

<b>Communities and Leisure Committee</b>	
<b>Meeting Date</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> September 2024
<b>Report Title</b>	Household Support Fund and Swale VCSE Funding Overview
<b>EMT Lead</b>	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration & Neighbourhoods
<b>Head of Service</b>	Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing and Communities
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Sarah-Jane Radley, Community & Partnerships Manager
<b>Classification</b>	<b>Open</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The committee is asked to <b>note</b> the contents of the report.</li> <li>2. The committee is asked to provide a steer for minimising impact and next steps post September 2024 and March 2025.</li> </ol>

## 1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 Provide an update on the outcomes of Household Support Fund delivery to date, the implications of the fund ending on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024 and an overview of the current funding situation across Swale.

## 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 five rounds (Oct 2021 – Sep 2024), we have developed support packages by working with local voluntary, community, and enterprise sector organisations (VCSE) and have delivered support through a network of frontline delivery.

### 2.2 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 (6<sup>th</sup> October 2021-31<sup>st</sup> March 2022) – £244,416.22
- Round 2 (1<sup>st</sup> April 2022-30<sup>th</sup> September 2022) – £558,940.00 (In-house voucher scheme delivered & pensioner payments)
- Round 3 (1<sup>st</sup> October 2022-31<sup>st</sup> March 2023) – £279,923.87
- Round 4 (1<sup>st</sup> April 2023-31<sup>st</sup> March 2024) – £505,445.00
- Round 5 (1<sup>st</sup> April 2024-30<sup>th</sup> September 2024) £252,722.45

### 2.3 Current funding position

The current round of funding will end on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024, and we have not received any updates from Government or Kent County Council that there will be a further round of funding, and this will have a significant impact on Swale residents, Swale Borough Council and Swales VCSE.

### 2.4 Delivery model

In rounds 1 & 2 (Oct 2021-Sep22) we developed a service offer that consisted of a combination of funding VCSE 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 VCSE to bolster existing service provision and creating a new voucher scheme working in collaboration with Children & Families.

The VCSE 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 VCSE, 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 VCSE:

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Service offer</b>
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)
Children & Families	School uniform voucher scheme (Professional referral only)
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)

### 2.5 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 September 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 VCSE has allowed us to strengthen the relationship we have as an authority with the VCSE 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.

## 2.6 **One Swale Roadshows**

Through the collaboration of our external Cost of Living Partnership Group we have been successfully delivering pop-up sessions around the borough in each of the three main geographical areas, Sheppey, Sittingbourne and Faversham.

The sessions have been a really successful way of bringing a variety of services into the community to give residents access to face to face support on key issues. Through this work, not only have residents been able to access services such as fuel advice, debt and benefit advice, children's services, clothes and food, the organisations themselves have used the opportunity to network and form relationships in the borough to enable a more cohesive approach to service delivery.

We have funded Swale CVS and Faversham Networking Group to deliver the sessions on our behalf until the end of March 2025. We would like to continue to deliver the sessions post March as they have become a valued support mechanism for residents and partners, however we are currently looking to source the funding for delivery.

The following information provides an overview of the session attendance from when we started delivering the sessions in December 2023 to date.

Note – we were delivering in 4 locations across the borough in the same month until the end of March 24, when we had to reduce resources to deliver the sessions due to funding restrictions.

Date	Location	Number of partners in attendance	Number of resident interactions
December 2023	Sheerness and Leysdown	17	74
January 2024	4 locations covered	23	187

February 2024	4 locations covered	25	241
March 2024	4 locations covered	22	122
April 2024	Sheerness	13	84
May 2024	Sittingbourne	15	35
June 2024	Faversham	11	60
July 2024	Sheerness (Seashells)	15	201
August 2024	Leysdown	12	62

The next roadshows are planned for Faversham in September and October in Sittingbourne.

