

Communities and Leisure Committee	
Meeting Date	5 th March 2025
Report Title	Household Support Fund – prioritisation framework
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration & Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing and Communities
Lead Officer	Sarah-Jane Radley, Community & Partnerships Manager
Classification	Open
Recommendations	1. The committee is asked to provide a steer on priorities for funding for the delivery of Household Support Fund – Round 7.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 Provide an update on the delivery outcomes to date for Household Support Fund and a prioritisation framework to allow members to prioritise funding for Round 7 (April 25-March 26).

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 six rounds (Oct 2021 – Mar 2025), 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 (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
- Round 5 (1st April 2024-30th September 2024) £252,722.45
- Round 6 (1st September 2025 – 31st March 2025) £252,722.45

2.3 Current funding position

The current round of funding will end on 31st March 2025 and Government have announced a further round of funding will be forthcoming for the period 1st April 2025-31st March 2026. We do not currently know the value of the allocation or if

the guidance for the delivery of HSF will change, however we are future planning for Round 7 to ensure that we can deliver efficiently as soon as we receive the allocation details.

2.4 Delivery model and Funding Allocation

The current delivery model provides funding to Swales voluntary, community and enterprise sector to deliver a number of emergency support packages and advice services. The Community & Partnerships Team manage the service offer and support internal departments such as Housing to access the fund.

Organisation	Service offer
Age UK (Faversham & Sittingbourne)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hot meals & food shopping Information & Advice Service for pensioners
Age UK (Sheppey)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hot meals & food shopping
Children & Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency food parcels
Children & Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> £100 Mastercard (Billed fuel support)
Citizens Advice Swale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fuel advice (and other advice services) Information & Advice Service for pensioners
Diversity House	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency food parcels (Multicultural)
Fuel & Water Advice Service (Children & Families)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fuel and energy advice (inc. fuel vouchers)
Swale Foodbank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency food parcels
West Faversham Community Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hot meals (children) Emergency food parcels

Food: Currently the majority of funding is allocated to services that deliver emergency food support to residents, through parcels, hot meals and shopping. These are vital food support services that ensure families receive the food they need to be able to eat.

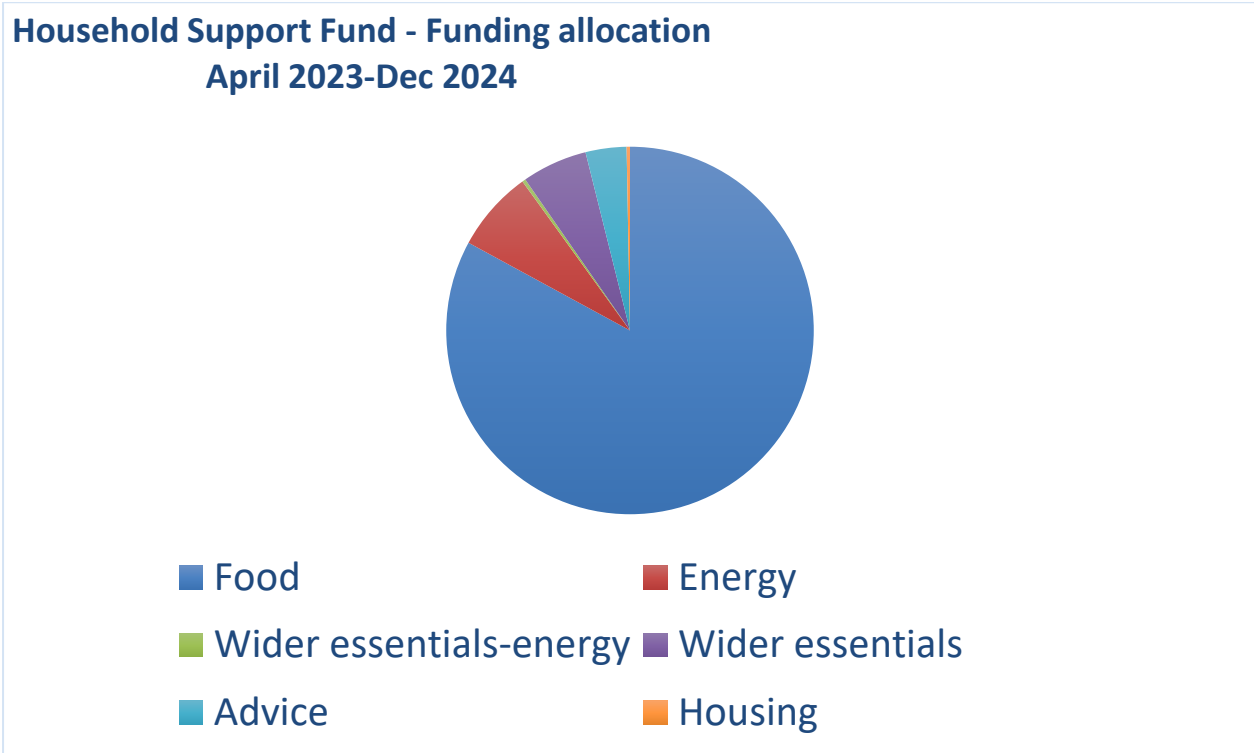
Fuel: In addition to food, we provide a service whereby residents can access £100 in the form of a digital card that can be used to contribute towards their energy bills and help them to reduce fuel debt or receive a pre-payment fuel voucher so that they can heat their homes.

