



Household Support Fund v1.0

Evaluation Report

Foreword

Executive Summary

This evaluation report covers the Household Support Fund from its inception in October 2021 to the end of March 2022. It does not cover the Household Support Fund extension which was announced on 23rd March 2022 and runs between 1st April 2022 and 30th September 2022. The scheme, which was designed from a central government grant to local authorities, aimed to support Peterborough and Cambridgeshire vulnerable households through small payments to meet daily needs such as food, clothing and utilities. This report draws upon reflections from council officers and their experiences, our partners, and the residents themselves.

Our evidence base and the data insights we have established and analysed, have come from a variety of sources including:

- Resident survey
- Review calls
- Feedback from our Trusted Partners
- Staff Feedback
- Local Authority Benchmarking

'How might we' questions have been formed to transform the learnings, insights and experiences gained throughout the evaluation in to design challenges that can focus work in a targeted manner in future iterations of the scheme. Throughout the report the 'how might we' questions have been supplemented with recommendations of areas to review:

How might we:

- develop our processes to ensure residents are kept up to date throughout changes to the scheme and the application process?
- develop a holistic approach to supporting individuals to maximise the impact of the scheme?
- structure the scheme to improve the application experience for all residents?
- provide information on further opportunities for support in a more engaging and accessible way?
- as an organisation, design and support redeployment opportunities so that we maximise their benefit to the individual and the organisation?

Introduction

On 30 September 2021, the government announced that vulnerable households across the country would be able to access a new £500 million support fund to help them with essentials over the winter. The funding covered the period 6 October 2021 to 31 March 2022 inclusive. The Household Support Fund was distributed by councils in England to directly help those who need it most. The grant was distributed through small payments to support vulnerable households meet daily needs such as food, clothing, and utilities. Whilst the fund started on 6 October up until 26 November

support was provided using the same model as the previous scheme, Covid Local Support Grant (CLSG) to enable continuity of support while we developed the response to the Household Support Fund. The data in this report therefore covers the period 26 November 2021 to 31 March 2022.

Funding was allocated to County Councils and Unitary Authorities according to the population of each authority, weighted by a function of the English Index of Multiple Deprivation. As County Councils and Unitary Authorities have a statutory duty regarding children, Central Government determined the funding would sit better at this level, as this reflected the focus of the grant, and that support could be directed in the most effective ways through a central point of coordination.

Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council collaborated with District Councils and partner organisations to understand how best to allocate this funding in their local areas, using the knowledge they had of the challenges families, households, and individuals were facing at this difficult time. In this sense, the Household Support Fund continued the work of the Winter Grant Scheme and provided an opportunity to further shape how we work with and in our communities to support residents.

Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council took the decision to use some of their allocated funding to provide vouchers during school holidays to families whose children are in receipt of free school meals as well as using the remaining funding to provide a wider support offer. The focus of this evaluation is the wider support offer across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and does not evaluate the free school meals offer.

It has highlighted to us the financial circumstances of many of our residents, the types of support our residents are most in need of, and where there are gaps in support that we offer them.

We have drawn upon a variety of evaluative methods to better understand the impact of the scheme and to further our learning. Whilst there will undoubtedly be further learning and evidence of the longer-term impact of the scheme, it was identified that by capturing early phase impacts, we would create a foundation from which to base meaningful conversations with our communities and partners. This will in turn reiterate our intent to work differently with our partners and communities, brokering co-designed solutions and empowering community-led action.

To maximise the insights gained from the scheme, we identified key areas of evaluation from which we could obtain rich quantitative and qualitative data. The key areas identified were:

Process and activity - a clear overview of the scheme's intentions and the guidance which informed the design of our offer.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough's offers - including a summary and evaluation of the scheme, wider support, and benchmarking against the offers of neighbouring authorities.

The application process and the application experience – the operational response, as well as first-hand feedback from those receiving support and those providing a response, through practical help, advice, and guidance.

Reflections on communications, the applicant-journey, and our use of language – a narrative which pulls out the key learning of what worked well and what needs to be considered and addressed in future design.

Demographics and customer profiles, number of applicants, geographic breakdown – provision of hard data insights, relevant to the scheme, evidencing the needs across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, which will also inform future design.

Circumstances of our applicants – exploration of previous support accessed by our residents, their needs, and the types of support they requested.

Impact on residents – outline of the impact of the scheme with specific sections on mental health and communities.

Impact on staff – direct impact on and feedback from the staff who were redeployed to support the administration of the scheme.

Evaluation Methodology

To effectively evaluate our Household Support Fund and its outcomes, we have carried out a variety of evaluative measures, to capture what we did and the key reflections that have arisen as a result of our work.

The methodologies we have adopted include:

- A review of our processes and all the documents we produced along the way.
- A benchmarking exercise to understand our performance against that of other local authorities.
- Resident survey sent to all individuals who registered an email address and received support.
- Review calls
- Feedback from our Trusted Partners
- Collation of Staff Feedback (including staff directly employed by the hub and staff who worked for the hub on a redeployment basis.)
- Case Studies
- Analysis of all data from the methodologies as outlined above.

It was also helpful to summarise the guidance we received from central government, as this was the starting point of our design process and shaped our local offer.

Process and Activity

This section will provide an overview of the Household Support Fund and its origins, including a summary of the guidance from central government.

National Government Guidance

Government guidance stipulated some key principles on how the funding could be used:

- At least 50% of the total funding was ring-fenced to support households with children, with up to 50% of the total funding to other households genuinely in need of support over winter. This included households not currently in receipt of Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) welfare benefits;

- Eligible spend included:
 - **Food.** The Fund should primarily be used to provide support with food whether in kind or through vouchers or cash.
 - **Energy and water.** The Fund should also primarily be used to support with energy bills for any form of fuel that is used for the purpose of domestic heating, cooking or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders. It can also be used to support with water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, and sanitary purposes and sewerage. The Fund could be used to provide support with essentials linked to energy and water (including sanitary products, warm clothing, soap, blankets, boiler service/repair, purchase of equipment including fridges, freezers, ovens, etc.), in recognition that a range of costs may arise which directly affect a household's ability to afford or access food, energy and water.
 - **Wider essentials.** The Fund could be used to support with wider essential needs not linked to energy and water should Authorities consider this appropriate in their area. These may include, but are not limited to, support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, clothing, and essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle or paying for fuel. This list is not exhaustive.
 - **Housing Costs.** In exceptional cases of genuine emergency where existing housing support schemes do not meet this exceptional need, the Fund could be used to support housing costs. Where eligible, ongoing housing support for rent must be provided through the housing cost element of Universal Credit (UC) and Housing Benefit (HB) rather than the Household Support Fund. In addition, eligibility for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) must first be considered before emergency housing support was offered through the Household Support Fund. The Authority must also first consider whether the claimant is at statutory risk of homelessness and therefore owed a duty of support through the Homelessness Prevention Grant (HPG).
 - In exceptional cases of genuine emergency, households in receipt of HB, UC, or DHPs can still receive housing cost support through the Household Support Fund if it is deemed necessary by their Authority. However, the Fund could not be used to provide housing support on an ongoing basis or to support unsustainable tenancies.
- Individuals in receipt of some other form of housing support could still qualify for the other elements of the Household Support Fund, such as food, energy, water, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials.
- The Fund could not be used to provide mortgage support, though homeowners could still qualify for the other elements of the Fund (such as food, energy, water, essentials linked to energy and water and wider essentials). Where a homeowner was having difficulty with their mortgage payments, they were directed to contact their lender as soon as possible to discuss their circumstances as lenders will have a set procedure to assist.
- The Fund could exceptionally and in genuine emergency be used to provide support for historic rent arrears built up prior to an existing benefit claim for households already in receipt of Universal Credit and Housing Benefit. This is because these arrears are excluded from the criteria for Discretionary Housing Payments. However, support with rent arrears was not the primary intent of the fund and should not be the focus of spend.
- Reasonable administrative costs. This includes reasonable costs incurred administering the scheme.
- Eligible spend does not include:
 - Advice services such as debt advice;
 - Mortgage costs.

- It is expected that the focus of support should be on food and bills and that support for housing costs should only be given in exceptional cases of genuine emergency. Beyond this, Authorities have discretion to determine the most appropriate scheme for their area, based on their understanding of local need and with due regard to equality considerations.
- Individual awards can be whatever type and amount is deemed appropriate by Authorities for the receiving household, bearing in mind the overall spend eligibility priorities listed above and the risk of fraud and error. Awards to any given household can cover only one of the spend eligibility categories listed above or can cover several.
- Authorities should not make Household Support Fund eligibility conditional on being employed or self-employed, or directly linked to a loss of earnings from employment or self-employment. This will ensure that there is no National Insurance Contribution liability payable on any payments by either the claimant, the Authority or employer.

Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council were awarded £3,581,425 and £1,824,636 respectively to deliver the scheme (an extension with updated guidance and further funds has since been announced to enable the support to continue into September 2022). The scheme was managed through the joint Hub team across both councils and delivered through the councils and other trusted partners.

