Overview of the Household Support Fund

Overview Select Committee

Decision to be taken by: N/A

Date of meeting: 9th September 2026

Lead director/officer: Amy Oliver, Director of Finance

Useful information

- ■ Ward(s) affected: All
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- ■ Report version number: 1

1. Recommended actions/decision

1.1 The Overview Select Committee is recommended to note the report and make comments to the Director of Finance and the Executive as they wish.

2. Background

2.1 HSF has provided critical financial support to residents during the cost-of-living crisis since its introduction. The scheme has now concluded and is being replaced by the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) from April 2026.

3.2 The Household Support Fund was introduced by Government in October 2021 as a response to the cost-of-living crisis and consisted of seven ‘phases’ between six and twelve months in length until March 2026.

3.3 The scheme provided £30m of funding over this period. But often our delivery was hindered by the short notice of announcements and the revised objectives in the scheme, limiting our ability plan and provide longer term support to households.

4. Aims of the Fund

4.1 HSF’s original aim was to help vulnerable households with the cost of essentials as they recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic, and subsequently with the ‘cost of living crisis’ precipitated by the war in Ukraine, supplementing:

- Food costs
- Energy and water bills
- Essential household items

4.2 In more recent iterations, its aims evolved to a broader, dual-objective focus on crisis relief and long-term prevention, also incorporating:

- Housing costs
- Preventative services including advice, skills and community infrastructure

5. Successes of the Household Support Fund

4.1 Across all phases of HSF, we have distributed over £30m aimed at supporting the households of Leicester.

5.2 **Through our immediate crisis support we have:**

- Made 82,366 payments to households to provide utility support assisting with maintaining access to energy and water, reducing utilities debt.
- Provided 406,069 in food vouchers reducing food insecurity at the point of crisis.
- Supported 5,406 household with essential items such as white goods, to assist with improving living conditions and making them more sustainable.

5.3 **An important element of this fund is assisting with housing stability**. HSF has played a crucial role in preventing housing-related crises, reducing the risk of homelessness and demand on housing services:

- 5,893 households supported with housing costs
- Over 3,000 evictions prevented, of which half had been served with legal proceedings

5.4 We have used the scheme to complement core benefits & discretionary support, HSF has enabled us to successfully reach a wide cohort of residents, and a significant proportion of support through housing and council tax support. Our flexible delivery routes ensured access for digitally excluded residents, vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups.

5.5 Early intervention at scale, targeted support was provided to households with children, reducing child poverty impacts and supporting family stability. This support was provided through school holiday food, toiletries

5.6 To demonstrate the positive impact this fund can have on households, a small number of direct quotes from recipients and supporting case studies have been included below:

"I'm emailing you to say a big thank you as I received my support fund for my gas and electric there's no words that can describe how thankful I am to you all for giving me this fund it's so much needed in most of all it's so much very appreciated again a very big thank you"

4.7 Case Study 1:

We have a client that presents to Citizens Advice who:

- Has significant multiple debts
- Needs support with the HSF application
- Lives with three children, one who is disabled and is on Universal Credit (UC).

The scheme was able to:

- CitAI supported with completing the HSF application
- General debt advice and completed benefit checks to ensure the household was receiving all eligible income.
- HSF awarded, support provided with food vouchers and energy support.
- Referred to Community Advice & Law Service for ongoing debt support.

5.8 Case Study 2:

- Single parent with two children, struggling with the cost of living
- Works full-time
- Father of children does not provide any financial support
- First language is Somali and customer struggles to update benefits when changes occur
- Arrears accrued due to withholding rent previously due to disrepair which has now been resolved, and due to UC being affected by change of circumstances after 2 of her sons left home
- Rent is too high and tenant is looking for cheaper accommodation
- Housing Prevention Team helped with rent deposit scheme
- Arrears were outstanding but tenant agreed to a payment plan to try to clear these. Tenant would have been issued with a S21 notice if arrangement was not adhered to
- HSF supported payment of the arrears and sustained the tenancy

6. How we were successful?

6.1 We were successful for a combination of reasons:

- We enable direct applications through both public and professional referral routes
- Provided targeted support to priority groups
- Working with partners to assist with distribution (e.g. Reaching People and Leicester Charity Link)
- Working collaboratively with schools, the voluntary sector and internal services.
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6.2 HSF has delivered wider system benefits:

- Reduced demand on crisis services (housing, ASC, emergency support, Community Support Grants)
- Supported household financial resilience
- Complemented core benefits and discretionary schemes
- Enabled early intervention at scale

6.3 As part of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) review of the scheme, several positive observations were made regarding Leicester's approach to delivery and future planning. Two extracts are included below.

