

Agenda

Sittingbourne Area Committee Meeting

Date: Thursday, 22 February 2024
Time 7.00 pm,
Venue: Kemsley Community Centre, The Square, Ridham Avenue, Kemsley,
Sittingbourne ME10 2SF*

Membership:

Councillors Derek Carnell (Vice-Chair), Shelley Cheesman, Simon Clark, Tim Gibson, James Hall, Mark Last (Chair), Charlie Miller, Angie Valls, Karen Watson, Tony Winckless and Ashley Wise.

Quorum = 3

Pages

Information about this meeting

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- (a) There is no scheduled test of the fire alarm during this meeting. If the alarm does sound, please leave the building quickly without

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- (b) Assemble outside where directed. Await instructions before re-entering the building.
- (c) Anyone who requires assistance in evacuating the building, should make themselves known during this agenda item.

2. Apologies for Absence

3. Declarations of Interest

Councillors should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their families or friends.

The Chair will ask Members if they have any disclosable pecuniary interests (DPIs) or disclosable non-pecuniary interests (DNPIs) to declare in respect of items on the agenda. Members with a DPI in an item must leave the room for that item and may not participate in the debate or vote.

Aside from disclosable interests, where a fair-minded and informed observer would think there was a real possibility that a Member might be biased or predetermined on an item, the Member should declare this and leave the room while that item is considered.

Members who are in any doubt about interests, bias or predetermination should contact the monitoring officer for advice prior to the meeting.

4. Minutes

To approve the [Minutes](#) of the meeting held on 12 December 2023 (Minute Nos. 510 – 520) as correct records.

5. Safer Streets Scheme update

6. Public Forum

7. Matters arising from previous meetings 5 - 6

8. Swale Local Bus Focus Group 7 - 16

9. Swale Traffic Forum 17 - 18

10. Housing Support Fund 19 - 28

11. Local issues to be raised

12. Matters referred to Service Committee Chairs for consideration

Issued on Wednesday, 14 February 2024

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**Chief Executive, Swale Borough Council,
Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT**

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Sittingbourne Area Committee: Progress on matters arising - February 2024

No.	Item	Background	Update on actions
1.	Sittingbourne Tennis Club	All resurfacing works are now complete. All fencing works are completed. Access control has been fitted to Milton and will be fitted end of November 2023 to King George's. There has been a delay in lining works due to the weather. Temporary lining is being considered in the short term. The website and payment process is being finalised	Both courts are now operational. Temporary lines are in place until the spring when the final court painting will be undertaken. Access control at Milton has been linked to floodlights. Season tickets have been purchased for both facilities.
2.	The Built Facilities Strategy (BFS)	The Built Facilities Strategy (BFS) final draft has been reviewed and feedback is with the consultants.	Community Committee have approved the recommendations for Rugby, Hockey, Cricket, Football, Netball, Tennis & Bowls. Strategy documents is now with Sport England for review ahead of wider consultation.
3.	Heritage issues	The Conservation & Design Team have been providing regular updates on the Milton Regis Conservation Area Review. The Conservation Area Appraisal review went out for public consultation which concluded on 22 December 2023.	Milton Regis Conservation Area appraisal was presented to the policy & Resources Committee on the 7th of February 2024, where in it was unanimously agreed to adopt the proposed document along with the proposed Boundary changes. Next step is to finalise the document with the proposed changes and send notifications to the properties within the conservation area and to London Gazette. It is envisaged that the final adopted document will be updated on the SBC website by Spring of 2024.
4.	Periwinkle Water Mill Site	Regular updates have been given on this project.	No further update.

5.	Swale Local Heritage List	Updates have been given at previous meetings on the Swale Local Heritage List.	The selection Panel will be set up shortly and the invitations will be sent out. Dates to be confirmed.
6.	Policing in Sittingbourne	<p>At the December 2023 meeting, Inspector Vanessa Foster attended to give an update on various policing issues.</p> <p>The Head of Housing and Community Services agreed to look into the policy for the use of mobile CCTV to see if there was any justification for one being deployed in Milton Regis High Street.</p> <p>The Head of Housing and Community Services agreed to look into the possibility of community groups in unparished areas funding CCTV cameras.</p>	The Community Services Manager advised officers had recently reviewed whether there was justification for CCTV deployment in the Milton area, following a request from a Councillor. Unfortunately, after speaking to the Police there were very limited reports of ASB or crime in the area that would provide this justification. She did raise the concern to the Police of under reporting of incidents in the area and this has been flagged to the Beat Officer and it will be kept under review.

The following issues were raised at the December 2023 round of Area Committee meetings to take to the first Enhanced Bus Partnership – Swale Local Focus Group meeting.