Local Response to National Guidance

The new Household Support Fund follows on from two similar schemes that provided short term funding for practical support – the Covid Winter Grant Scheme which ran over the winter months in 2020/21, and the Covid Local Support Grant Scheme which ran until 30 September 2021. Although there are many similarities between the three schemes, the new Household Support Fund provided greater flexibility to support more households without children and broadened out the scope of the type of support that can be offered as well as provided significantly more funding than previous schemes.

In Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, the design of the previous two schemes was developed in close collaboration with our key partners, particularly the district councils and a range of voluntary sector organisations, including Citizens' Advice. To help shape the new Household Support Fund, we facilitated a partner workshop in October at which some core design principles were agreed, alongside a range of important linked opportunities for supporting households beyond the eligibility of the Household Support Fund.

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Household Support Fund was based on several principles:

- That the scheme was simple to understand and to access, given that it was designed to support households in urgent need
- That it was delivered with as little bureaucracy as possible, to ensure as much of the funding as possible reached vulnerable households
- That we established as many application routes as possible, and publicised it widely, so that anybody in need could seek support
- That we worked creatively to identify potentially vulnerable households that might not yet be known to services, and find ways of reaching out to them to offer support
- That we continued to work in absolute collaboration with our partners across the public and voluntary sectors to reach as many households as possible, but to also make sure that

ongoing support, where required, was available for households beyond that which can be provided by this Fund

- That households could apply for support as many times as necessary, but that from the third application we would make direct contact with the household to have a broader discussion about need in order to seek to address the underlying causes of that need

Benchmarking

As the Household Support Fund was a national scheme for management by local government, it is useful to note the offers produced by other councils to compare our own work. This helps us to understand the processes of other councils and thus reflect on our own to improve our performance and user experience in the future. It can also highlight any gaps in our offer and help us to realise what other options might have been available to us and could be for future work. Equally, it is useful to benchmark our scheme against those of others in order to highlight where we have excelled.

Key Insights

- Authorities have taken a variety of approaches to provision of support, including:
 - Inviting applications and allowing 'self-referrals'
 - Receiving referrals from specified partner organisations or professionals supporting residents
 - Funding community groups or delegating district and city councils to identify and provide support to those in need
 - Prioritising funding for families with children that qualified for benefit related free school meals
- Smaller authorities who received lower levels of funding have focused on a sole issue such as food, including provision of food vouchers for school holidays.
- Authorities that are traditionally considered to be 'affluent' were more likely to allow 'self-referrals' to a central support line.
- Schools and to a lesser extent Children's Centres have been at the centre of efforts to identify, contact and support vulnerable families.
- The most popular approach was to build on existing services to deliver support e.g., Local welfare/crisis support schemes.

Funding that County Councils allocated to other organisations for distribution went to the following types of organisations:

- District / City Councils
- Local Welfare schemes
- Local citizens advice
- Community hubs
- Voluntary and community sector organisations / charities
- Age UK
- Food banks

Further benchmarking information can be found in Appendix 2.

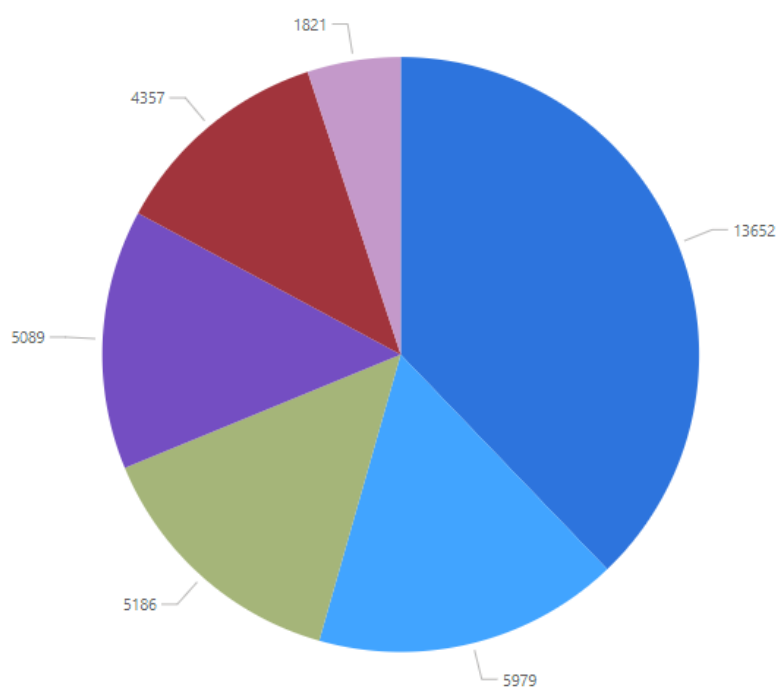
Application Process

The wider scheme had two primary routes for households to get the support they required: direct application process, and support facilitated via a trusted partner network.

In total, 34,839 direct applications were received and 1,245 were received through our trusted partner network. 24,535 residents received support from the Household Support Fund with some receiving support on more than one occasion.

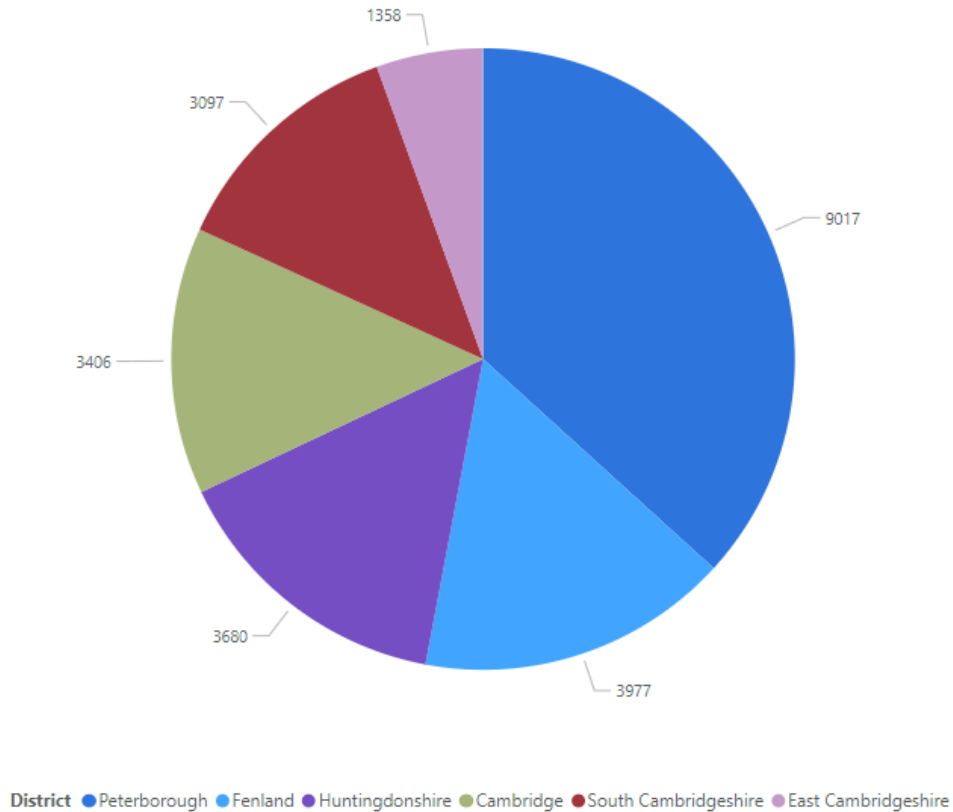
The graph below shows the number of Household Support Fund applicants and the number of people who received an award through the Household Support Fund broken down by district:

Applicants by District



District ● Peterborough ● Fenland ● Cambridge ● Huntingdonshire ● South Cambridgeshire ● East Cambridgeshire

HSF Recipients by District



A breakdown of direct applications and trusted group applications by district can be found in appendix 3.

Direct Applications

A simple, intuitive application form was available via the council's website which households could use to request the support they needed. For households without internet access, or who needed help completing the form, a telephone line was available through the respective Council's contact centres. The application form was available in different languages through compatibility with screen translators.

Waiting times emerged as a key theme in the free-text analysis of the resident's survey. While applications were processed as quickly as possible once received and the website was regularly updated with the anticipated waiting time at the point of application, there were times when the scale of applications received (at its height, there were more than 1000 applications a day) meant that it was taking about 14 days from submission of an application to receipt of vouchers. This dropped to 2-3 days with the outcome email being shared the following working day to receipt of the application towards the end of the scheme as demand reduced. This would account for a minority of people who commented positively on the speed of the scheme including the time between applying and receiving support.

Recommendation:

How might we develop our processes to ensure residents are kept up to date throughout changes to the scheme and the application process?

- Review how residents are updated as applications progress, so that they are made aware of anticipated timescales and how long they can expect to wait.

Trusted Partner Network

A successful feature of the previous two funding schemes has been the development, via our district council partners, of a trusted partner network comprising a range of organisations that are already in touch with or supporting people who might be in urgent need of support, or who are locally available to households who might go to them for help.

