

OPEN

Children and Families Committee

19 January 2026

Crisis and Resilience Fund 2026 - 2029 - Delivery Plan

Report of: Dawn Godfrey, Executive Director, Children's Services

Report Reference No: CF/35/25-26

Ward(s) Affected: All

For Decision

Purpose of Report

- 1 Approval of the Crisis and Resilience Fund Delivery proposal for 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29.

Executive Summary

- 2 The Household Support Fund (HSF) has provided essential support to vulnerable households in Cheshire East since 2020, including food, utilities, housing assistance, and other necessities. As of April 2024, HSF transitioned from bulk payments to an enhanced referral system, aiming to reduce dependency and to promote sustainable impact, which continued until 31 March 2026, with over £6m being provided to over 20,000 members of the community.
- 3 The Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) was announced in the Spring Budget ([Spending Review 2025](#)), and is intended to replace the HSF and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). The CRF as described in the recent provisional settlement announcement is expected to provide £3.781m in 2026/27; £3.779m in 2027/28 and £3.816m in 2028/29 (£11.376m total) in funding for Cheshire East until 31st March 2029.
- 4 Cheshire East received the grant conditions from the DWP on the 19 December 2025, however they are currently embargoed, which prevent us from sharing more widely. We can confirm that the delivery plan

described within this paper meets grant conditions and the financial settlement aligns with the values as stated below.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Endorse the proposed delivery model of the Crisis and Resilience Fund for 2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29.
2. Delegate authority of the grant to the Director of Children's Services (DCS) to deliver the grant in line with grant conditions.
3. Approval to commence procurement for the services as detailed within report.
4. Note that the funding is included within the medium-term financial strategy 2026/27 to 28/29 for an estimated total sum of approx. £11.4m.

Background

- 5 The HSF has been delivering food, utilities, white goods, housing support, and other household essentials since December 2020. During this time, the HSF programme, and its variants: Covid Winter Grant Scheme and Covid Support Grant, have provided over £20m of support and over 100,000 separate payments to high priority groups within Cheshire East.
- 6 As of March 2026, the Department for Work and Pensions has renamed and rolled in the HSF and DHP programmes into the Crisis and Resilience Fund.

Consultation and Engagement

- 7 The HSF programme routinely surveys grant recipients and referrers, as well as collecting case studies from grant recipients.
- 8 We are currently undergoing recipient and referrer consultation to identify possible improvements in the current delivery system. However, our most recent survey from earlier in the year showed that 97% of recipients described the grant as 'helping a lot' alongside 3% describing the grant as 'quite a lot of help'.
- 9 Further information on and engagement can be located in appendix 4.

CRF Proposal

- 10 The proposed model will include the following:

- (i) Provide targeted support to a range of highly targeted cohorts in the children and adults spheres - such as, children in need (CiN) and child protection (CP) care leavers, children with

disabilities (CWD), children open to early help services, and a range of vulnerable adults.

(ii) Operate an online referral form for application-based support where a range of support can be accessed, expected to include essentials such food, energy, wider essentials, housing and exceptional cost payments can be accessed.

(iii) Provide a portion of the funding as a third sector grant, targeting local voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) groups such as food banks and other third sector organisations who work with vulnerable residents.

- 11 CRF will retain the same target cohorts, focussing on Cheshire East's most vulnerable individuals. These cohorts include, care leavers, young carers, financially vulnerable individuals, individuals known to Cheshire East professionals, individuals known to third sector organisations and individuals with a financial vulnerability as deemed by a professional or practitioner.
- 12 Administration of the programme is managed by a team within Cheshire East's children's department. The team is responsible for the following:
 - (i) Project Finances, contract management and procurement, payments, advertising, council governance, grant returns, management of inboxes, review and approval of all referrals, liaise DWP advisors and attend DWP national meetings, as well as other tasks inherent to running a project of this scale.
- 13 In addition to this core team, the programme will use a portion of the admin fund to allocate resource from the Financial Welfare team. This resource will allow for streamlined background checks on grant referrals and will enhance the sustainability capabilities of the programme by conducting full benefits and welfare checks for recipients, plus signposting onto other support organisations.
- 14 Governance is completed at a monthly multi-agency steering group, attended by all our key stakeholders and the triage network. The meeting provides an update on case work (financial, volumes and outcomes), a chance to share any developing risks, and for multi-agency reviews of cases. This is chaired by the Programme Head of Service.
- 15 To run the CRF programme, a series of contracts are required to be managed and procured to support successful implementation. As the CRF is a new programme, spanning 3 years, it will require a series of procurement activities. Including:

- (a) Re-procurement of the supermarket voucher service. This is expected to include spend of up to £1.5m per year.
- (b) Re-procurement of the white goods and household essential service. This is expected to include spend of up to £500,000 per year.