Western Area Committee:

- The majority of villages in the Western area had been severely impacted. Rodmersham, Milstead, and Bredgar had no bus services, Tunstall had a limited service to the Kent Science Park and Bapchild services had been reduced from five to one an hour (Stagecoach X3 service). Due to roadworks on the A2, they were often delayed and the last bus service was often cancelled;
- services ended at 6 pm, there was no service in Bapchild on Sundays and a reduced service on Saturdays;
- it was not a useful service as buses were operating during times that were of no use to people working, attending hospital appointments, or hoped to use train services. New services needed to be better timetabled;
- the current option of using a drop-off service was not always suitable as it had to be booked in advance, bus pass holders had to pay and the varying routes could take a long time;
- KCC had not taken advantage of Section 106 funding from the expansion of the Kent Science Park, Sittingbourne which could have been used to support rural communities;
- developers would often put in pilot schemes such as Arriva Click, but they would not stop at villages such as Rodmersham, therefore it was destined to fail as it did not have enough passengers. It also killed the commercial bus service that ran to the Kent Science Park.
- Newington had limited buses with poor timings which did not link up with train times. There was no service in the evening.
- elderly people who liked to be independent were affected by the reduction in services. Not being able to leave the house could affect their mental health;
- bus companies were credited with only 80 pence each time a bus pass was used which impacted commercial services;
- people who regularly attended hospital appointments, or visited relatives or friends in hospital, had to use costly taxis as there was no bus service when they needed it;
- pupils attending schools in Maidstone were affected when the Arriva service stopped. The alternative service, Stagecoach X3, did not always turn up, and not all parents were able to give lifts;
- some people could not get home from the bus station; and
- evening bus services were needed.

Sheppey Area Committee:

Members commented that public transport on the Isle of Sheppey was lacking and there was general support for the implementation of the Enhanced Bus Partnership Swale Local Focus Group.

Sittingbourne Area Committee:

Due to lack of time, the Chair asked that people contact the rep outside of the meeting with any issues they would like raised.

Eastern Area Committee:

- Areas such as Lower Road and Ospringe Road, Faversham were effectively cut off as there were only two buses timetabled per day with the last but at 2 pm;
- Boughton, Faversham was often bypassed by the buses which left school children unable to get to school;
- if residents could not rely on bus services, they would stop using them;
- a breakdown of how much of the funding allocated to KCC by the Government would be spent in the Eastern Area was requested;
- due to the changes to family hubs in Kent, families had to travel further to get to them. If they used the bus service from Bysingwood, Faversham, there was only room for 2 pushchairs which was not enough;
- a Member asked if there were any allocated funds for rural services which had been lost? and
- there was no bus services from Oare, North Preston, Faversham Lakes, Lakeside Avenue into Faversham.

Response to above from Swale Local Bus Forum held on 06 February 2024:

Western Area Cttee

- Cllr Mike Baldock suggested to assist with offering a service to link village to village, providing a hopper service to link villages with town.
- Cllr Mike Mike Baldock suggested if daily services not viable to rural villages, offer a twice weekly service.
- Dan Bruce (KCC) advised Stagecoach working on X3 route issue.
- Dan Bruce (KCC) - Aware of the Kent Science Park S106 issue and reviewing.

Sheppey Area Committee

Following this meeting Cllr Dolley Wooster has greater understanding of BSIP, Enhanced Partnership Board and Local Bus Forum to update Sheppey Area Cttee.

Sittingbourne Area Committee

Member rep had sent apologies, but bus companies were aware of the points raised as they had attended the committee previously.

Eastern Area Committee

- Matthew Arnold (Stagecoach) - Issues with Boughton due to highway improvement works and access to village.
- Matthew Arnold (Stagecoach) - Bus design impacts on allocated pushchair space

- Cllr Mike Baldock suggested if daily services not viable to rural villages offer a twice weekly service.
- Dan Bruce (KCC) Funding allocation not specific to the area but benefit from county wide initiatives like the travel saver pass and free weekend last summer.

Representatives from bus companies offered to attend future meetings of Area Committees if required.

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Driving Britain Forward

CPT's bus priorities for the next government

Contribution of Bus

Buses are at the centre of British life. They are the nation's most affordable, accessible and popular form of public transport, carrying over 10 million people a day.

- Bus passengers spend over £40 billion each year on leisure and retail activitiesⁱ, while bus commuters add over £64 billion to the economyⁱⁱ
- Buses help everyone to get where they need to be, particularly lower income families, 40% of whom have no access to a car and use the bus three times more often than wealthier householdsⁱⁱⁱ
- Taking the bus is a simple, affordable way of reducing environmental impact: switching just two car journeys per driver per month to bus would keep us on the path to net zero while bringing huge benefits in reduced air pollution and congestion^{iv}

We all gain whenever someone takes the bus. That's why the next government needs a national strategy to encourage more people to do so more often.

Here's how it can be done



A five year funding settlement, giving certainty and encouraging private sector investment in new vehicles and more services

Targeted measures to keep fares low when the national fares cap ends, giving a helping hand to passengers who need it most

A long-term government-industry partnership to drive the transition to zero emission bus travel, leveraging private sector investment and enabling a transition to a zero emission fleet by 2035