Details of organisations who form part of the trusted partner network can be found in appendix 1.

In this model, the trusted partner network was able to make a financial award to vulnerable households as part of their broader toolkit of support. Network organisations were briefed on eligibility criteria and funding conditions and made decisions on whether an award should be made. If an award was deemed to be the right solution, the trusted partner organisation submitted details to the Hub team who processed the requested vouchers on their behalf. This enables the Trusted Partner network to include small voluntary and community sector organisations who may have difficulty managing the administration costs required to run a similar scheme themselves.

Alongside this model a reporting mechanism was also created, providing a feedback loop with our districts and city councils. This enabled districts to hold oversight of the activity linked to the trusted partner network and provided targeted support to groups and individuals where necessary. As part of the review, Trusted Partners were asked for feedback. Key themes are outlined below:

Theme	Summary
Support Offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common response was that people were struggling with fuel and energy. • ‘HSF has been a lifeline over the past few months’ • ‘Re-referral has been incredibly valuable’ • Increased to include oil was really helpful. Supporting rural locations, supermarket vouchers are tricky. • PayPoint vouchers can often encounter challenges. • Middle earners are missed and excluded
Application Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forms to complete with individuals were straightforward and simple. • Barrier is how long it takes to process the applications • Training was adequate and very simple straight forward to use. • Applications seemed to go through seamlessly. • The change of Direct Award was a significant change which could have been smoother. • It would be good to have a dialog / system where we can log where the support has been offered, and be able to offer proof of the support / financial gain has impacted the resident.
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were a lot of changes throughout the scheme, which

	<p>became an issue when people were calling in and managing the conversations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application time frames were not clear which caused an increased contact volume. • Concerns with resourcing on the future of the HSF, and the frustration for the customer having to call after awaiting their application outcome., consider the Hub taking the contact on. A direct line for someone in the hub, or feedback from the hub on the outcome of the application and the chasing contact. • Concerns raised on communication on any changes made, rather than finding out via the webpage.
Joint Working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common financial assessment tool is being explored, all using something different we should/could be sharing – what do we need to do to make that happen

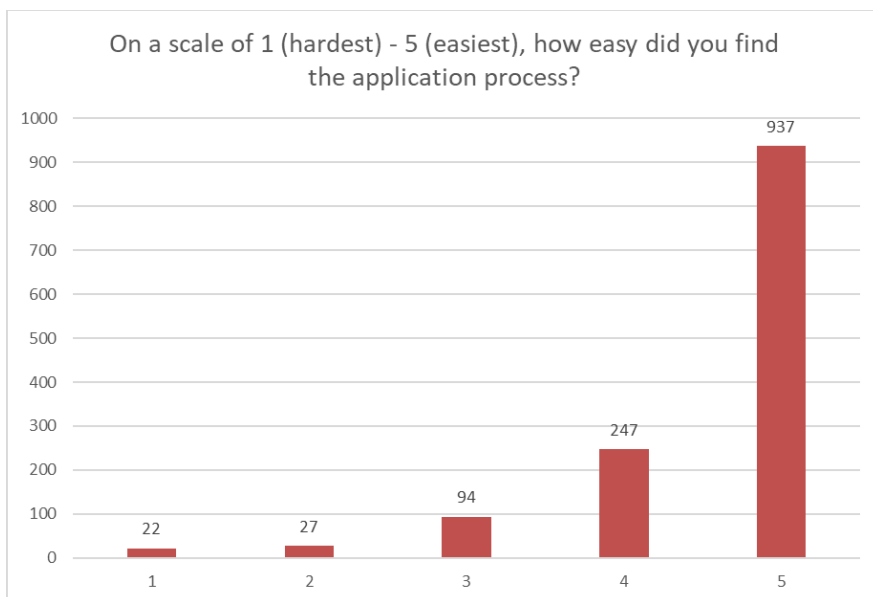
Recommendations:

How might we develop a holistic approach to supporting individuals to maximise the impact of the scheme?

- Explore opportunities for a more holistic approach to enhance wrap around support and avoid ‘sticking plasters’. Explore opportunities for working across the trusted partner network (example - financial assessment tool)
- Review communication points with residents when accessing application.
- Assess the impact of scheme changes and explore how they can be communicated effectively to staff, trusted partner network and residents.

Application Experience

Residents were asked how easy they found the application process on a scale of 1 (hardest) to 5 (easiest), and the average score was 4.54. As you can see below, 96% of respondents felt that the application process was neutral or easy.



In the free text question to applicants about what worked well with the scheme, many people mentioned the ease of the application process with the simplicity of the form and ease of understanding highlighted. This was balanced with accessibility of support which was flagged as a key theme in the residents' survey when asked what could be improved about the scheme. The majority of respondents commenting under this theme flagged up the accessibility to help for those who do not have computer access or struggle with technology. A few respondents specifically flagged challenges with the application process including technological difficulties and disabilities. It was recommended that an option to apply by post be added.

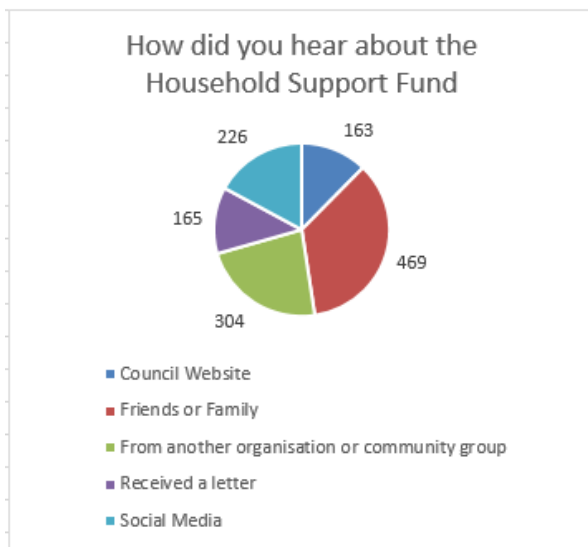
Case Study:

Customer A requested a Fridge Freezer, as their Fridge Freezer had stopped working. Details of the Household Support Fund were found on the council's website, and they applied using the online application form. The customer found the application both quick and easy to use. They were requested to submit evidence of benefits, which they did by attaching a photo to an email.

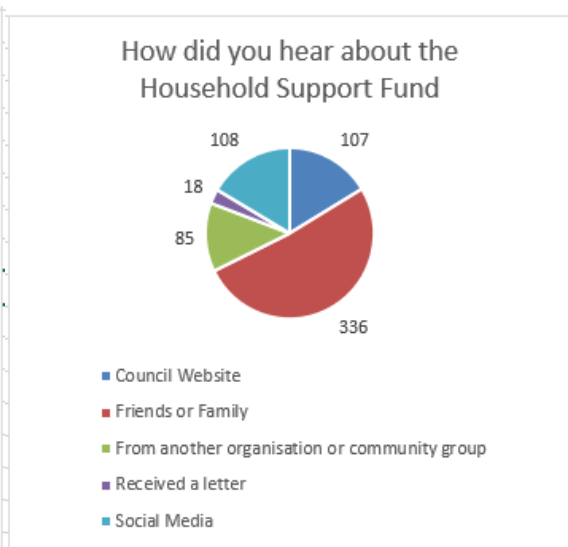
"Excellent really helped me in my time of need! I couldn't be more grateful everyone I spoke with was fantastic. My freezer broke and this was a god send!"

When asked how they heard about the Household Support Fund, 58% of residents heard about the scheme through friends and family or another organisation or community group. This signals that word of mouth was a key form of promotion of the scheme.

Cambridgeshire (excluding Peterborough)



Peterborough



This was another theme picked up in the residents' survey with some respondents suggesting that the scheme could have been more widely publicised with proactive contact to those who were eligible considered. Some work was done with South Cambridgeshire District Council to directly mail out to residents with offers of support and this resulted in the number of applications from South Cambridgeshire doubling over the following week before slowly reducing back to the usual levels.

Recommendations:

How might we structure the scheme to improve the application experience for all residents?

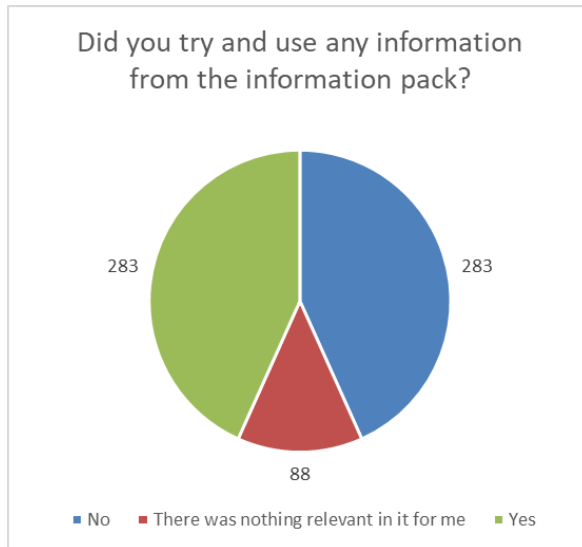
- Explore opportunities to improve the accessibility of the application process to ensure it is inclusive.

Information Pack

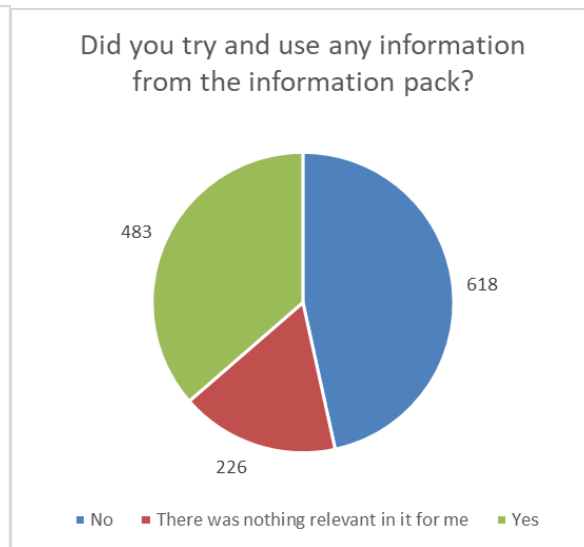
As part of the offer, all applicants were sent an information pack, signposting them to other forms of support. The information pack was also available as a download on the website following requests from Trusted Partners and other internal teams in the council to make it publicly available.

We asked residents the following question as part of the survey:

Cambridgeshire (excluding Peterborough)

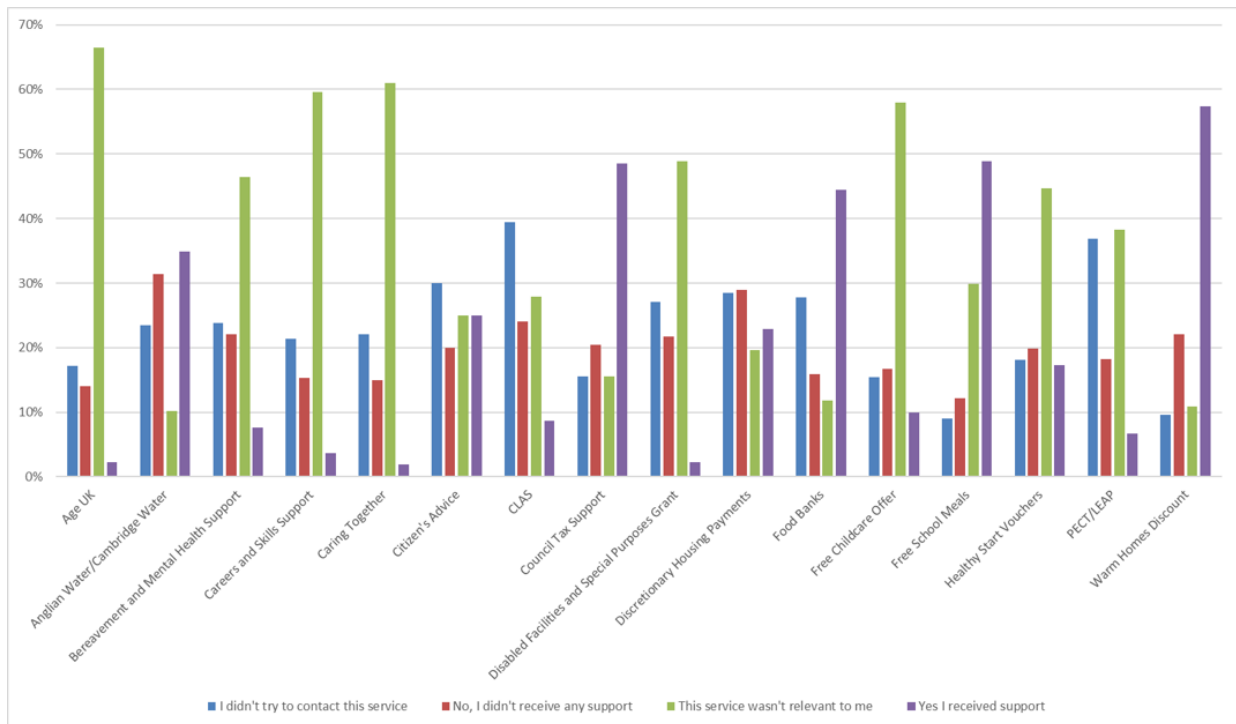


Peterborough

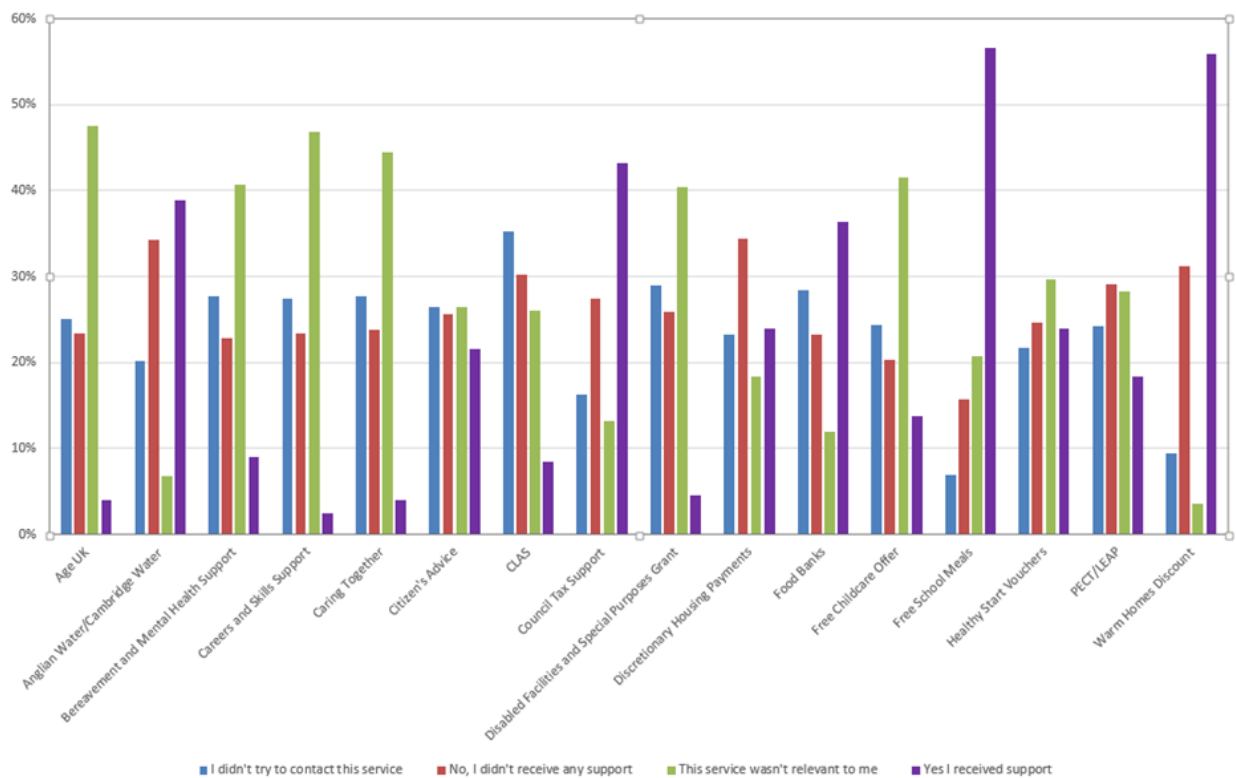


63% of applicants did not use the information pack or did not find anything relevant. For those that did use the information pack, we asked further details about what services they had tried to contact and whether they received support.

Cambridgeshire (excluding Peterborough)



Peterborough



This shows that the services that most people contacted from the information pack were Council Tax Support, Warm Homes Discount, Free School Meals and Food Banks. This shows that people were seeking financial support to meet their basic needs, reflected in the statement that the majority of people applied due to the general rise in cost of living rather than a specific change in their circumstances.

A total of 656 respondents left comments when asked about other information that would have been useful to include. The key themes are summarised in the table below:

Theme	Summary
No other information suggested	Respondents leaving comments under this theme stated that either there was no other information that would have been useful to include, that they were unsure of any other information that would have been helpful or they left general positive comments about the information that was available.
Available help	Respondents discussed how information about any/all help available would be useful.
Did not receive or view information	Respondents commenting under this theme highlighted that they had not seen an information pack or could not remember having seen one. In some cases this was due to someone else completing the application for them.
Practical scheme details	Respondents suggested that additional practical information relating to the scheme would be helpful. Specific suggestions included; how to access the help available, guidance on multiple application/grants, explanation around amounts granted and rationale, guidance on how the payment would be made and redemption methods (clear instructions relating to vouchers).
Advice/signposting	<p>Respondents highlighted that additional advice beyond that relating to the scheme would be helpful. A number of respondents suggested that budgeting advice would be helpful including; ideas on cheap meals, cutting energy costs and obtaining essential items. A few respondents suggested advice on debt and general advice on coping during the cost of living crisis would help.</p> <p>Respondents also suggested signposting to other services that could help would be beneficial, for example, food banks, charities, emotional support services, utility company support services, local support groups, government websites etc.</p>
Bills	Respondents highlighted that information relating to support with bills (particularly energy bills) would be helpful.

