

Housing, Health & Communities Committee	
Meeting Date	20 th January 2026
Report Title	Household Support Fund (Round 7) and Tackling Poverty Update
EMT Lead	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration & Neighbourhoods
Head of Service	Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing & Communities
Lead Officer	Sarah-Jane Radley, Community & Partnerships Manager
Classification	Open
Recommendations	1. The committee is asked to note the contents of the report. 2. To discuss the recommendation for two Anti-Poverty Champions - internal and external.

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 To provide an update on the delivery of Household Support Fund (Round 7) and the work of the Community & Partnerships Team on tackling poverty in the borough.

2 Background, Context and Proposals

- 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 and energy prices. Over the seven rounds (Oct 2021 – Mar 2026), 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
- Round 7 (1st April 2025 – 31st March 2026) £445,415.81

2.3 Current funding position

The current round of funding will end on 31st March 2026. Government has announced this will be the final extension to Household Support Fund in its current iteration and it will become a new fund as of 1st April 2026. The new fund will be called the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF). We do not currently have the full guidance for the new fund, any detail as to the value of the allocation, or indeed if we will receive the fund locally as we have previously for HSF.

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 grant delivery and monitoring and evaluation, as well as supporting internal departments such as Housing to access the fund.

Organisation	Service offer
Age UK (Faversham & Sittingbourne)	• Hot meals & food shopping • Information & Advice Service for pensioners
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) • Information & Advice Service for pensioners
Diversity House	• Emergency food parcels (Multicultural)
Fuel & Water Advice Service (Children & Families)	• Fuel and energy advice (inc. fuel vouchers)
Swale Foodbank	• Emergency food parcels
West Faversham Community Association	• 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 for homeless.

Prevention: We are working closely with local VCSE organisations to deliver preventative support such as advice services and linking up providers to provide a person-centred approach to service delivery.

Additional Prevention Projects

As part of the winter (September 2025-February 2026) funding delivery we included a community chest funding scheme which enabled organisations to bid for individual pots of £2500. The criterion for delivery is in line with prevention within the HSF Round 7 Guidance. We had a variety of fantastic projects come forward of which we have funded 11 projects under the scheme. These are as follows:

Organisation	Project	Value
Autism Apprentice	Coffee and support sessions to help families access Disability Living Allowance	£1,560
Citizen Advice Swale	Monthly workshops designed to enhance participants' financial capability through the development of numerical skills and essential digital literacy	£2,021.16
Diversity House	Community based skills programme	£2,500
EKC Secondary School	Delivery of 45 food parcels to families engaging with EKCSS and Children and Families	£1,000
Faversham Umbrella	Warm Space and Free Soup initiative during the winter months (November 2025 – February 2026).	£2,500
Friendly Faces of Kent	Face to face energy saving talks and advice - Teynham, Sittingbourne and the Isle of Sheppey	£1,972
Mid Kent Mind	Support sessions to adults living in areas of deprivation across Swale who are experiencing low levels of wellbeing and are impacted by COL	£2,497.44
Oasis Youth and Community Hub	The Community Junction project - Queenborough & Rushenden	£2,500
SATEDA	To provide emergency resilience packs to high risk children and adults fleeing domestic abuse.	£1,000
Streetlight UK	Outreach project, supporting women involved in prostitution and all forms of sexual violence and exploitation, including those trafficked into prostitution.	£2,500
Swale Foodbank	Support worker to provide emergency crisis parcels for vulnerable families across Sittingbourne and the Isle of Sheppey during Christmas period	£2,500

Please see **Appendix I** for Household Support Fund data – to date.

2.5 Cost of Living

The Cost of Living Partnership Group (CoL) was established in 2022 as a collaborative response to the emerging Cost of Living Crisis post Covid. The group consists of a partnership made up of SBC officers, statutory organisations such as DWP and voluntary and community sector organisations. The group is chaired by a voluntary sector organisation, and this has proved to be vital in the make up and attendance of the group as we have an average of 35 plus attendees at most meetings.