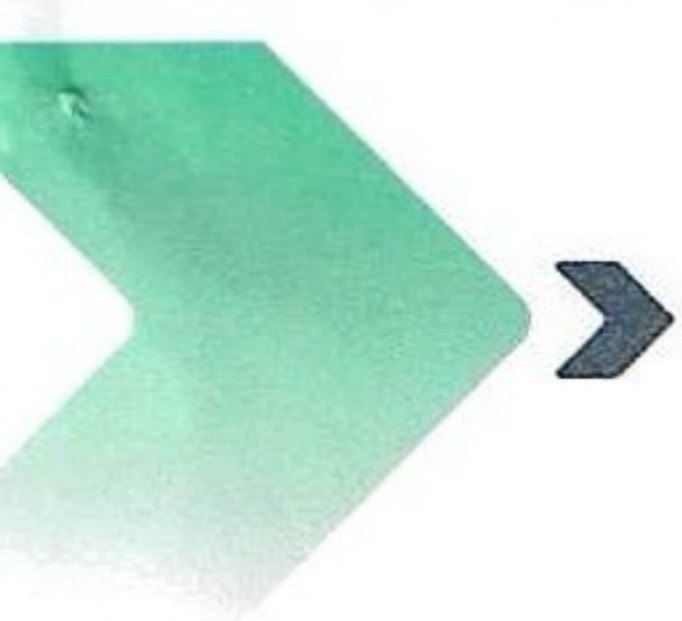
National and local targets to increase bus speeds, attracting more passengers and reducing operating costs

A new statutory, funded definition of essential bus services, giving councils clarity over the services they must provide to ensure access for everyone

A workforce strategy led by industry, supported by government, training the drivers and engineers needed to grow the industry and transition to zero emission operation



It's a strategy built on the successful partnership between central government, local government and the private sector. It's a strategy which can be delivered – and needs to be delivered – whatever form of regulatory framework bus services operate under. It's a strategy which maximises the value for money of public funding by leveraging private sector investment and creating a sustainable, virtuous cycle of growth



A five year funding settlement

The government currently spends around £400m per year on directly supporting bus services, through payments to operators and councils. A lack of clarity over the existence and size of future funding streams undermines confidence and prevents operators and councils from investing in longer-term service development.

Conversely, a clear future stream of income will build confidence. It will enable, for example, operators and councils to develop new routes over a period of two-three years giving them time to grow and become sustainable in a way which wouldn't be possible within a single year. Same investment, better results.

The government should maximise the value for money of its investment by announcing a five-year spending plan, as happens in rail. This should include an updated reimbursement mechanism for free travel by older and disabled people which is clear, fair and which reflects post-pandemic travel patterns.



Keeping fares low

Bus travel has always been an affordable way to travel, particularly for regular commuters. In recent years, operators have built on this value with new ticketing options to cater for post-pandemic travel patterns and have worked with government to deliver a two-year national £2 fare cap.

New research for CPT^v shows though that there are a wide range of trade-offs to consider as government reviews its £350m plus annual investment into the fare cap. In considering the balance between different policy goals such as net zero, economic growth and managing the cost of living it is likely that there will be better value-for-money ways of helping passengers.

The next government should continue to support passengers from January 2025 with a package of targeted measures that support sustainable modal shift.



National and local targets to increase bus speeds

Slow buses cost us all: they increase operating costs for operators, soaking up money which could be invested in more services; waste bus passengers' time; and deter others from taking the bus at all. After decades of decline by an average of 1% per year^{vi} the average bus now travels at just 10.7 miles per hour^{vii}, and much more slowly in congested urban areas.

Reversing the trend is possible and would be transformational. Research shows that a 10% increase in bus speeds – to just under 12 miles per hour on average – could increase passenger numbers by 2.5% and reduce operating costs by 8% or up to £250m per year; a cost saving which operators will work with councils to reinvest in local services. It also has the potential to save the average household £400 a year in transport spending.^{ix}

The next government should set and monitor a target for all local transport authorities to increase bus speeds by 10% over the lifetime of the next parliament. Councils in the north and midlands will be able to use existing capital funding streams to invest in bus priority measures which offer immediate customer benefit, a long-lasting impact and great value for money; the next government will need to ensure that southern councils also have access to capital funding to deliver bus priority in their areas.



A new statutory definition of essential bus services

Too many people in rural areas and small towns lack access to the transport services they need to participate fully in the workforce and their community. Bus services which cannot be run on a commercial basis can be supported by councils, but declining budgets and competition with statutory priorities such as education and adult social care mean that funding has declined and 56% of lifeline services covering 180 million miles a year have been lost since 2009/10.*

This is a national problem which needs a national solution.

The next government should work with us and councils to adopt a simple definition of essential services into legislation and, over time, fund councils to invest in missing services.



A government-industry partnership to drive the transition to a zero emission bus network

While we have made great strides in greening the bus fleet, a stop-start approach to funding has held back manufacturers' production plans and operators' purchasing decisions.

The transition to a zero emission fleet is an opportunity for Britain to lead the world in manufacturing, operating and engineering a zero emission bus network. And government investment leverages private sector investment; the government's recent ZEBRA funding scheme, for example, attracted around £1.20 of private investment for every £1 of central government investment.

The next government should announce a five year £1 billion investment programme to leverage more private sector investment in new vehicles and put us on track to a zero emission fleet by the middle of the next decade.