## 2.7 **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 5 (Apr24-Sep24) is still being collated.

Total Value of Awards Split by Category							
<b>Round 1</b>							
	<b>Food Support</b> <i>(Vouchers, Food Parcels, Food Shopping, Hot Meals)</i>	<b>Energy and Water</b> <i>(fuel vouchers, essentials linked to energy/water ie. warm packs, hygro meters)</i>	<b>Wider Essentials</b> <i>(white goods)</i>	<b>Advice Services</b>	<b>Housing Costs</b> <i>(rent arrears)</i>	<b>Total Volume</b>	<b>Total Households</b>
<b>TOTAL FOR 6 MONTHS</b>							
06/10/21-31/03/22	443	155	258	0	0	856	683
<b>Round 2</b>							
	<b>Food Support</b> <i>(Vouchers, Food Parcels, Food Shopping, Hot Meals)</i>	<b>Energy and Water</b> <i>(fuel vouchers, essentials linked to energy/water ie. warm packs, hygro meters)</i>	<b>Wider Essentials</b> <i>(white goods)</i>	<b>Advice Services</b>	<b>Housing Costs</b> <i>(rent arrears)</i>	<b>Total Volume</b>	<b>Total Households</b>
<b>TOTAL FOR 6 MONTHS</b>							
01/04/22-30/09/22	1753	3982	0	0	0	5735	1773
<b>Round 3</b>							
	<b>Food Support</b> <i>(Vouchers, Food Parcels, Food Shopping, Hot Meals)</i>	<b>Energy and Water</b> <i>(fuel vouchers, essentials linked to energy/water ie. warm packs, hygro meters)</i>	<b>Wider Essentials</b> <i>(white goods)</i>	<b>Advice Services</b>	<b>Housing Costs</b> <i>(rent arrears)</i>	<b>Total Volume</b>	<b>Total Households</b>
<b>TOTAL FOR 6 MONTHS</b>							
01/10/22-30/03/23	6380	2313	33		4	8730	5861
<b>Round 4</b>							
	<b>Food Support</b> <i>(Vouchers, Food Parcels, Food Shopping, Hot Meals)</i>	<b>Energy and Water</b> <i>(fuel vouchers, essentials linked to energy/water ie. warm packs, hygro meters)</i>	<b>Wider Essentials</b> <i>(white goods)</i>	<b>Advice Services</b>	<b>Housing Costs</b> <i>(rent arrears)</i>	<b>Total Volume</b>	<b>Total Households</b>
<b>TOTAL FOR 1 YEAR</b>							
01/04/23-31/03/2024	20937	2415	76	615	6	24049	22818
<b>Round 5</b>							
	<b>Food Support</b> <i>(Vouchers, Food Parcels, Food Shopping, Hot Meals)</i>	<b>Energy and Water</b> <i>(fuel vouchers, essentials linked to energy/water ie. warm packs, hygro meters)</i>	<b>Wider Essentials</b> <i>(white goods)</i>	<b>Advice Services</b>	<b>Housing Costs</b> <i>(rent arrears)</i>	<b>Total Volume</b>	<b>Total Households</b>
<b>TOTAL TO DATE</b>							
01/04/2024-30/09/2024	4223	312	20	148	0	4703	3997
<b>Totals</b>	<b>33736</b>	<b>9177</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>763</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>44073</b>	<b>35132</b>

## 2.8 Case studies

we have collected a sample of case studies provided to us by our HSF delivery partners who are dealing with a variety of sensitive and complex cases on a daily basis, of which without HSF and other funding streams this work would be difficult to continue.

### Case 1

*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 and referrals to other organisations who can provide appropriate support.

## Case 2

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 funding, 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.

## Case 3

I don't get paid until next Friday and I am nearly out of electric every spear penny I have had I have put on the meter, but it doesn't seem to be lasting. I can't do any washing for me or my children trying to save electricity so I don't come off grid, but I am close to that now. I am on my emergency now and only have 7 pound left.

## 2.9 Funding outlook

Across Swale there are a variety of services that are reliant on contracts and funding that are due to end either before or on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025. Many of the contract holders are voluntary sector organisations who do not have the capacity to deliver services without the guarantee of future funding. This will have a significant impact to communities if these services must close their doors.