Recommendation:

How might we provide information on further opportunities for support in a more engaging and accessible way?

- Explore different ways to signpost applicants to further opportunities for support, that will increase engagement.
- Review key themes to determine any missing information which should be included.

The Numbers

This section will outline the data insights we have drawn from the applications we received between October 2021 and March 2022 to help build a picture of the scale of the Housing Support Fund. This will include the geographic breakdown of applications and some notes on demographics of our applicants. More detailed analysis of the demographics of applicants and in particular how they compare with the wider population of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are due later in the year when the 2021 Census data is available as a comparator.

From the point of the Household Support Fund going live until the end of March 2022, there were 37,226 applications received from 28,718 individuals.

	Applications	Individuals
Peterborough	13,652	8,821
Cambridge City	5,186	4,708
East Cambridgeshire	1,821	1,606
Fenland	5,979	4,389
Huntingdonshire	5,089	4,426
South Cambridgeshire	4,357	3,830
Cambridgeshire	22,432	18,959
Peterborough and Cambridgeshire	36,084	27,780
Out of Area ¹	1,142	938

One of the questions that we wanted to analyse using the data was to ensure that the Household Support Fund awards were well-targeted towards those who were struggling financially. We have used the Index of Multiple Deprivation² as a proxy measure to identify areas where people are likely to have been struggling financially and therefore areas where we should see a higher number of awards made.

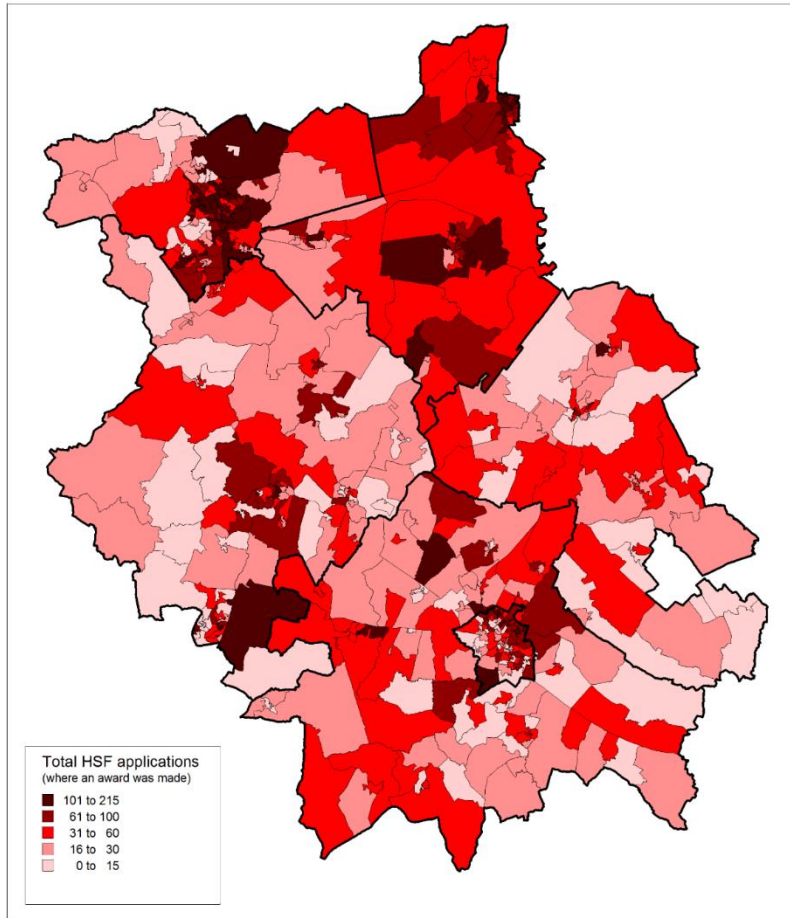
The maps on the next page show the distribution of Household Support Fund awards across Cambridgeshire in comparison to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) decile by LSOA 2019.

The scatter diagram below the maps shows the total number of awarded applications by LSOA against the IMD ranking for that LSOA. It shows a reasonably strong correlation with areas that had the highest number of awarded applications typically being areas of higher relative deprivation.

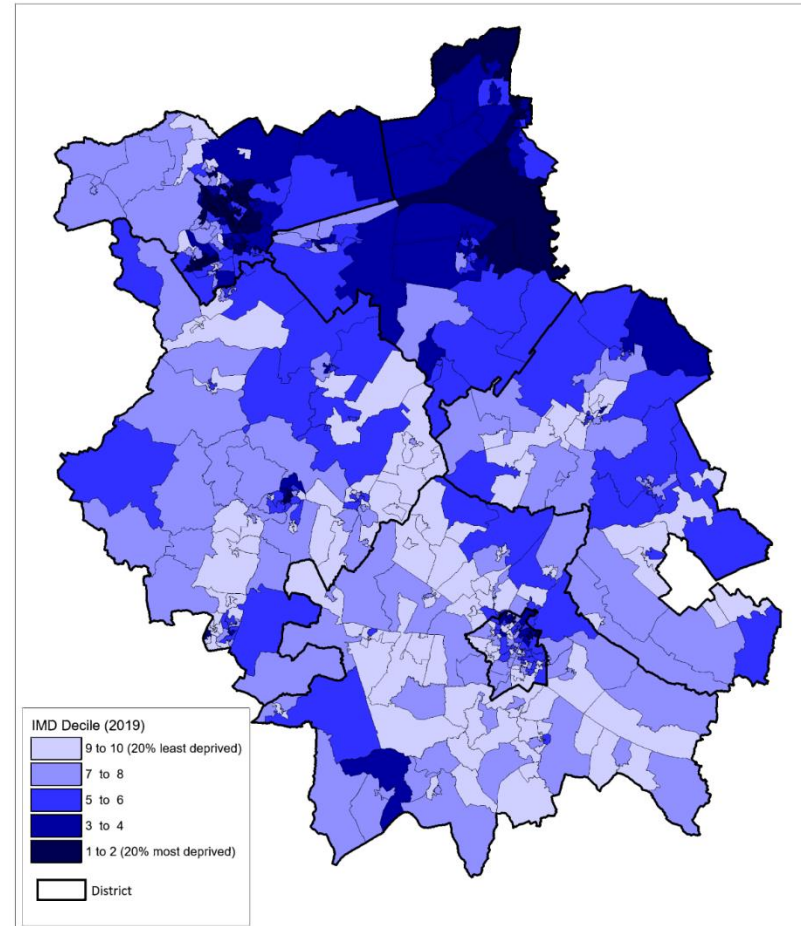
¹ There was a national newspaper article published regarding Household Support Fund across England which included details of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough scheme and provoked a significant number of out of area applications from across the country.

² The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is a measure of relative deprivation in small areas across England. It ranks all LSOA's from the most deprived (1) to the least deprived (32,844). The latest IMD, released in 2019, showed Peterborough to be the most relative deprived authority across Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, followed by Fenland and then Cambridge City.

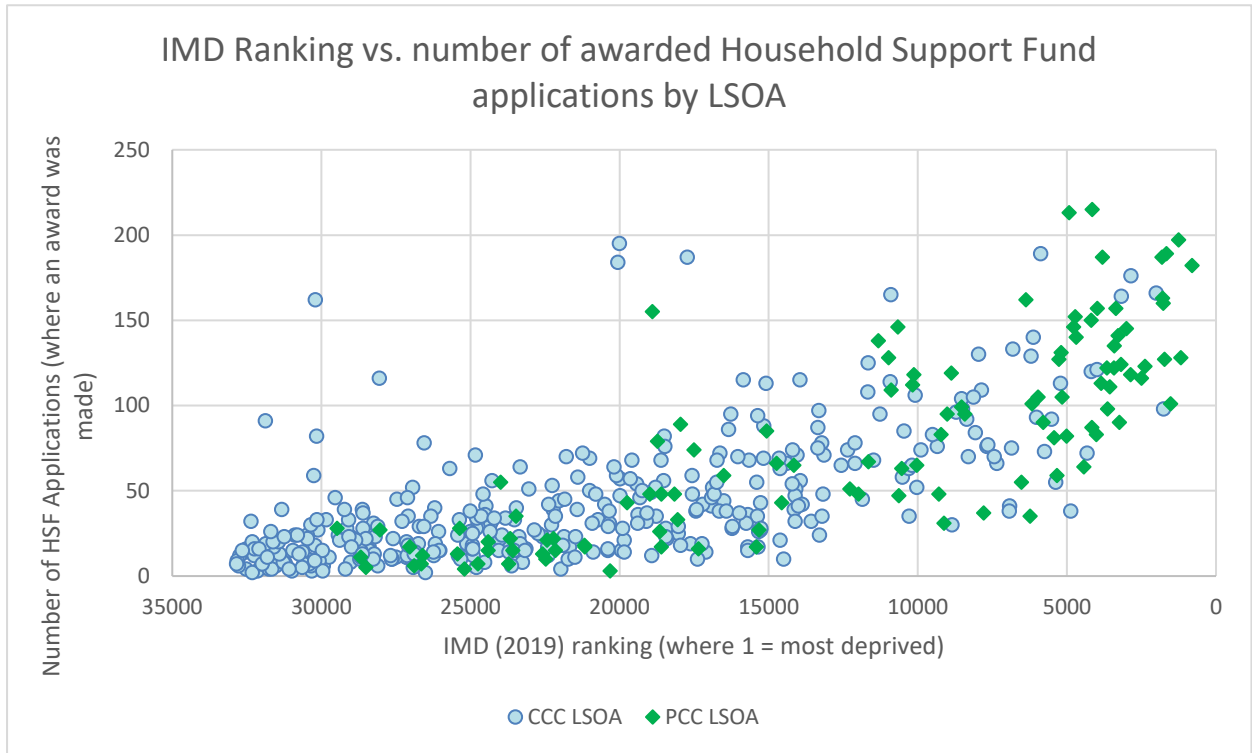
Fenland, Peterborough City and North East Cambridge all have high levels of awarded applications as well as high levels of relative deprivation. Huntingdonshire also saw some crossover with the highest relative deprived LSOA's in the district seeing a high number of awarded applications, however, there were also some less deprived LSOA's in the area which also saw a high number of awarded applications.