A workforce strategy led by industry, supported by government

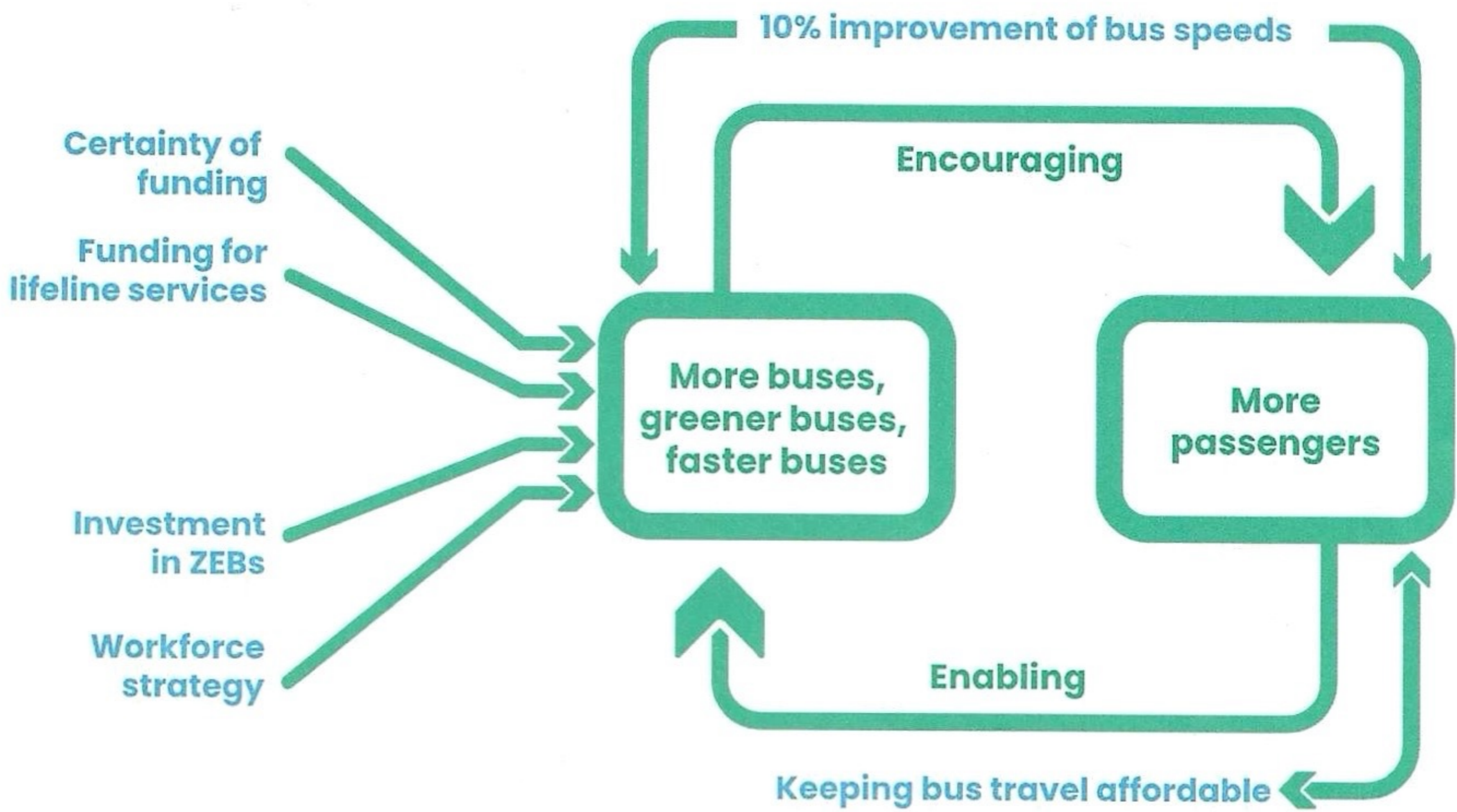
Despite record levels of recruitment and record investment in training and apprenticeships, staff shortages remain persistent across the industry with almost 7% of driver roles currently vacant. The shortages of drivers and engineers are already a brake on growth and could hold back the industry from delivering the potential outlined elsewhere in our plan.

The industry will continue to focus on recruiting and retaining a skilled, diverse workforce fit for the opportunities of growth and the transition to zero emission operation. Government can help in a variety of ways, for example by: removing red tape, endorsing and amplifying our campaigns, working with us to reform apprenticeships, ensuring Jobcentres across the country work with local operators.

The next government should put its full support behind an industry-led strategy to develop the workforce the sector needs to grow and to prepare for the zero emission future.



All the elements of our priorities for the next government work together to attract more passengers and deliver more, faster buses, creating a virtuous cycle which over time reduces the need for government expenditure.

