overreliance on traditional retail and therefore struggle to compete with online shopping.

*Cities with the most high street vacancies 2017/18*

Rank	City	Percentage vacant
1	<b>Newport</b>	24.3%
2	<b>Bradford</b>	21.2%
3	<b>Wigan</b>	20.8%
4	<b>Blackpool</b>	19.1%
5	<b>Stoke</b>	19.1%

The report makes three key recommendations:

- Calls upon the Chancellor allow city leaders to access to the National Productivity Investment Fund to invest in making city centres more attractive places for businesses and employees;
- Urges the Government to offer all city centres exemptions from commercial-to-residential conversions to protect valuable office space;
- Greater investment in skills for cities' residents is necessary to create the educated workforce that future city centres need to thrive.

For further information, visit [City Centres: Past, Present and Future](#).