6.4 A visit to Leicester City Council by the DWP highlighted a strong and well-structured approach to delivering the Household Support Fund (HSF), underpinned by clear governance and a commitment to meeting local needs.

6.5 DWP noted that delivery plans were developed collaboratively with Service Managers and approved through a robust governance process, including sign-off by the City Mayor and S151 Officer. Quarterly reviews aligned with MI data returns ensure progress is monitored effectively, while flexibility remains a defining feature of their approach, enabling responsiveness to emerging challenges. Leicester's model was utilised as a case study example of how HSF and Discretionary Housing Payments can be successfully integrated in a research paper published by the DWP in February 2026.

6.6 No benchmarking data has been published by the DWP since HSF4 (ending 2023/24), however internal research conducted in November established:

- FSM Vouchers remain the single largest budget item nationally. Across all authorities except Nottingham (who have now ceased to provide them), 40–60% of spend goes on holiday FSM vouchers. In the most recent phase of HSF, DWP informed us that only 20% of local authorities had no allocation towards FSM vouchers. However, this dependency has reduced over time and the new CRF scheme does not allow bulk distribution of free school meal vouchers going forward in favour of individual assessments of need.
- Many councils were increasing allocations towards application-based support, and the majority of overall spend continued to be towards food and energy support
- Use of third-party/community partners was growing, as was digital delivery and targeted awards based on data insights.
- Administrative spend was low, typically 2%–7%.

7. Challenges:

7.1 We did face challenges with HSF due to the short-term funding and late announcements, demand on the system and the limited funding and change in guidance.

- Short-term funding cycles limited long-term planning
- High demand volumes created pressure on systems and outstripped available funding
- Variability in national guidance required frequent changes
- Risk of dependency on crisis-based support

7.2 HSF learning is being applied to deliver a more sustainable and strategic approach to financial support:

- Single, simplified application route to improve customer journey
- Continued partnership working
- Stronger focus on outcomes and targeting
- Balance between crisis support and preventative interventions

8. Conclusion

8.1 The Household Support Fund has been a critical intervention during the cost-of-living crisis, delivering:

- Significant financial support, at scale
- Measurable outcomes in reducing hardship
- Strong partnership-based delivery
- Tangible prevention of crisis and escalation

8.2 The transition to CRF represents a shift from emergency response to long-term resilience and we have used our learning and success with HSF to design our approach to the Crisis and Resilience fund.

Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

9. Financial implications

9.1	There are no direct financial implications beyond those detailed within the body of the report.
9.2	Signed: Stuart McAvoy - Head of Finance
9.3	Dated: 14th May 2026

10. Legal implications

10.1	This is a noting report and does not require a decision. It does not, in itself, engage the Council's executive or non-executive decision-making functions. The Household Support Fund (HSF) has been administered in accordance with grant determinations issued by the Department for Work and Pensions. The Council was required to comply with the conditions of those determinations, including as to eligibility, use of funds, administration, monitoring and audit. There is no indication within this report of any departure from those requirements. The allocation of support under the scheme involved the exercise of discretionary functions. In doing so, the Council was required to apply clear criteria and act consistently with public law principles, including fairness, reasonableness and proper purpose. Nothing in this report gives rise to any concern in that regard.
10.2	Signed: City Barrister & Head of Standards Kamal Adatia
10.3	Dated: 18/05/2026

11. Equalities implications

11.1	Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't. Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. The Household Support Fund (HSF) has had a positive impact on several protected characteristic groups, particularly age (children in low-income families), disability (vulnerable households with additional care costs), and race (supporting residents with English as a second language through partnership working). The transition to the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) seeks to build on these successes by moving from a reactive crisis model to a preventative one. The new scheme uses

individual assessments and data-driven targeting to ensure support reaches those most in need. An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out to ensure that equalities considerations have been taken into account.	
11.2 Signed: Equalities Officer, Surinder Singh, Ext 37 4148	
11.3 Dated: 14th May 2026	

12. Climate Emergency implications

12.1	There are no significant climate emergency implications associated with this report.
12.2	Signed: Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer, Ext 372246
12.3	Dated: 15.05.2026

13. Other implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

13.1	None

14 Background information and other papers:

15 Summary of appendices:

16 Is this a private report (If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)? No

17 Is this a "key decision"? No