The group has agreed on four main priorities:

Priority 1: Engagement, communications and networking

Priority 2: Collaborate on projects that relate to skills, employment and educational opportunities

Priority 3: Deliver prevention activities that include utilising available mechanisms to deliver benefit uptake projects, financial resilience and income maximisation

Priority 4: Health and wellbeing

In 2025 the meetings have covered subject areas including a workshop around mental health, development of the HSF services, developing core priorities, and increasing prevention as an area of work. The group has delivered a number of projects which have been as a direct result of the group discussions, these include the setup of the One Swale Roadshows, the delivery of funding and grant opportunities, increased collaboration by VCSE organisations on local delivery, promotional events and activities, mapping of local services and collective emergency response to emerging local issues.

The group is vital to localised collaboration and conversation which enables a stronger more resilient response to tackling poverty within the borough and is well established in its presence as a platform for making change within the borough.

In addition to the external meetings, we also deliver an internal officer Cost of Living meetings, these are attended by a cross section of departments including, Housing, Customer Services, Revenues & Benefits, Climate Change and others. The meetings cover updates relating to the items noted within this paper and present an opportunity for service areas to work collaboratively on projects and develop ideas.

2.6 Benefit uptake and campaigns

We have delivered a number of targeted campaigns through use of the Lower Income Family Tracker (LIFT) platform. The platform enables us to draw down localised data sets from SBC benefit claimants who are living in the borough and claiming Council Tax support/Housing Benefit. The benefit of the platform is that it enables us to categorise household information into a variety of groups, including fuel, water and food poverty, unclaimed benefits and financial resilience.

Attendance Allowance Campaign, July 2024 to March 2025

Achieved over £4million in lifetime Attendance Allowance awards for claimants and partners in Swale.

- Total claiming: 96
- Higher rate: 19
- Lower rate: 77
- Monthly claim: £51,029
- Annual claim: £404,970
- Lifetime claim: £4,178,458

Pension Credit Take-up Campaign, March 2025 to October 2025

Total number of new claimants	26
Take up percentage	9%
Average age of new claimants (years)	71
Total annual amount awarded	£ 85,493.80
Average life expectancy (years)	80
Total annual amount awarded x difference between average age of new claimant and life expectancy in Swale (i.e. Lifetime Award)	£ 759,142.07
Total number of households contacted	277

In addition, we have delivered a variety of campaigns promoting targeted support offers for local services to ensure that households who are eligible for support know how to access it. We do this using basic postcard style cards that are directly mailed to the household with high level information about the support available. For example, over the winter period we have promoted access to advice services such as Age UK and Citizen Advice Swale.

2.7 One Swale Roadshows

The roadshows are multi-agency drop-in sessions that take place around the borough, rotating between, Sheerness, Leysdown, Sittingbourne & Faversham.

The sessions are a useful way of bringing a variety of services into the community to give residents access to face-to-face support and advice. 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.

The roadshows have become a recognisable branding that residents trust and have been joined up with other activity days such as Seashells half term fun day to ensure maximum impact.

Date	Location	Number of partners in attendance	Number of resident interactions

January 2025	Leysdown	12	4
February 2025	Sittingbourne	20	80
March 2025	Faversham (FCNG event)	18	101
March 2025	Sheerness	15	82
April 2025	Sittingbourne	14	22
May 2025	Leysdown	13	22
June 2025	Faversham	15	41
July 2025	Sheerness	17	62
August 2025	Leysdown (Family Hub Event)	10	105
September 2025	Faversham	11	39
October 2025	Sheerness (Seashells Event)	18	143
November 2025	Sittingbourne	15	80

The One Swale Roadshows are delivered in partnership with Swale CVS and Faversham Community Networking Group and are funded by Household Support Fund.

2.8 Skills & Employment

We are working with a variety of partners to deliver skills & employment projects within the borough that are related to tackling inequalities. We have recently set up a strategic Skills & Employment Group which is chaired by Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods, with the aim of targeting some of the key issues being experienced within the borough, including high levels of NEET's. We are also working with existing programs such as the Marmot Coastal program linked to KCC Public Health and the Widening Access Demonstrator (WAD) which is being led by Medway & Swale Health & Care Partnership, to promote access and develop bids to bring future projects and funding into the locality.

Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IoMD)

- 2.9 Underpinning the work delivered within this subject area is the evidence base provided by the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IoMD) Data (link in background papers), to ensure that we are targeting services to the most deprived residents as well as incorporating the data within strategies and funding bids to support future work and opportunities. The current Empowering You in Swale Strategy sits across four priorities that link to the IoMD Data and is intrinsically linked to poverty.

Anti-Poverty Champion

- 2.10 The Chair asked us to explore the option for representatives to become Anti-Poverty Champions for the Council. The Champion's role is to utilise existing networks and service delivery programmes to promote tackling and reducing poverty within the borough. We felt that as the promotion of this work sits within the existing delivery of the Community & Partnerships Team and the joint work of the Cost of Living Group that representation could be made from these two areas. The role would be resourced from current operational delivery and therefore no

additional project delivery outside of existing agreed service planning may be expected from Officers.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 The committee is asked to **note** the contents of the report.
- 3.2 To agree the Chairs recommendation for two Anti-Poverty Champions - internal and external.

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 We have rejected the option to do nothing, due to the high levels of need within the borough, as indicted in the most recent Indices of Multiple Deprivation data that state Swale is in the most deprived 20% of all districts in England.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 Within the variety of workstreams, we utilise mechanisms such as the Cost of Living groups, localised networking groups, partner feedback and resident feedback to shape service delivery. A review of the current round of Swales Household Support Fund will be carried out when it closes to feed into the development of the Crisis and Resilience Fund.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The variety of work streams within this paper link to a number of Corporate Plan priorities: • Community: supports community resilience and improves welfare of residents • Health & Housing: Tackles health inequalities within the borough and improves residents' health and wellbeing. • Economy: Improving opportunities for residents to access skills & employment. • Running the Council: Working in partnership with a variety of agencies to improve sustainability and resilience. • Environment: Tackling fuel poverty and supporting residents to become more energy efficient.
Financial, Resource and Property	Household Support Fund delivered by Community & Partnerships Team under operational business with an administrative draw down through The Fund. Core delivery of The Fund - Third Party Organisations; grant funded.

	HSF Allocation Round 7 (1st April 2025 – 31st March 2026) £445,415.81 Risk: we do not currently know the allocation for CRF post March 2026. Cost of Living, and other related activities are delivered within operational business. Delivery of the Anti Poverty Champion to sit within the current operational delivery. Risk: additional projects would need to be resourced accordingly. Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) – data platform utilised for targeted welfare projects; £18,000 total cost 2024/25. HSF £9000 and £9000 match funded by KCC for 2024/25. No current funding identified for 2026/27.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	None identified at this stage
Crime and Disorder	This work aims to reduce crime and disorder by engaging local communities in a variety of projects and links to the Community Safety Plan due to the correlation between crime and disorder and poverty.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	This work aims to provide residents access local services that can support the sharing of information and resources such as energy vouchers to reduce fuel poverty and support residents to be come more energy efficient within their homes.
Health and Wellbeing	This work aims to tackle high levels of health inequalities within the borough and increase life expectancy.
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	This work is closely linked to the safeguarding of residents including vulnerable children and adults. Partners will have relevant policies and procedures.
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

Local Government Reorganisation	The Crisis and Resilience Fund will continue into the formation of the new organisation; however, we hope services will be delivered locally until such time as the new authority is formed.
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7 Appendices

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

- **Appendix I:** Household Support Fund Data

8 Background Papers

Indices of Multiple Deprivation: [English indices of deprivation 2025: statistical release - GOV.UK](#)