We have carried out a survey through the Cost of Living Partnership Group and been advised of the following:

Organisation	Service & Impact	Funder	End date
Children and Families	Family services – Seashells. A vast number of services will be impacted including family support, parenting programs and delivering	Kent County Council	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025

	specialist services to families on the Island		
Citizens Advice Swale	Reduction in core grant for delivery of core advice services. National Citizens Advice fund Energy Advice Program, due to end in 2025. End of funding from Collyer Fergusson in March 25 for core service.	Various including Swale Borough Council, Collyer Fergusson and National Citizen Advice	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025
SATEDA	Domestic abuse support services – including the main core delivery of services	Police Crime and Commissioner	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025
Swale Community Care	Community Café	Lottery	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025
Age UK Kent Rivers	A vast number of services delivered by Age UK Kent Rivers including health activities, befriending, post diagnostic dementia services, and HSF hot food and shopping	Universal Well-Being fund	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025
Brogdale CIC Group including Vibe community	Youth activities	Faversham Town Council	31 <sup>st</sup> August 2024
KCC Community Wardens	Service is proposed to be halved in numbers and will therefore impact the numbers of clients and level of service able to be provided to communities in Swale	Kent County Council	Under consultation

This is just a snapshot of what we know is coming over the next 7 months as we know there will be others. Most of the clients accessing the services listed are categorised as being the most vulnerable and are living in areas of high health inequalities and deprivation. Communities rely on these services to deliver life changing support and advice, and everyone is working hard to try to find alternative funding solutions, but this is proving difficult within the current climate.

### 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 VCSE and support any opportunities to develop ideas suggested by the Cost of Living Partnership Group some of which are as follows:

- Develop a communications strategy that includes promoting key ‘triggers’ as a preventative measure to stop people from entering crisis, including things like not paying bills, or choosing between fuel and food – this is to be developed through a working group.
- Set up a working group that will specifically look at funding opportunities for the VCSE and to map where the gaps are across the sector – this will be linked to Swale Voluntary Alliance.
- Set up a working group that links directly to the preventative work already being carried by Officers, including benefit uptake campaigns and housing prevention to look at the prospect of including the VCSE to develop further opportunities.
- Develop ideas to work with local businesses in Swale to see how the Cost of Living Group can tap into corporate and social responsibility and how employees of organisations in the borough can be supported better.

### ***Existing and new projects***

3.3 We will continue to promote Swale Voluntary Alliance and utilise the available resources to link any new project ideas and develop all new projects in a collaborative way to ensure that statutory and non-statutory sectors are linked. In addition, the creation of the new Community Lottery Scheme will also be linked to any potential availability of resources once it is launched.

## **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 for delivery of HSF 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 The Cost of Living External Partnership Group which has a varied and high number of members from across multiple sectors and geographical representation across the borough continues to provide a vital platform for us to understand the issues facing communities in Swale. We held a workshop at the July meeting where we discussed the impact of HSF ending, not only for



residents but for organisations and services across the borough. The outcomes of this workshop have been included within this paper and we will continue to use this group to monitor impact as we progress into winter and post HSF funding.

- 5.2 In addition to the external Cost of Living Group an internal Officers group meets regularly to discuss issues that are impacting on Swale Borough Council frontline teams and others, and we will also continue to monitor impacts through this group.
- 5.3 We conducted a survey through the External Cost of Living Group to try and gain an understanding of what organisations are facing regarding contracts and funding cuts. We have included the results of this survey within this paper.

## 6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	<p>Household Support Fund aligns to Community within the Corporate Plan – enabling community resilience through access to food, fuel and other emergency support.</p> <p>The VCSE in Swale deliver many key services to residents not provided through statutory organisations, the reduction in funding to the sector will impact not only residents but Swale Borough Council delivery and frontline services as well as other statutory organisations such as the NHS.</p>
Financial, Resource and Property	<p>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.</p> <p>Reduction in funding into the VCSE will increase pressures to the Local Authority as residents will not be able to access services and a decrease in prevention activities delivered by VCSE will mean longer term financial responsibility falling back onto the Local Authority.</p>
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	None identified at this stage
Crime and Disorder	There is the potential to see an increase in crime in the borough due to the difficulties families will face with the potential reduction in access to emergency support such as food and fuel.

Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	None identified at this stage
Health and Wellbeing	There are multiple health implications for Swale residents should HSF and other key funding streams 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 VCSE 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 VCSE will be unable to meet the demand put upon them and therefore having to turn people away or refer them back to SBC. The VCSE 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

- None

## 8 Background Papers

Website link to Household Support Fund: [www.swale.gov.uk/hsf](http://www.swale.gov.uk/hsf)