Total number of Household Support Fund applications which were awarded by LSOA



Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) decile by LSOA 2019

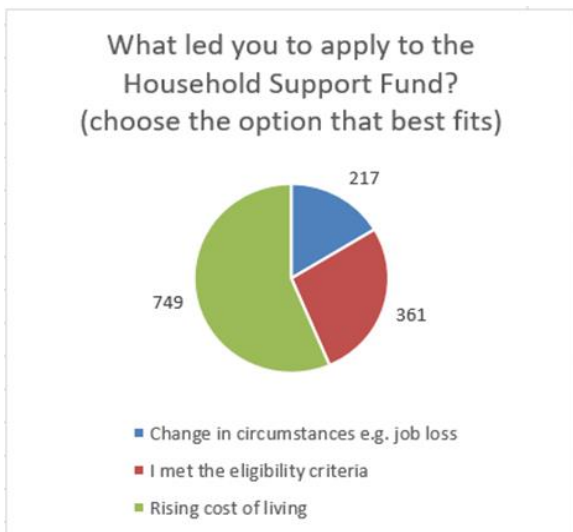


Circumstances

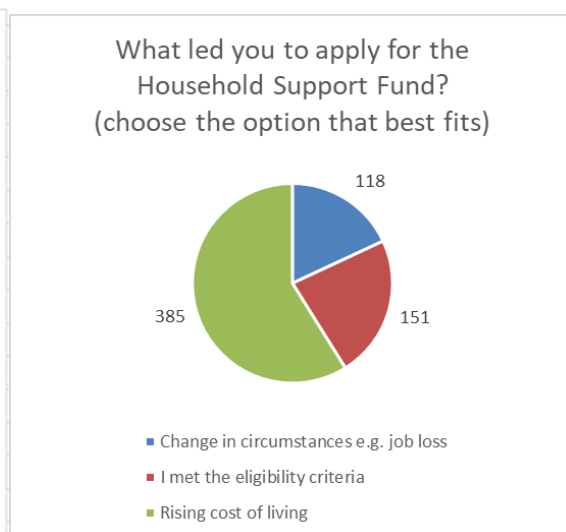
To better understand why applicants needed support through the Household Support Fund, we asked residents directly as part of the survey, but also gained insights from our partner organisations.

The following graph shows the response to the resident’s survey to the question ‘what led you to apply to the Household Support Fund?’. 56% of respondents stated that they had applied because of the rising costs of living, indicating the impact that this is having on residents of Cambridgeshire.

Cambridgeshire (excluding Peterborough)



Peterborough

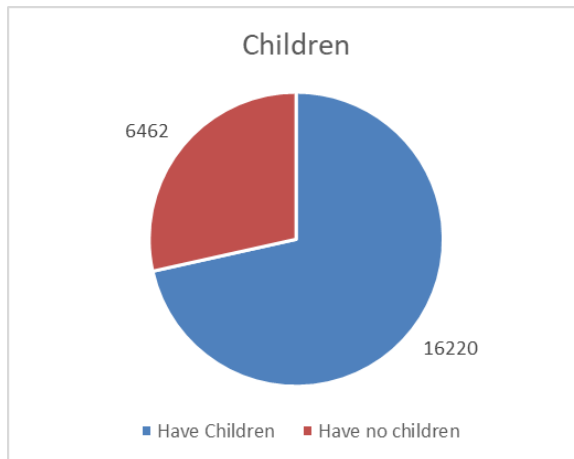


Feedback from our partners suggested that the most common reason for applying was that people were struggling with fuel and energy, signaling the impact that fuel cost increases are having on residents and a correlation with the residents' responses around the rising costs of living.

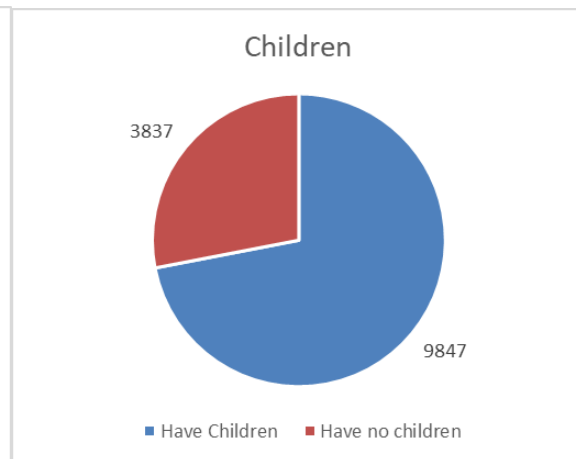
Demographics

72% of applicants had children in their household. This is not surprising as the wider scheme was included in communications regarding the free school meal voucher offer. However it does mean that struggling child less working age households and pensioner households were under represented in the cohort that received support through the Household Support Fund.

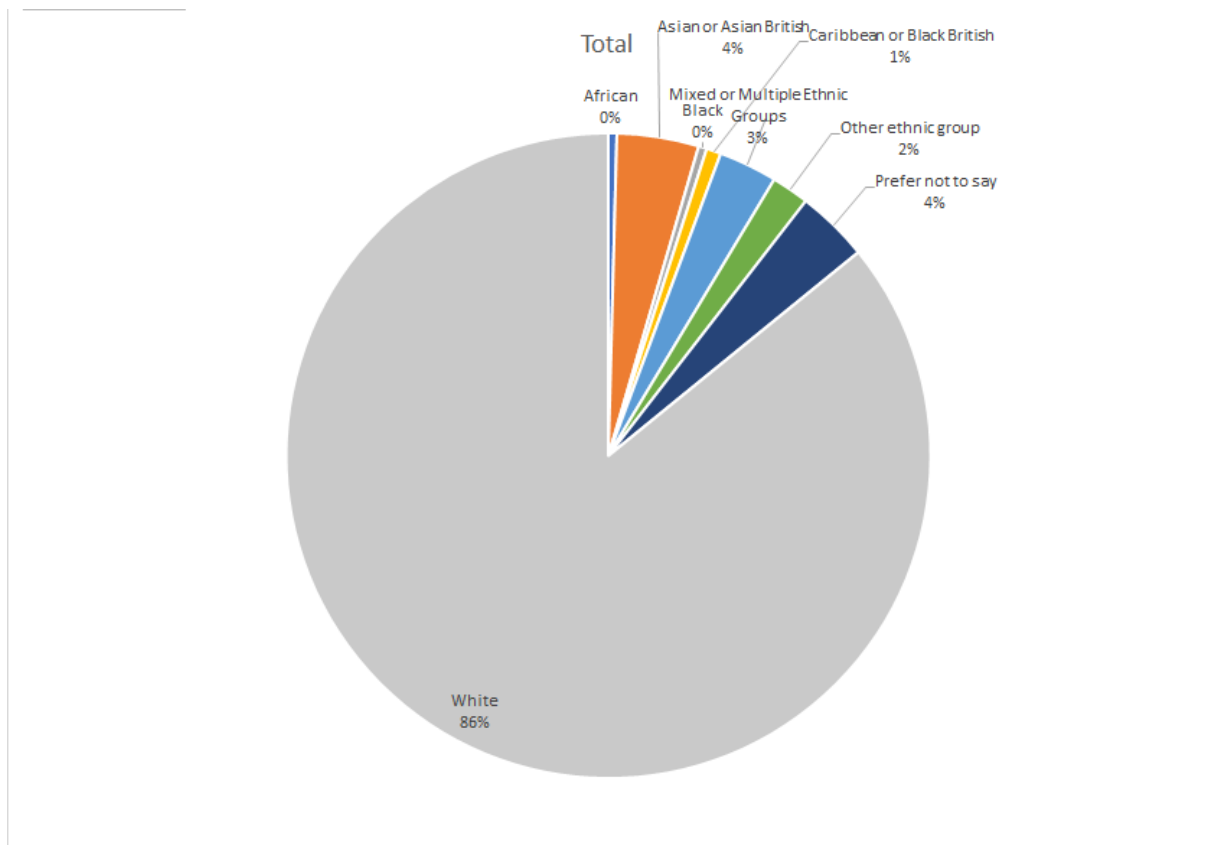
Cambridgeshire (excluding Peterborough)



Peterborough



The majority of applicants (86%) described themselves as white (includes any white background). The distribution of ethnicities is broadly in line with the ethnicity data for the wider population from the 2011 Census. However as mentioned above, more detailed demographic analysis will be completed later in the year when the 2021 Census data is available.



