

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.