

Communities Committee Meeting	
Meeting Date	Wednesday 6 th March 2024
Report Title	Household Support Fund (HSF) delivery update
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration & Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing and Community
Lead Officer	Sarah-Jane Radley, Community & Partnerships Manager
Classification	Open
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The committee is asked to note the contents of the report. 2. The committee is asked to provide a steer for minimising impact and next steps post March 31st 2024.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 Provide an update on the outcomes of Household Support Fund delivery to date and implications of the fund ending on 31st March 2024.

2 Background

- 2.1 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 with 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.

Final data for Round 4 (Apr23-Mar24) is still being collated, although we expect to have supported over 30,000 households across the entire year.

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, hygro meters)</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, hygro meters)</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, hygro meters)</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, hygro meters)</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.

3 Proposals

- 3.1 Request member input on options for next steps and suggestions on how to minimise impact and suggested lobbying tactics.
- 3.2 The Community & Partnerships Team will continue to link in with the VCS and support any opportunities for funding outside of HSF as well as develop ideas with Swale Voluntary Alliance.

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 We have consulted with other funders such as Medway & Swale Health & Care Partnership, National Lottery, and other smaller funds however none of these are suitable due to the criteria of the funding, they are either specifically targeted to a project theme and/or they are not funds that cannot be used to directly support residents in the way that HSF does.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 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 – see attached **Appendix I**.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Currently awaiting the new plan to be adopted, however the Community and Partnerships Team will continue to develop a response in conjunction with partners to the Cost of Living Crisis.

Financial, Resource and Property	HSF currently provides funding to multiple partner agencies to assist them in supporting the most vulnerable households in the borough through a variety of functions that SBC does not deliver. The funding currently helps to reduce the pressure on SBC frontline services by providing residents with access to emergency support, without this service residents will look to SBC for support, of which is limited. We could see an increase in demand in several areas including, Safeguarding, contacts to Housing services, increase in non payment of Council Tax and other community facing services.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	None identified at this stage
Crime and Disorder	There is a potential to see an increase in theft in the borough due to lack of access to food.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	None identified at this stage
Health and Wellbeing	There are multiple health implications for Swale residents should HSF funding no longer be available, these include an increase in mental health issues, increase in hunger, families unable to heat their homes or cook hot meals due to lack of fuel. Waiting lists for access to services may become longer which will increase stress and worry for families.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	Potential increase in Safeguarding cases due to lack of services and increased pressures on families to feed and heat their homes. Potential increase suicide rates and increase in mental health issues.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	Potential risks to the VCS include closure of services due to lack of funding and a reduction in donations as well as a reduction in volunteers to support delivery of services. There is a potential that the VCS will be unable to meet the demand put upon them and therefore having to turn people away or refer them back to SBC. VCS consists of smaller organisations and charities, mostly made up from volunteers, the increase in pressure to provide services and deal with ever increasingly frustrated residents could cause mental health issues and the potential to lose more volunteers.
Equality and Diversity	None identified at this stage
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage

7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: HSF.doc

8 Background Papers

For national guidance and information on Household Support Fund visit:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils>