



Chancellor of the Exchequer
The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
externalaffairs@hmtreasury.gov.uk

3rd November 2023

Re: Renewal of Household Support Fund urgently needed to protect our most vulnerable residents

Dear Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP

We urge you to extend the Household Support Fund for the financial year from April 24 to March 25.

The Household Support Fund (Fund) has become a core source of funding for local authorities to support their most vulnerable residents accessing food and other essentials. However, there is no confirmation that it will be extended beyond March 2024. It is unthinkable to imagine a near future without the Fund at a time when our frontline services are experiencing the most demand.

The Sustainable Food Places (SFP) Network is a growing movement of 94 food partnerships across the UK that are driving innovation and best practice in all aspects of healthy and sustainable food. Among other functions, food partnerships support local food poverty alliances, work strategically with or within their council and the voluntary and community sector. They are extremely concerned about the uncertainty around the Fund. This account from Hull Food Partnership is echoed by many of our members:

'It is unthinkable to imagine a near future without this extra money at a time when our frontline services are experiencing the most demand. Applications from Citizens in crisis are more than nine times the volume they were prior to the pandemic and the current cost of living crisis. It is only through the Household Support Fund that we have been able to support citizens as we would wish to, and there is now an expectation of that support being there at a time of continuing need.'

Councils need to know if the Fund is being extended, in the November 22nd Autumn statement. Previous announcements have not given enough notice to plan effectively, which has caused stress within councils.

We include evidence from some members in our network and we are at your disposal to provide further evidence the impact Household support Fund is having, in support of its renewal.

Yours Sincerely:

Sofia Parente, on behalf of Sustainable Food Places

sofia@sustainweb.org



Plymouth Case Study

Plymouth City Council had a £2.29 million allocation from the Government's Household Support Fund. Nearly £1 million of the funding was used to help families cover the cost of meals over the school holidays. Families with children that are eligible for free school meals had vouchers to the value of £13 per child, per week, which can be redeemed at various supermarkets.

'The rise in cost of living has meant our VCS partners have seen ever increasing levels of poverty and requests for help. The energy crisis has seen unprecedented levels of demand for help with energy bills. Plymouth Energy Community and Citizens Advice Plymouth have been overwhelmed with requests for help which are predicted to increase.'

The Council partnered with Plymouth Energy Community and Citizens Advice Plymouth to provide help with energy bills in the form of grants, plumbing and heating repairs, and the provision of goods and appliances that help to save energy, such as electric blankets, slow cookers and microwaves.

Funding was also given to local voluntary sector organisations who work directly with vulnerable Plymouth residents and to food aid organisations to develop a sustainable food supply model. This would mean less focus on emergency aid and more offers such as community larders and cookery lessons. Funding was also available for venues to provide warm, welcoming spaces across the city this winter, providing a safe, heated environment for people to spend time in.

Plymouth funded Plymouth Food Aid Network (PFAN) through Household Support Fund. PFAN is a collection of around 60 organisations / causes providing frontline food support of various kinds in Plymouth and district. These range from Trussell Trust Food Banks at the formal end of the spectrum, through to various less formal food banks / affordable food clubs / larders / pantries in the centre and community fridges at the informal end of the spectrum.

With a relatively modest but adequate investment of HSF funding, this supported and enabled frontline providers which in turn benefitted the people who depend on their support.

Plymouth has a strong voluntary and community sector:

'Distributing aid through these routes removed stigma and fear that would prevent people needing help from coming forward. This route also ensured people in need were more likely to receive assistance at the first point of call rather than signposting or referring to other agencies or to a centralised, local authority controlled system for households to apply for aid and support.'

Organisations such as Citizens Advice and Plymouth Energy Community brought considerable added value through alignment with their core activities around issues such as debt advice or help with energy saving plans creating an opportunity for longer term poverty prevention.

With the Household Support Fund we were able to support a family (a dad and 3 boys under 5 years old) who had been living in temporary accommodation having moved to Plymouth from Cornwall due to Domestic Abuse. Having been locked out of their previous home they arrived in Plymouth with only the clothes they were wearing and the boys had no spare clothes or any of their toys. Dad had no mobile phone and had borrowed one, dad had to leave his job to care for his 3 boys and until benefits



were in payment had very little money. Routeways worked in conjunction with the local church, food club and a DWP outreach worker to support the family with essentials and a gift card for food whilst they were in the temporary accommodation. From their temporary accommodation they were finally given a place to call home. Their new home came unfurnished and without any white goods they had nothing to cook on, no fridge or washing machine. Between the organisations these items were bought to support the family to get back to some normality. Multiagency working provided emotional and practical support for all of the family. They are now settled in their new home, the eldest boy is settled in primary school and the 2 younger boys are in nursery part-time. Without the Household Support Fund they would have struggled to manage.

Brighton & Hove Case Study

Brighton City Council had an overall allocation of £4,280,000 over the year. Nearly one third was spent on Free School Meal vouchers for families eligible for Free school meals, which amounted to £15 per week per family.

Brighton City Council adopted a cash-first approach, where another third of the funding goes through their local discretionary fund scheme (LDSF) which gives out money direct to people via vouchers for food, fuel and other essential items.

The rest of the Household Support Fund goes out through organisations giving energy support and through community food and other projects.

Brighton & Hove City Council has worked closely with Brighton & Hove Food Partnership, who run a yearly Emergency Food Network Survey. This identifies everyone in the city who is providing crisis support, their size and financial needs. The community services are given a small proportion of the funding, which they can then disseminate to their clients via food or energy vouchers, buying in healthy food or essential items for the people they support.

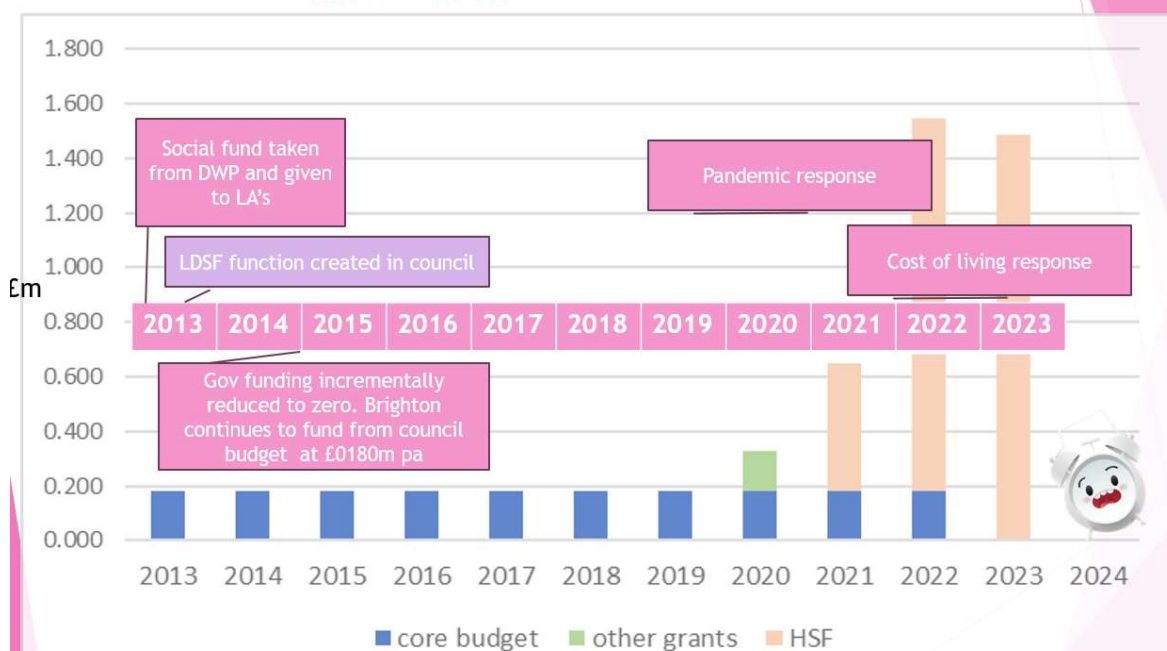
Both the community and voluntary sector and the council have benefitted from this approach. The CVS are able to reach people who might have barriers to being able to access support from the council and get some valuable funding whilst other sources of funding and donations have dried up. For the council they rely on the CVS for referrals and signposting.

'Once we have reeled them in for practical support, this links them in for more meaningful community support. This is a 'many doors' approach, where crisis help reaches out into the community'.

Proposed Support:	Allocation
Free School Meals Vouchers - 13 weeks, continuing previous amounts (£15) including early years to 6th Form	1,485,000.00
Local Discretionary Social Fund (LDSF) awards	1,418,000.00
Community organisations	280,000.00
Sustainable energy solutions / BHESCO	35,000.00
Warmth for Wellbeing, including £30k for staffing and extra admin	219,000.00
Discretionary Council Tax Reduction (to work in conjunction with the Council Tax Support Fund)	140,000.00
Staffing - LDSF x 3 (Sc 6), LDSF admin x 2 (Sc 4b), Community Hub Officer x 1 (Sc 5)	213,000.00
Local Lift Up Scheme (for Just About Managing households)	85,000.00
Brighton & Hove Food Partnership / Impact Initiatives	100,000.00
Carers' Centre	20,000.00
Food club and providers of delivered meals	110,000.00
Family Hubs (formerly Childrens Centre allocation)	70,000.00
Children's Services - Section 17 payments, distributed by the Social Work pods	60,000.00
Advice Staffing	45,000.00
TOTAL	4,280,000.00

The LDSF team have seen a staggering increase in demand over the years, their current monthly expenditure is on a par with what they have previously spent in one year.

The staggering growth of LDSF demand



Brighton and Hove City Council has a large number of UC claimants for such a small geographical area, higher than the mean of UK local authorities. In July 2023, there were 25,649 people claiming UC in the area, with that number increasing every month. More people are facing the prospect of



being unable to feed themselves and their families, and many are seeking out food support for the first time.

East Sussex

East Sussex County Council have given discretionary grants to each of the Emergency Food Providers across the county to support running and purchasing costs. More broadly, the county council is working with the district and boroughs and VCSE partners to distribute the Household Support Fund, in line with the criteria set out by the Department of Work and Pensions.