Customer Profiles – Caci Acorn

ACORN is a customer profiler tool that groups households into one of five categories, as listed below. These categories provide a level of insight into the population related to their consumer habits and engagement levels in order to better target strategies and communications to those groups.

ACORN Category code	ACORN Category Name	Number of applications (which received an award) in a postcode with Acorn classification
1	Affluent Achievers	2020 (8.4%)
2	Rising Prosperity	1557 (6.4%)
3	Comfortable Communities	4665 (19.3%)
4	Financially Stretched	9022 (37.3%)
5	Urban Adversity	6925 (28.6%)

The table above shows that 65.9% of recipients fell into groups 4 and 5, the Financially Stretched and Urban Adversity groups, highlighting that it is those that were already struggling financially who were most in need and that the Household Support Fund awards were targeted towards those likely to be in highest need.

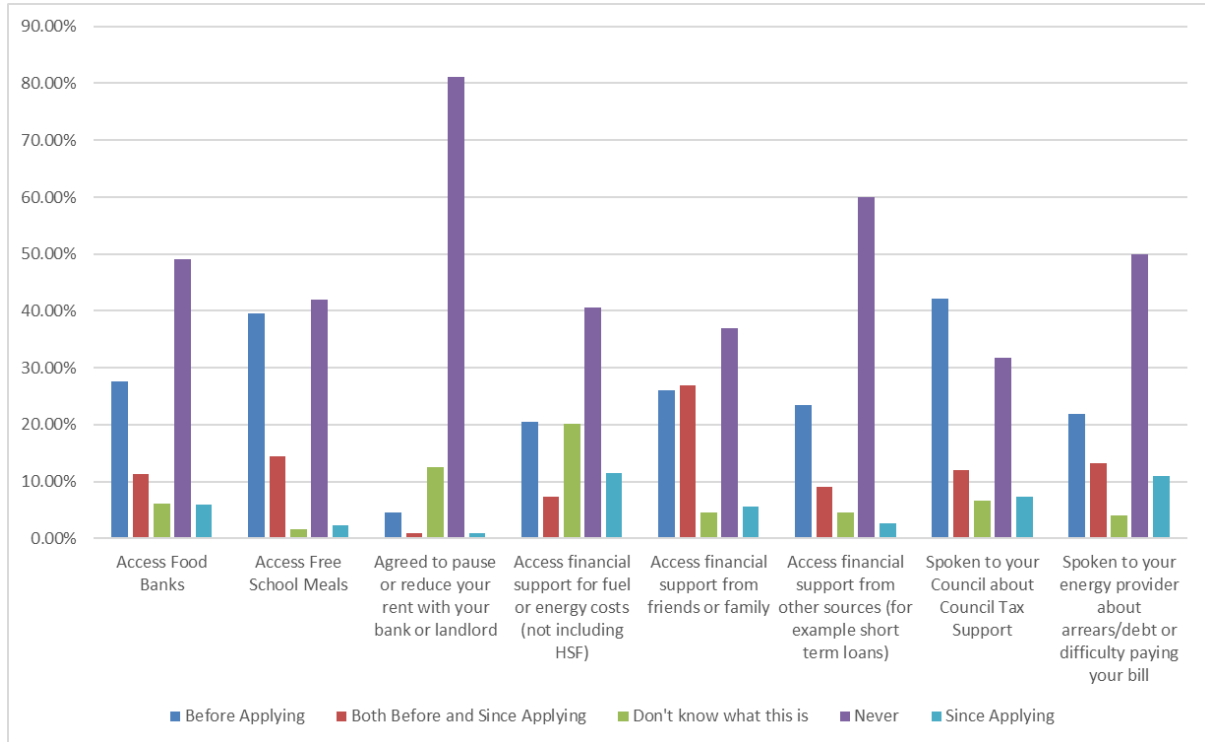
However, significantly, the graphs also show that close to 20% of those in 'Comfortable Communities' who generally work and live in owner-occupied (with and without mortgages) were also struggling and needed help from the Household Support Fund. This emphasises the financial

strain that many of our residents are under even those who might have been considered 'comfortable' previously.

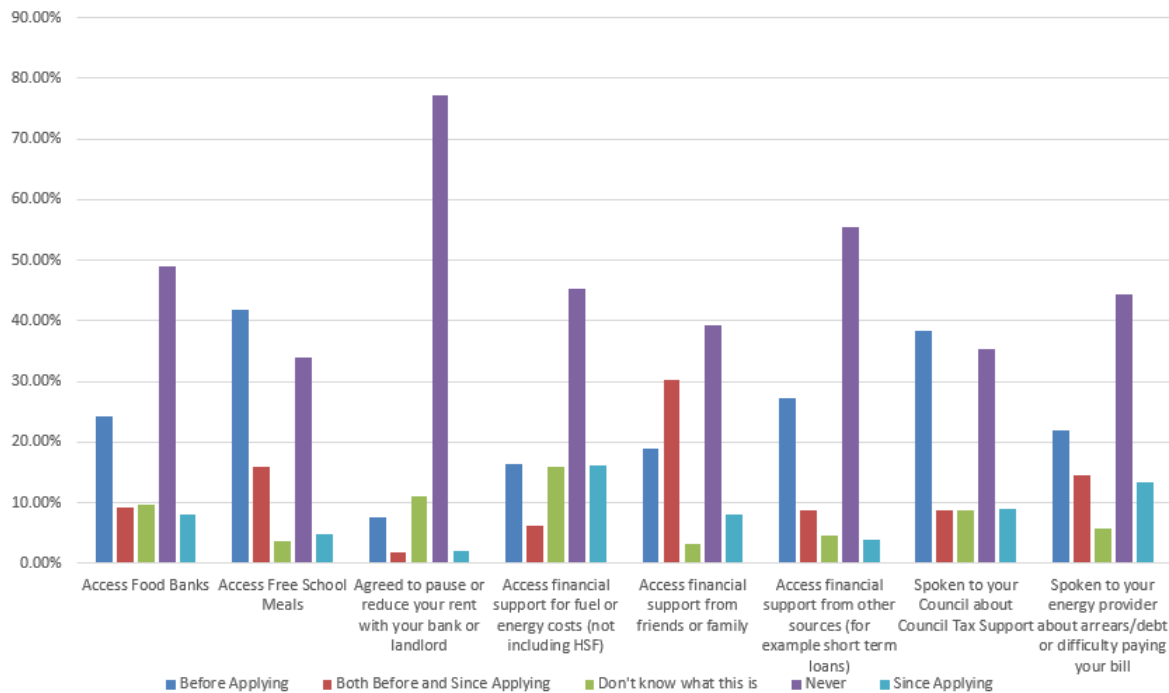
Ongoing Support Needs

As part of the resident's survey, respondents were asked if they had accessed support from a number of routes before or after applying. The graph below shows the breakdown of responses to each type of support:

Cambridgeshire (excluding Peterborough)



Peterborough



This shows that across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, a significant proportion of residents seeking financial help have not accessed other forms of support with proportions ranging from just over 30% of people in Cambridgeshire having never spoken to their Council about Council Tax Support to nearly 50% of people in Cambridgeshire having never spoken to their energy providers about difficulties paying energy bills. It also shows that most of the applicants had not agreed to pause or reduce their rent with their bank or landlord and had not considered accessing financial support from other sources (for example short term loans).

This indicates there is potential for further wrap around support using an 'Every Contact Counts' model to link people in with longer term sources of support at the point of initial contact and that a significant proportion of applicants to the Household Support Fund would benefit from this.

Redeployed staff feedback

A total of 17 members of staff were redeployed (for various amounts of time, amounting to 7 full time equivalent posts) from other parts of the organisation to support the team of agency staff dedicated to the Household Support Fund with the processing of applications. Following the assignment, staff were asked for feedback about their experience. A summary of key themes is provided below:

Working arrangements

- Some staff were redeployed on a part-time basis to process Household Support Fund applications. This led to some staff reporting difficulties balancing the pressures in their redeployed role with the pressures in their substantive role.
- Staff reported challenges being able to keep up with changes to processes/ criteria as the scheme moved at pace.

- Staff suggested a variety of improvements to the IT systems used to manage the applications.

Recommendations:

How might we, as an organisation, design and support redeployment opportunities so that we maximise their benefit to the individual and the organisation?