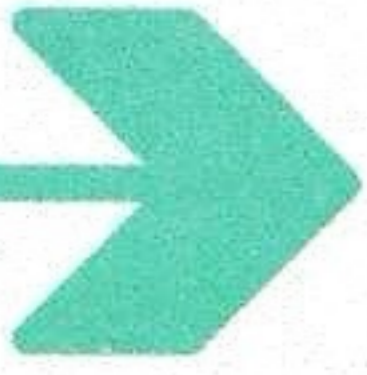


Our priorities give the next government the opportunity to build a better bus network with us:

- ✓ more buses going to more places more often...
- ✓ carrying more passengers, to...
 - revitalise local economies;
 - connect communities; and
 - minimise the impact of travel on the environment

ⁱ CPT and Opinium Polling 2023
ⁱⁱ Institute for Transport Studies, Buses and economic growth
ⁱⁱⁱ Department for Transport, National Travel Survey 2022 (tables NTS0703, NTS 0705)
^{iv} WPI Economics, The Decarbonisation Dividend
^v Alternatives to the National Fare Cap, KPMG, January 2024
^{vi} David Begg, The impact of congestion on bus passengers
^{vii} CPT, Bus Industry Costs in 2023
^{viii} 2FM Research for CPT
^{ix} Social Market Foundation, Getting the measure of transport poverty
^x Department for Transport Bus Statistics (table Bus02a_mi)
^{xi} CPT analysis of Zebra 1 business cases
^{xii} CPT Operator Survey, September 2023

Picture courtesy of: Stagecoach



For further information

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Driving the industry forward for 50 years

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Sittingbourne Area Committee	
Meeting Date	22 February 2024
Report Title	Swale Traffic Forum
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Martyn Cassell, Head of Environment and Leisure
Report Author	Adrian Oliver, Active Travel Co-ordinator
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the content of the report. 2. Nominate a representative from the Sittingbourne Area Committee to sit on the Swale Traffic Forum. 3. Feedback any traffic issues that can be raised at the first Swale Traffic Forum end February/beginning March 2024.

1 Background

- 1.1 The Policy & Resources Committee has approved the pursuit of establishing a multi-agency group – Swale Traffic Forum – to monitor the wider road network to ensure that the current programme of works and any future planned works, delivers the mitigations to allow for the regeneration of the shared space rural lanes and recommend interventions where and when appropriate.
- 1.2 The Swale Traffic Forum (STF) is to assist Kent Highways and National Highways with traffic management plans by providing local knowledge, during significant works such as those at Junction 5 of the M2/A249, Key Street and Grovehurst roundabouts, to endeavour to maintain the flow of traffic along key corridors without impacting residential streets or the rural road network.
- 1.3 The STF will assist with communications to help drivers avoid and reduce congestion.
- 1.4 The STF aims to bring together Swale Members & Officers and representatives of industry, education, Kent Highways and National Highways:
 - The Chair of the Swale Joint Transport Board
 - The Vice-Chair of the Swale Joint Transport Board
 - One representative from each of the four Area Committees
 - At least one representative from Kent Highways
 - At least one representative from National Highways
 - At least one representative from industry
 - At least one representative from Swale Schools
 - Appropriate Swale Borough Council officers
- 1.5 The Chair and or Vice-Chair of the Swale Joint Transport Board are responsible for reporting on the activities of the STF to the Joint Transport Board.
- 1.6 Kent Highways and National Highways representatives to investigate recommendations from the STF and report back.
- 1.7 The work and effectiveness of the STF will be reviewed annually to aid members decisions on the relevance and continuation of the meetings.
- 1.8 The STF will meet every other month – six times a year. The members can decide to meet more or less regularly if the volume of key corridor works necessitates.
- 1.9 Meetings will be held during the working day on Teams and organised by Swale Borough Council.

2 Proposal

- 2.1 Note the content of the report.
- 2.2 Nominate a representation from the Sittingbourne Area Committee to sit on the Swale Traffic Forum
- 2.3 Feedback any traffic issues that can be raised at the first Swale Traffic Forum end
February/beginning March 2024

Household Support Fund (HSF)

Area Committees update for Swale.

Household Support Fund has provided vital Government funding to deliver critical services to the residents of Swale who are impacted by the current Cost of Living Crisis and energy prices. Over the four rounds (Oct 2021 – Jan 2024), we have developed support packages by working with local voluntary and community sector organisations (VCS) and have delivered support to the most vulnerable through a network of frontline delivery.

Funding Allocations

Household Support Fund is a Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) provision which is funded to Kent County Council and then we receive local allocations dependant on a variety of measures including poverty levels.

- Round 1 (6th October 2021-31st March 2022) – £244,416.22
- Round 2 (1st April 2022-30th September 2022) – £558,940.00 (In-house voucher scheme delivered & pensioner payments)
- Round 3 (1st October 2022-31st March 2023) – £279,923.87
- Round 4 (1st April 2023-31st March 2024) – £505,445.00

Current funding position

The current round of funding will end on 31st March 2024, and we have not received any updates from Government or Kent County Council that there will be a further round of funding, this will have significant impact on Swale residents, Swale Borough Council and Swales VCS.

Delivery model

In rounds 1 & 2 (Oct 2021-Sep22) we developed a service offer that consisted of a combination of funding VCS partners and delivery of a voucher scheme by officers in-house. This formed the basis of the service offer that we have been delivering ever since by using the evidence from the first rounds to show resident need and how we could respond with the staff resources and funds available to us.

As the scheme developed, we stopped delivering in-house and moved to funding all services through Swale's VCS to bolster existing service provision and creating a new voucher scheme working in collaboration with Children & Families.

The VCS organisations delivering the scheme were able to increase their volumes of support and develop their existing service offers to respond to the immediate crisis. New and innovative support offers were developed through working with the VCS, of which as a Local Authority we were unable to deliver due to a lack of resources and delivery mechanisms.