As part of the HSF, the local food partnerships have been allocated funding to run three separate rounds of Small Grants Programmes to allocate funding to smaller projects tackling food poverty. Each round of grants is £20K in total per area.

Lewes District Food Partnership has used the Small Grants Programme to fund recipe bag projects at food banks, community growing projects and community cafes, as well funding a slow cooker donation scheme and the purchase of fruit and healthy snacks for young children at a nursery. They launched Round 3 of the Small Grants Programme in the first quarter of 2023. In addition, Lewes District Council have used HSF funding to distribute vouchers to residents to help towards the essential costs of food and energy bills. Working closely with the food partnership offers the district council the benefit of connection with frontline organisations and feedback on how well their support is working on the ground. In a previous round of HSF, Lewes District Council offered vouchers to help residents meet increased energy and food costs, via an online application. After a consultation among food bank users in the emergency food network, it became clear that digital exclusion is much higher than the average and many were cautious of applying online due to previous fraud scares. This feedback was promptly shared by the food partnership and since then, the local council has introduced a phone line.

There has been a similar approach in Eastbourne. The second round of grants was run in November 2022. The panel responsible for deciding the allocation included the partnership coordinator, the director of the food partnership, a district council officer and the chief executive of the food bank. The small grants programme created lots of interesting questions about the activity of food partnership i.e. how to provide support and what projects the partnership can endorse. Alongside dignified support, food hygiene and safeguarding are non-negotiable for every project that is funded.

In Hastings and Rother, the food partnership adopted a slightly different approach in rounds two and three. In round two, the focus for grant applications was on physical food spaces. In round three, they took this a step further and rather than administer a grants programme, the funding was split down the middle, half for Rother and half for Hastings. A working group met for each borough, identified where they could make the most impact and funds were spent accordingly. This enabled the funding of a pilot mobile pantry to get food supplies to rural areas. The demand from this pilot has led to Feeding Britain funding a mobile social supermarket which will cover Kent, Rother area In East Sussex. Other initiatives included a food donation programme by St Michael's Hospice over the Christmas months with food then distributed to local food projects and warm spaces through the food network. The Grumpy Cook Hastings has held pop up low cost cafes throughout Hastings and Rother. Network members also offered free cooked meals at Form Filling Friday session in Hastings





aimed at supporting older people who were not digitally connected to make online applications for grants and financial assistance from the HSF.

In Wealden, 25 grants have been awarded as part of rounds two and three to a range of community organisations, farms and growing projects. Projects funded included activities and healthy food at a holiday activities and food (HAF) programme for children on free school meals; freshly made soups and food to take home at warm places; locally sourced food boxes distributed at foodbanks over the Christmas and New Year period; support to farms working with vulnerable children on their farm school to provide recipe kits for the families to cook together at home, to provide boxes for older people in their communities, as well as fresh produce for their local food banks and community fridges. The fund also supported all three foodbanks and all the community fridges to provide additional capacity through the winter months. The food partnership worked with network members and council teams in Housing, HAF, Wellbeing, Children's Services, Adult Learning and others to distribute information encouraging groups to request funding where they have identified need. This ensured a wide distribution and representative use of the funds across the district.

Bristol case study

Feeding Bristol have been working with Bristol City Council over the last year to distribute the Household Support Fund and reduce the prevalence of food inequality due to the rise in the cost of living. Working together, they have been able to award over £1.5m to groups and organisations working directly with residents most at-risk in our communities, supporting approximately 200 projects.

In Bristol, there is a 'One City Food Equality Strategy (2022-2032)' and 'One City Food Equality Action Plan (2023-26)', which help to guide and coordinate how to address food inequalities such as food insecurity.

'By ensuring that groups and organisations applying for HSF grants were familiar with this wider work, and by asking them to identify how their project would complement the objectives of the Strategy and Action Plan, we have been able to award the HSF to support those most at-risk of food insecurity in a strategic way that has longer-lasting impact and resilience-building in our city.'

There is a high level of demand for support locally and nationally due to the rise in the cost of living, and this need is still currently growing. If the HSF were to be continued next year – which we believe is absolutely crucial – we would strongly recommend advising local authorities to work collaboratively with their VCSE counterparts. As you will see from the data, since Feeding Bristol started working with Bristol City Council to distribute the HSF, they have been able to support a significantly higher proportion of the population affected by the cost-of-living crisis. In particular, they have been able to support groups the council have previously found hard to reach, and who have been largely under supported in the past. By tapping into that local knowledge and understanding, local authorities can utilise the HSF to help build resilience within their communities.



Per Year	Period Length	Total Funding	Households	a) Food	b) Energy and Water	c) Essentials linked to Energy and Water	d) Wider Essentials	e) Housing Costs
2021	6 months	£ 4,039,965	73,340	71,728	1,180	-	432	-
2022	1 year	£ 8,079,930	104,170	78,876	11,756	12,152	1,193	193
2023	6 months	£ 4,252,670	119,208	113,352	3,384	6	1,910	556