- Review induction into a redeployed position
- Review and enhance documentation to support staff (process flows, structure charts etc.)
- Review how changes to the scheme are communicated internally
- Undertake a review of IT systems and make enhancements that will streamline the processing of applications.

Additional value from redeployed staff

- As the project moved at pace with time constraints, staff reported that they felt their skills and knowledge were not always utilised in the best or most consistent way for applications.
- The information pack that was developed was thorough and not too overwhelming. In addition, some applicants would benefit from more place-based information. This can and has been provided through individual conversations but staff suggested that it would be worth developing a way of doing this more consistently and not dependent on the knowledge of the individual staff member.

Recommendations:

How might we develop a holistic approach to supporting individuals to maximise the impact of the scheme?

- Review skillset of the team and look for opportunities to maximise the impact of the range of skills and experience.
- Information pack to be enhanced with place based information as appropriate.

Summary of Recommendations

How might we question	Points to consider
<p>How might we develop our processes to ensure residents and trusted partners are kept up to date throughout changes to the scheme and the application process?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review how residents are updated as applications progress, so that they are made aware of anticipated timescales and how long they can expect to wait. • Review how scheme changes are implemented and communicated to all parties
<p>How might we develop a holistic approach to supporting individuals to maximise the impact of the scheme?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore opportunities for a more holistic approach to enhance wrap around support and avoid 'sticking plasters'. Explore opportunities for build on current working across the trusted partner network. • Review communication points with residents when accessing application. • Assess the impact of scheme changes and explore how they can be communicated effectively to staff, trusted partner network and residents. • Review skillset of the team and look for opportunities to maximise the impact of the range of skills and experience. • Review how Information pack could be enhanced with place-based information as appropriate.
<p>How might we structure the scheme to improve the application experience for all residents?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore opportunities to improve the accessibility of the application process to ensure it is inclusive.
<p>How might we provide information on further opportunities for support in a more engaging and accessible way?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore different ways to signpost applicants to further opportunities for support, that will increase engagement. • Review key themes to determine any missing information which

	should be included.
How might we, as an organisation, design and support redeployment opportunities so that we maximise their benefit to the individual and the organisation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review induction into a redeployed position• Review and enhance documentation to support staff (process flows, structure charts etc.)• Review how changes to the scheme are communicated internally• Undertake a review of the IT systems and make enhancements that will streamline the processing of applications.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Trusted Partner Network

At present, this network consists of:

Countywide

- Care Network
- Barnardo's
- Early Help Teams

Fenland

- Wisbech Foodbank

Cambridge City

- Financial Inclusion team
- Cambridge City Child and Family Centre

South Cambridgeshire

- SCDC Housing Advice
- SCDC Duty Housing
- SCDC Benefits
- SCDC Community Team
- South Cambridgeshire Child and Family Centre

Huntingdonshire

- Huntingdon Community Hub
- Godmanchester Timebank
- St Neots Community Support
- St Ives Timebank
- Huntingdon Community Group
- Kimbolton Parish Council
- Ramsey Neighbourhoods Trust
- CARESCO
- Somersham and Pidley Timebank
- St Neots Timebank
- St Ives and Huntingdonshire Child and Family Centre
- St Neots Child and Family Centre

Appendix 2 – Benchmarking information

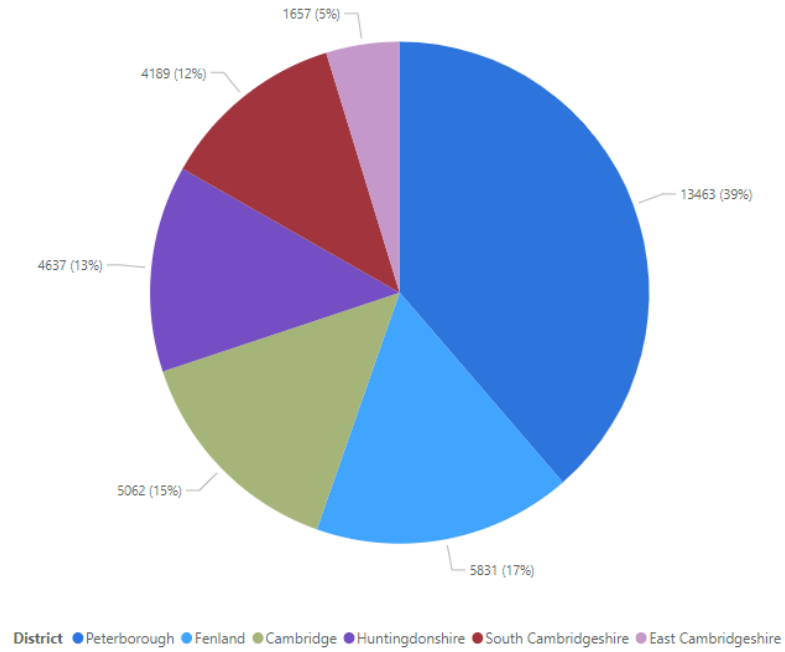
	Detail	Other information or activity
Essex County Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for those in most need over winter with the cost of food, energy, water bills and other essentials. • The provision of food vouchers through targeted family support. • District, Boroughs and City Council's received food for homeless households and rough sleepers. <p>Free school meals during the holidays. Food vouchers for the Christmas 2021, February and Easter 2022 school holidays.</p>	<p>A large proportion of funding was allocated to key organisations and partners across the county to continue their work in supporting residents in need</p> <p>Community Hubs, Voluntary and Community sector organisations and local Citizens Advice also received allocations to support residents.</p>
Lincolnshire County Council	<p>Lincolnshire County Council worked with schools and early years providers to distribute around 50 percent of their funding to families with children. This was targeted at children eligible for benefit related free school meals, 2-year-old early years entitlement (EYE) or early years pupil premium</p>	<p>The remaining funding was distributed to district councils within Lincolnshire.</p>
North Kesteven District Council & City of Lincoln	<p>Specified professionals supporting Lincolnshire residents made a referral on applicants' behalf if they were struggling with the cost of household essentials. Eligibility criteria included, but are not limited to, evidence of unmanageable debt, bereavement, poor physical or mental health, relationship breakdown, struggling with household bills, victim of domestic abuse, recently homeless or rough sleeping. Referrers are required to be satisfied by seeing evidence of need.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applications limited to one per calendar month per household • Each application capped at £400 • This scheme is not linked to benefit eligibility, employment or immigration status <p>Across Lincolnshire District Councils previous funding has supported families with food, clothing, energy and water. This extension of HSF ensured that support continued through the Autumn.</p>

Oxfordshire	<p>Most of the allocation was for family food vouchers, and Holiday family food vouchers (or equivalent support) for all eligible children & young people in Oxfordshire schools, colleges and early years settings, with the remaining balance delegated to District & City Councils working in partnership with the voluntary & community sector to deliver local emergency welfare support to residents.</p>	<p>Money was also spent across the Voluntary & Service Score supporting administration of local emergency welfare to support residence.</p>
Hertfordshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food vouchers for children & young people registered to receive free school meals during the October half term, Christmas holidays and February 2022 half term. • To district councils and Herts Help to provide crisis support and our Money Advice Service and local Citizens Advise Service • To provide vouchers through Adult Care Services and Children’s Services teams working directly with vulnerable people 	
Warwickshire	<p>Warwickshire’s funding was distributed via Warwickshire County Council’s Local Welfare Scheme. The fund is designed to provide short-term financial support (vouchers) to meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford essentials.</p>	<p>The eligibility criteria balanced supporting as many residents as possible targeting limited funds to support those who needed help the most</p>
North Northamptonshire Council	<p>Much of the funding was allocated to specific organisations and initiatives, all local councils in the county were given funding to direct towards residents in need.</p>	<p>Norwich City Council: Norwich’s funding was used to fund purchases of essential goods and items, digital support provision, fuel hardship support, water bill payments and rent arrears clearance. There was no application process for the funds, people thought to benefit the most were contacted directly by the council.</p> <p>North Norfolk District Council:</p>

		The grant in North Norfolk has been given to various Norfolk organisations working together to make sure the funding goes to those most in need.
Bedford Borough	Bedford Borough Council gave more than 50% of the Household Support Grant funding to families with children that qualified for free school meals.	They also had a Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme which provided a Council Tax Support discount of 100% to households on a low income and persons not liable for Council tax.
Central Bedfordshire Council	<p>Central Bedford Council supported residents with food, energy and water bills and other essentials</p> <p>Households with Children and care leavers (young adults between 18 – 25 that spent time in care before they were 18) received vouchers to help with the cost of food and utilities over the 2021/22 autumn and winter school holidays.</p> <p>Residents of permanent, legally licensed, residential park homes and council-managed caravan sites, received funding to cover food and utilities for six weeks over Christmas and winter period</p>	Some of the funding was allocated to organisations designed to support vulnerable households including Citizens Advice, Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity, Age UK, three food banks and Grand Union Housing.

Appendix 3 – Breakdown of Applications by District

Number of Direct Applications by District



Number of Trusted Group Applications by District