16 A breakdown of expected spend is available in table 1 for the full grant period.

17 Please note, the funding amounts proposed in table 1 are indicative and reflect the volumes the programme has received in prior iterations. The final spend may differ from this amount if demand for another area of support increases.

Other Options Considered

- 18 Two other options were considered to deliver the CRF programme, these are detailed below:
 - 19 Targeted bulk delivery with basic referral routes and third sector grant.
 - (i) Provide the majority of support via bulk release to targeted groups in the form of supermarket vouchers during key periods of need throughout the year.
 - (ii) Operate an online referral form for application-based support for food, energy, wider essentials, and housing payments.
 - (iii) Deliver to a large population of key groups such as income related free school meal, child in need and child protection, care leavers and SEND (list not exhaustive).
 - (iv) Provide a portion of the funding as a third sector grant, targeting local VCFS groups, food banks and other third sector organisations who work with vulnerable residents.
 - 20 Enhanced referral routes with VCFS grant.
 - (i) Operate an online referral form for application-based support where support for food, energy, wider essentials, transport, housing adaptions and exceptional costs can be accessed.
 - (ii) Provide a portion of the funding as a third sector grant, targeting local VCFS groups, food banks and other third sector organisations who work with vulnerable residents.
 - (iii) This option would deliver the majority of the funding through the online referral form and replicate how we have delivered for the past 6 months.

21 The option selected combines the benefits for both above, whilst ensuring administrative efficient delivery.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

22 As set out in paragraph 4 above, the Council have been provided with the Grant Conditions at the time of this Committee in the Guidance.

23 Whilst the key aspects of the Guidance from a legal perspective are set out in paragraph 24 below, the Council needs to comply with all the requirements set out in the Guidance provided in order to avoid a potential repayment situation.

24 The CRF Grant Conditions are contained within the Guidance. The Guidance provides the following key provisions that the Council needs to be aware of:

(a) Clawback/repayment - paragraph 130 of the Guidance:

If the recipient Authority fails to comply with any of the conditions set out in this guidance or the Grant Determination, or if any overpayment is made under this grant, or any amount is paid in error, or any unspent funding at the end of Year 3 is not returned, the Minister may reduce, suspend or withhold grant payments, or require the repayment of the whole or any part of the CRF grant monies paid, as may be determined by the Minister and notified in writing to the recipient Authority. The list below contains examples of a breach of the grant conditions:

- *Inappropriate use of funding or no evidence of funding having been spent on the specified purpose.*
- *Failure to submit one or more of the documents as specified in the CRF Grant Determination.*

(b) Audit - paragraph 130 of the Guidance:

DWP retain the right to undertake audits at any time, should it be considered appropriate and necessary.

(c) Fraud – paragraph 149 of the Guidance:

The Authority must maintain a sound system of internal governance and financial controls in relation to the grant. If the Authority has any grounds for suspecting financial irregularity in the use of any grant paid under the determination, it must notify DWP immediately, explain what steps are being taken to investigate the suspicion and keep DWP informed about the progress of the investigation. For these purposes 'financial irregularity' includes fraud or other impropriety, mismanagement and the use of the grant for purposes other than those for which it was provided.

(d) Subsidy Control – paragraph 152 of the Guidance:

The Fund should not be used for any economic undertaking. Whichever way the Authority uses the funding, including work in partnership with others, all Subsidy rules (previously State Aid) issues should be considered. Check whether the 'de minimis' regulation exception applies. You should also follow Government procurement procedures where relevant.

(e) Reporting and MI – paragraph 177 of the Guidance:

*Authorities must comply with DWP's reporting and MI requirements. This includes submitting an **annual delivery plan** and providing MI returns on a **six-monthly basis**. Full details, including templates and deadlines, are set out in The Crisis and Resilience Fund (April 2026 to March 2029) MI Reporting Requirements.*

25 Pursuant to the contracts required as set out in paragraph 13 above, Legal will be able to work with the service to prepare these contracts and to include the required terms and conditions.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

26 The CRF as described in the recent provisional settlement announcement is expected to provide £3.781m in 2026/27; £3.779m in 2027/28 and £3.816m in 2028/29 (£11.376m total) in funding for Cheshire East until 31st March 2029.