The current delivery model consists of the following service offers being delivered Swales VCS:

Organisation	Service offer
Age UK (Faversham & Sittingbourne)	Hot meals & food shopping
Age UK (Sheppey)	Hot meals & food shopping
Children & Families	Emergency food parcels
Children & Families	£100 Mastercard (Billed fuel support)
Citizens Advice Swale	Fuel advice (and other advice services)

Diversity House	Emergency food parcels (Multicultural)
Fuel & Water Advice Service (Children & Families)	Fuel and energy advice (inc. fuel vouchers)
Swale Foodbank	Emergency food parcels
Swale Foodbank	White goods
West Faversham Community Association	Hot meals (children)

Partnerships

The Fuel and Water Advisor service was created in 2019 through SBC Special Projects Fund after we declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency. The development of this contract included providing support to residents to tackle fuel and water poverty in the borough.

Children & Families delivered this successful project over a period of 3 years, and we were able to fund the extension of this much needed service through HSF until the end of March 2024. The District Councils Network are promoting this as a stand out service model and we are proud of the work this project has done to support many residents to improve the energy efficiency of their homes and access to emergency fuel support and advice. Due to the proven track record of this project and the continued need for a service of this kind, Children & Families have been successful in gaining a further year's funding through local energy provider schemes.

In addition, development of HSF in conjunction with the local VCS has allowed us to strengthen the relationship we have as an authority with the VCS and wider statutory partners. There is a collaborative voice through the Cost of Living Partnership Group and working closely with frontline partners helps us to get a true picture of the issues and experiences our residents are facing at this time as well as engaging local MPs within the group.

Data

The following data has been collected over the lifespan of HSF and shows the numbers of households that the scheme has assisted.

Although the service delivery differs the data collection has remained the same for reporting. The number of households differs from the volume of support provided as we have provided multiple support to the same household in some instances.

Round 1							
Time Period	Food Support <i>(Vouchers, Food Parcels, Food Shopping, Hot Meals)</i>	Energy and Water <i>(fuel vouchers, essentials linked to energy/water ie. warm packs, hygrometers)</i>	Wider Essentials <i>(white goods)</i>	Advice Services	Housing Costs <i>(rent arrears)</i>	Total Volume	Total Households
6 months							
06/10/21-31/03/22	443	155	258	0	0	856	683
Round 2							
Time Period	Food Support <i>(Vouchers, Food Parcels, Food Shopping, Hot Meals)</i>	Energy and Water <i>(fuel vouchers, essentials linked to energy/water ie. warm packs, hygrometers)</i>	Wider Essentials <i>(white goods)</i>	Advice Services	Housing Costs <i>(rent arrears)</i>	Total Volume	Total Households
6 months							
01/04/22-30/09/22	1753	3982	0	0	0	5735	1773
Round 3							
Time Period	Food Support <i>(Vouchers, Food Parcels, Food Shopping, Hot Meals)</i>	Energy and Water <i>(fuel vouchers, essentials linked to energy/water ie. warm packs, hygrometers)</i>	Wider Essentials <i>(white goods)</i>	Advice Services	Housing Costs <i>(rent arrears)</i>	Total Volume	Total Households
6 months							
01/10/22-30/03/23	6380	2313	33	0	4	8730	5861
Round 4							
Time Period	Food Support <i>(Vouchers, Food Parcels, Food Shopping, Hot Meals)</i>	Energy and Water <i>(fuel vouchers, essentials linked to energy/water ie. warm packs, hygrometers)</i>	Wider Essentials <i>(white goods)</i>	Advice Services	Housing Costs <i>(rent arrears)</i>	Total Volume	Total Households
1 year Apr23-Mar24							
01/04/23-31/12/23	15,055	1149	76	338	3	16,621	15,960
Overall Total	23,631	7599	367	338	7	31,942	24,277

The fund has provided **2,710** £100 digital Mastercard's to households to enable them to decrease their fuel bills or support their families with fuel or food supplies.

The fund has provided **11,614** emergency food parcels to households who would have otherwise gone without essential food supplies.

Through the Fuel & Water Advisor service **4444** households have been provided with essentials to reduce fuel consumption such as, as water hippos, radiator reflector panels, draft excluders, and hygrometers to help reduce damp. As well as advice on energy/water bills and fuel vouchers for those on pre-paid meters.

In exceptional circumstances the fund has contributed to rent arrears for families who are not entitled to any other form of additional funding support, and they have shown that they are valid cases to receive the support to avoid homelessness or transition from temporary accommodation.

Voluntary and Community Sector impact

Through the development of HSF, we have been able to improve and build on the relationship that we have with Swales VCS. Covid significantly impacted the sector as they saw increasing numbers of residents turning to them for support because of the pandemic. In addition, the impact of the fuel crisis as well as the Cost-of-Living crisis have all played a part in putting incredible strain on their services.

We acknowledge that residents trust the VCS in Swale and are turning to them more and more and so collectively we agreed to design a scheme that would benefit residents first and foremost but also allow the VCS to tackle some of the issues they are facing and reduce pressure to our own frontline services. Without HSF these organisations will without doubt no longer be able to deliver the level of service offer they have been, and many residents will start to feel the effects of a reduced service.