Advice: Other areas of support include advice services; these play a vital role to ensure that residents have access to the right information and advice to ensure they can resolve issues and better their circumstances.

Other: Additionally, we work closely with our internal housing teams to provide support to residents who are in exceptional circumstances and require

emergency funds such as payments for rent arrears to help them advance into permanent living conditions, vouchers or essentials such as sleeping bags and hats/scarves.

Not currently funded: Dedicated prevention services, of which options for these are being discussed at the February Cost of Living Group as this could potentially be included as criteria for Round 7.



The Cost of Living Group held a workshop on the 11th February to discuss the ongoing delivery of HSF and the priorities for delivery in Round 7. The key areas that they felt should be included are more preventative services such as resident education activities, targeted delivery to ensure that those who are digitally excluded or find it difficult to access services have the support they need, to review repeat access by offering alternative support options, information or data sharing for services such as food banks and peer support offers.

Other areas of discussion included looking at employment and support into work, skills, and lobbying for changes to LHA, UC and National Minimum Wage as the group felt that all of these contribute to the financial shortfall that many find themselves in and therefore reliant on emergency support each month.

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 have delivered this successful project over a period of years, and we have been able to contribute towards an extension of this much needed service through HSF until the end of March 2025. Changes to funding for Children & Families means that there is a possibility that this service may end, however we have included funding of this service (in part) as an option within the framework.

Through our partnership with the VCSE we have been able to implement short term projects such as this winter we introduced an Information & Advice service with Citizen Advice Swale and Age UK Kent Rivers to specifically support those who were affected by the removal of the Winter Fuel Payment to ensure pensioners are accessing support and benefit reviews.

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 and be creative in how we tackle these issues.

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 are a 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 are keen to ensure we continue to deliver these sessions across the borough post March – funding dependant.

Date	Location	Number of partners in attendance	Number of resident interactions
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
September 2024	Sheerness	14	86

October 2024	Faversham	10	77
November 2024	Sittingbourne	18	134
January 2025	Leysdown	12	4
February 2025	Sittingbourne		
March 2025	Faversham		
March 2025	Sheerness		

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 similar 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 6 (Sep24-Mar25) is still being collated.

Full Data set can be seen in **Annex I**

1.8 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 31st 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.

Included within these are Children & Families (Seashells) who deliver a number of services to Swale residents. Age UK Kent Rivers and the IMAGO services which in the long term will have a huge impact on our aging residents. SATEDA and the domestic abuse services, and cuts to Youth Services are to name a few.

3 Proposals

3.1 Request member input to prioritise the key elements of the funding allocation for HSF Round 7. The funding landscape has changed significantly since the inception of HSF, however the level of need for emergency support within the community has not reduced, if anything it is more than ever. Food banks are seeing vast numbers of complex cases, and the fuel support services are still overrun with applications for vouchers.

3.2 The following sets out proposals for funding options in Round 7 – Subject to confirmation of funding allocation from Government and Guidance Criteria.

Funding category	Delivery mechanism	Priority option
Food Support	Vouchers, Food Parcels, Food Shopping, Hot Meals	Continue as main service offer – review delivery providers to ensure value for money

Energy and Water	£100 Mastercard - billed account fuel support	Continue at a reduced service offer – reduce number of vouchers available per month
Wider Essentials linked to energy and water	Fuel & Water Advisor - warm packs, hygro meters etc	Continue with current service offers
Wider Essentials	White goods	Deliver to households only referred by housing – voucher
Advice Services	Information and advice services, including benefit uptake, energy advice and general advice	Continue with current service offers
Prevention	Specific delivery of prevention services - for example budgeting advice, benefit support,	Include new service offer – value and delivery model tbc
Housing Costs	Exceptional circumstances- rent arrears, emergency support for homeless/TA	Continue at reduced service offer – introduce a set criteria for priority households

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 An alternative option would be to deliver HSF internally by SBC Officers and not utilise the VCSE. This option has been rejected as there are not enough resources within the current team to be able to deliver services, there would be a vast amount of work required to set up delivery and the current model delivers value for money by utilising the VCSE.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 The Cost of Living Partnership Group has a high number of attendees from across multiple sectors and services from around the borough. The group meet on a bi-monthly basis and a workshop was held at the February meeting to delve into the current issues and gather ideas and insights for Round 7.
- 5.2 We conducted a brief survey to members of the External Cost of Living Group to ask their views on the reasons why people are accessing HSF and if they feel we should be concentrating our efforts on a dedicated prevention service. Of the 12 responses received the majority felt that we should include a specific service relating to prevention and the top reasons for people accessing HSF are negative budget, sudden change in circumstances and health conditions worsening or changing.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	HSF aligns to Community within the Corporate Plan – enabling community resilience through access to food, fuel and other emergency support.
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.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	None identified at this stage
Crime and Disorder	Crime and disorder can be linked to poverty as those who are struggling can turn to crime.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	None identified at this stage
Health and Wellbeing	The long-term effects of deprivation are key to the high level of health inequalities in the borough. HSF supports residents to feed and heat their homes which are essential.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	Without HSF we could potentially see and increase in Safeguarding cases due to lack of services and increased pressures on families to feed and heat their homes. As well as potential increased suicide rates and increase in mental health issues.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	None identified at this stage
Equality and Diversity	None identified at this stage
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage

7 Appendices

- Annex I – HSF Data

8 Background Papers

Website link to Household Support Fund: www.swale.gov.uk/hsf