27 The council will spend the grant in accordance with the conditions and not exceed the amount advised by the DWP.

28 The council is required to provide management information (MI) returns outlining their grant spend and the volume of awards.

29 The grant payments will be made in arrears on receipt of a fully completed and verified MI return.

30 If the council has not spent the grant in accordance with the conditions, then there is scope for clawback. The service will manage that risk.

Human Resources

31 The grant conditions enable Cheshire East to take a portion of the grant for administration. We have already taken steps to extend temporary contracts to ensure the programme is staffed going forward.

Risk Management

32 As with any welfare payment to vulnerable recipients there is a risk of fraud, as recipients might appear to be in financial need when they are not. We have tried to mitigate this risk by accepting funding requests via the panel by trusted practitioners and professionals who work directly with those in need.

33 Risks are routinely assessed and reported on at the monthly household support fund steering group, and remedial action is taken, as required.

Impact on other Committees

34 The CRF grant will support a broad spectrum of individuals affected by poverty in Cheshire East. This includes children, adults, and those of pension age, as well as other priority cohorts impacted by the complex and multi-dimensional effects of poverty - such as care leavers, individuals involved with social care, and those with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities).

Policy

35 The CRF grants are part of the government's package of support, targeted at those vulnerable families and adults who are most in need, to help them to cope with the cost of essentials.

Commitment 1: Unlocking prosperity for all	Commitment 2: Improving health and wellbeing	
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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

36 This scheme has an EIA in place which can be provided upon request.

Other Implications

- 37 Children, families, and adults in rural areas of the council will directly benefit from receipt of the new grant in line with financial need. There is no restriction on funding decisions dependent on where service users live.
- 38 Children and young people who suffer the greatest inequality in terms of lack of household income will directly benefit from both of these grants.
- 39 Poverty poses a threat to the public health of our residents as they are less likely to be able to access the conditions that promote a healthy physical and mental lifestyle. An adequate income can help people to avoid stress and feel in control, to access experiences and material resources, to adopt and maintain healthy behaviours, and to feel supported by a financial safety net.
- 40 There are not expected to be any climate change implications from the Crisis and Resilience Grant.

Name of Consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
<i>Statutory Officer (or deputy) :</i>			
Chris Benham	Director of Finance and Deputy 151 Officer	02/12/2025	22/12/2025
Kevin O'Keefe	Interim Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)	02/12/2025	02/12/2025
<i>Legal and Finance</i>			
Diane Green	Finance Manager – Children's Services	02/12/2025	03/12/2025
Daniel O'Brien	Lawyer	02/11/2025	02/11/2025
<i>Other Consultees:</i>			

<i>Directors</i>			
Dawn Godfrey	Executive Director, Children's Services	02/12/2025	04/12/2025

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Douglas Hubbert, Business Development Manager Douglas.hubbert@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – HSF7 Evaluation Appendix 2 - Table 1 – CRF Spend Proposal Appendix 3 - Table 2 – HSF Spend update Appendix 4 - Table 3 – Case studies
Background Papers:	DWP Grant Conditions – Currently embargoed and unable for publication. HSF7 paper - Decision - Delivery proposals for the Household Support Fund (HSF7) 2025/26 Cheshire East Council

Appendix 1

HSF7 Outcomes and Impact update

- 41 An overview of HSF7 spend from 01 April 2025 to 21 September 2025 is shown below in table 2. The table demonstrates a total spend of £2.3m. When planned expenditure is included, the grant is on track to spend its entire allocation.
- 42 Since April the HSF programme has provided thousands of food vouchers to vulnerable members of the community (5021) as well as thousands of energy vouchers to help households keep the heating and the lights on (4614).
- 43 As well as food and energy, the programme has also been able to prevent many families from being going through lengthy and costly court cases and evictions (215), supported young people to get to school who otherwise would have missed their education (55), repaired heating in homes which would have been cold during the winter (11), provided care leavers with white goods so they have the best opportunity in their new homes (10), cleaned homes which were unsafe for children to live in, allowing families to return (34), and providing families with beds who otherwise would have had individuals sleeping on the floor or couch (95). This is just a snapshot of the impacts this money has had, for case studies which will illustrate the scope and impact of the programme please see the table 3.
- 44 Many of these activities have also had avoidant impact, keeping families together, young people in school and young people in placements.
- 45 The HSF programme awarded 175k to community organisations such as food banks, social supermarkets and debt and advise services to enhance their infrastructure and provide preventative interventions leaving long lasting impacts which will outlast the grant. A copy of the schemes funded by the community grant portion of the grant can be found on [Grant funded projects](#) under 'cost of living community response grants.'
- 46 The HSF team have been in contact with a wide range of the triage network, including internal colleagues, third sector referrers and NHS referrers. Their feedback has been gathered as part of the monthly HSF steering group.
- 47 As demonstrated in table 3, the programme has received very good feedback from the community, stating that the programme has been a critical lifeline and has averted major crisis. For further detail, please see table 3.