We have spoken to the core delivery partners from Swales VCS and captured their comments and feedback regarding HSF funding ceasing post March 2024 – see attached **Appendix I**.

Implications of the fund ending post March 2024

For Swale residents

- Reduction in availability of emergency support ie. food parcels, fuel vouchers
- Increased wait times to access services
- Increase in mental health issues due to worry of not being able to access support
- Some services that are currently funded by HSF will become chargeable to residents who are unable to afford the costs ie. Age UK hot meals

For Swale Borough Council

- Increase of Safeguarding cases
- Increase in contacts to Housing and Homelessness services
- Increase in non payment of Council Tax
- Increase on pressure on SBC to find alternative support options

For the Voluntary & Community Sector in Swale

- Possible centre closures due to lack of funding
- Organisations unable to meet the demand and therefore having to turn people away or redirect them back to SBC
- Organisations needing to charge for services that are currently available through HSF
- Increased stress and pressures to small organisations without the capability to cope

Appendix I

Household Support Fund (HSF)

Voluntary and Community Sector Statements to support Household Support Fund Review Paper January 2024.

Children & Families – Ian Townsend-Blazier

Emergency food parcels and £100 digital Mastercard's

The HSF has enabled us to support thousands of the most vulnerable members of our community across Swale. Through this work we are able to support those on prepayment meters, billed support and food support. As a local charity the funding has helped support the sustainability of these much needed services. If children/families are unable to meet their basic needs (food, clothes, shelter, warmth) they are unable thrive, concentrate, learn, etc. which impacts their life chances and creates costly interventions later on in life. We are currently in a period where the energy cap has re-risen, food costs and fuel costs are still high and are unlikely to see any deflation.

The services we provide are not just about sort fixes, but long term sustainable changes.

The support team that provides our emergency support are now regulated by Ofgem who undertake 3rd party Quality assurance reviews. Below is a quote provided by one resident to Explain on the 22nd Dec 2023 regarding the difference HSF makes to peoples lives from the support we provide.

"I'm not disappointed in anything. I've not got one bad thing to say, she saved my life. She's done things I never thought was possible. I've gone through so much, I nearly took my own life. She's just listened to me, she has done so many other little things and helped me out with my housing, bills and my health, I've lost my wife. She made me realise that I've got something worth living for. Rebecca has been for me ten all the way. I didn't expect half the help I got from Rebecca. It was very good for me, I have been in a dark place and she pulled me out financially and mentally and helped me get on track. It's been a huge help, she dropped my bills down and support me with emergency credit when in need so I could heat my home and eat. The people who helped me got it down to a 000 kind of thing, especially around Christmas it's been useful. They were awesome, Rebecca, she something else. She is phenomenal, she saved my life. She has this calmness about her, it's not something you can learn. She's got it like she's every man's wife. People should know what good people have. It's only good things can come out of it."

Citizens Advice Swale – Fiona Spall and Jude Lee

Fuel (and other) advice services

The HSF fund has been instrumental in helping CAS to support residents through the COL crisis. The fund has contributed significantly to salary costs and enabled us to meet increasing demand. The wrap around service offered by CAS means that residents are provided with more than just a fuel or food voucher. We provide a holistic service, which includes comprehensive energy advice, income maximisation, benefit checks and support with debt and finances. In the calendar year we made an income gain of **£167,804.12** through HSF alone in addition to helping clients repay over **£37,000** in financial liabilities. In

the last three months alone we've supported 122 clients through funding from HSF. The majority of these clients presented with multiple complex issues requiring ongoing casework or specialist referrals

The impact on residents should funding be pulled would be extremely detrimental to the community and leave a gap in support where demand is growing. Energy prices rose again in January and many of clients are struggling to heat or eat due to the cost of living. The HSF project allows us to make contact with households that are hardest hit and to increasing their income, and helping them to better manage their finances, this in turn relieves the pressures on statutory services and improves mental health and wellbeing

This recent client story demonstrates the difference we can make through HSF:

Our client contacted us following his move to a very rural and isolated location. He has carpet and curtains in just one room and the Community Support worker has been helping him. Our client described his day to day life as full of pain and despair, he is very lonely and isolated.

He was provided with food from the foodbank but this is mostly canned and he can't use a can opener due to dexterity problems with his hands so it's still sitting in his cupboards. He doesn't have the basic utensils required for serving food.

Our client has no family support and multiple health conditions which makes it very difficult for him to get out and about. He's unable to read or write and has no digital awareness, having just a basic phone for making calls. On top of this he has a basic income from Universal Credit and can't afford bus fares to get into town.

He suffers from depression and has recently had some suicidal thoughts due to his living conditions and ability to see a way forward. He's been turned down three times for Personal Independence Payments, but we're now helping him with an appeal.

After several phone calls we've been able to make progress in trying to secure a better quality of life for him through the HSF scheme

So far we've managed to secure a £50 cash donation to buy the small items he needs for his kitchen and submitted an application for fuel support

Vincent De Paul charity is going to carry out a home visit to see if they can help with white goods, curtains, floor coverings etc.

A referral has been made to the Community Practitioner who'll carry out a home visit to see what help and assistance he needs to manage his day to day affairs

Age UK is going to contact him about their Community Shopping service (a shop to the value of £45 for him at no cost to him and deliver the food).

A referral was also made to Age UK for its Befriending service.

Our client was also under the impression that he had to wait another two years before he could retire, but our adviser was able to reassure him that his retirement date was in 2024. At this point his financial situation will improve as he'll be able to access other benefits to assist him.

During the follow-up phone call when all of the above was explained to the client, he was more positive and said he wasn't feeling as hopeless as he had been since his move. Speaking to him on the phone there was a definite lift in his demeanour; he appeared much more relaxed.

Swale Food Bank (Trussell Trust) – Esther Hurwood

Emergency food support & white goods

Due to Universal Credit payments being too low to afford the essentials, including food, combined with the Cost of Living Crisis, we are currently needing to support many more clients than we ever have before. We are spending around £1000 per week to ensure enough food & supplies goes to those most in need. The Housing Support Foundation has enabled us to support these families and individuals which have been sadly let down by statutory services and a welfare system that is not fit for purpose. Removing this support from ourselves and many of our professional partners at a time when the whole nation is in crisis financially is a blow to the many we are trying to support.

One family we have supported over the last year is a single mum of 4 children. As the Cost of Living crisis hit, her landlord had no choice but to increase her rent by £300. Housing Benefit agreed to cover this for her, but then Universal Credit decreased her payments by £300, meaning she is now minus £300 per month. This incredible woman is attending college to learn new skills in the hope that she will be able to work a full-time job in the future and come off of benefits completely. If, in addition, we now have to remove food support from this family as a result of losing the HSF, we don't know how she will cope. It is almost certain that she would need to leave her college course to try and get lower paid work, in order that her family can continue to eat.

Having helped 6436 people with emergency food last year, and with a predicted 49% increase in households requiring our support this year, we ask that the Housing Support Fund is not discontinued at the end of this financial year. Far too many households require this support in order to provide food for their children for it to be withdrawn.

Age UK (Sheppey) – Louise Johnson

Hot meals and food shopping

We are a charitable organisation that relies on funding, grants, fundraising or charging for our services to be able to be sustainable. Due to the cost-of-living crisis many in our community have been struggling to pay for extra services so have been socialising less or not eating properly. We have been able to offer free two course meal delivery or food packages to those most in need due to the funding from SBC. Without this funding we would not be offering this service so those that are really struggling and vulnerable would find themselves in an even more vulnerable situation. If funding was to stop unfortunately, we would be able to continue the service without charging for it.

Over the months we have had people writing into us to tell us how the service has helped them. Here are some quotes.

“Just a short letter to let you know how much my weekly food parcels have helped out and how grateful I am to have received them. I can’t tell you how much it means to get that extra help”

“I just wanted to say a huge Thank you for our food parcel over the past few weeks. It is so sad really that at 70 years of age I’ve had to turn to a charity to help feed my husband and I but without the help of Age UK I really don’t think we would have managed. The quality and variety of foods we have had through Age UK have been impressive. It has given me the opportunity to prepare and cook some of the nicest, tastiest meals we’ve had for some time. I have always loved cooking and I have to say I have been able to immerse myself in making so many delicious meals from roast dinners, to soups, pastas, jacket potatoes, quiches, pies, puddings and snacks that have not only filled our bellies but also helped my mental wellbeing as I suffer from anxiety and depression, often not being able to step outside the door. Not having the worry of how I was going to feed us as we are really struggling financially to cover our basic needs at present, whilst being busy cooking had made such a difference to me emotionally too so I cannot thank Age UK enough”

“Having my food parcel every week for 4 weeks has helped me so much, just having food that helps with everyday meals makes all the difference. I have been struggling with food shopping and paying bills, sometimes leaving shopping overpaying my bills so thank you so much”

“I have been very fortunate to have received 4 wonderful food parcels via Age UK, which I understand was due to funding from the council. These have been a lifeline for me, as it enabled me with the money saved to pay off a couple of outstanding bills, which I am so grateful for, plus the parcels enabled me to have a little extra money to be able to buy my grandchildren a small token gift to Christmas. I hope that the council will fund these parcels again so as to help more people. I will be forever grateful”

West Faversham Community Association – Louise Asekokhai

Hot meals – young people

I just wanted to put forward a few words from West Faversham regarding the difference the HSF grant makes to our service users.

We provide hot, free meals for young people. The grant allows us to cook a variety of tasty meals for the young people that use our clubs, we often get the children arriving early asking what's for dinner, which means that the meal we are providing is likely to be the only proper hot meal they are being offered. Some of the young people have started to bring their siblings along for food, and often visit the community fridge to take other food home for the rest of the family.

I believe from the feedback we receive that we are ensuring many forgotten about young people, some which do not attend fulltime school are getting a decent meal a few times a week which they would not have from anywhere else. Without the grant money we are going to struggle to provide the quality, variety and quantity we offer, and young people will miss out on being fed properly.

Young people need good quality, healthy food to grow and develop, and if they are left hungry they are more likely to shoplift food and start on the wrong path.

It may not seem a lot to many people, but we know that many of the young people we see on a regular basis rely on the meals we offer.

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