Appendix 2

Table 1 - CRF Spend Forecast

Spend area	Volumes	Spend
Food	28,922	£3,856,000
Energy	28,922	£3,856,000
Wider Essentials - Triage Network	2,892	£2,121,000
Wider Essentials - Exceptional Costs	145	£97,000
Prevention - 3rd Sector Grant	0	£723,000.00
Admin	0	£723,000.00
Total	60,881	£11,376,000

Appendix 3

Table 2 – HSF7 Spend Update

Spend area	21/09/2025	volumes 21/09/2025
Food	£617,987.20	5021
Energy	£461,400.00	4614
Triage Network	£688,957.61	832
Exceptional Cost	£16,484.29	27
adults bulk	£50,000.00	0
childrens bulk	£50,000.00	0
3rd sec grant	£175,529.00	0
admin	£200,000.00	0
Total	£2,260,358.10	10494

Appendix 4

Table 3 – Case studies

Team	Feedback
Housing Adaptions	<p>Miss X recently moved into a new home with her young daughter. Shortly after, the boiler failed, leaving them without heating or hot water and unable to bathe the child. Miss X was in receipt of Universal Credit and qualified for the Council's Affordable Warmth Grant of £1,531.87 (covering 75% of the cost) and a Gas Safe Grant of £200. However, this still left her with a contribution of £310.63, which she could not afford, placing her in a crisis situation.</p> <p>Through the Household Support Fund (HSF), the remaining £310.63 was covered, enabling Miss X to replace the boiler. She now has heating and hot water, ensuring her child's needs are met. Without the HSF intervention, the home would have remained cold and unsafe, posing serious risks to the child's health and pushing the family further into crisis.</p>
Homelessness Prevention	<p>X's life has been shaped by unimaginable trauma that has laid the foundation for a deeply troubled adulthood, marked by repeated victimisation at the hands of serial domestic abusers and sex offenders. Her vulnerability left her exposed to serious assaults and at high risk of sexual exploitation, including conversations around turning to prostitution as a means of survival.</p> <p>Compounded by significant substance and alcohol misuse, X also battled severe mental health challenges. Diagnosed with epilepsy and suffering from grand mal seizures, she was also living with Complex PTSD. Her history included frequent self-harm and threats to both herself and others, painting a picture of a life in constant crisis.</p> <p>Eventually, X's chaotic lifestyle led to street homelessness and a seven-month prison sentence. It was during this period of incarceration (at her lowest point) that she began to reflect deeply on her life. Determined to change, she engaged with substance and alcohol services and began attending peer support groups. Upon release, she stayed temporarily with family, but this arrangement was never sustainable long term. When her family could no longer accommodate her, she</p>

	<p>faced the terrifying prospect of returning to homelessness and the cycle of abuse and exploitation.</p> <p>It was at this critical juncture that the Household Support Fund (HSF) stepped in. Through HSF, X was supported with a deposit which has allowed her to secure private sector accommodation, providing her with the safety, stability, and dignity she had long been denied. This intervention was not just about housing - it was about hope.</p> <p>Since moving into her new home, X has remained sober for an extended period, free from negative influences and actively engaging with support services. Her gratitude is palpable; she has expressed overwhelming joy and even joked about baking cookies for everyone who helped give her this second chance.</p> <p>X's story is a powerful testament to the transformative impact of targeted financial support. Without HSF, she would almost certainly have returned to street homelessness, facing renewed risks of sexual exploitation, substance abuse, abusive relationships, and self-harm. Instead, she now has a safe and settled home, a support network, and a future filled with possibility.</p> <p>This is not just a success story, it is a life reclaimed. It is a shining example of what can be achieved when funding is paired with the right teams who are capable of utilising the funding to transform vulnerable people's lives.</p> <p>X's journey underscores the urgent need for continued investment in HSF, ensuring that others like her are not left behind.</p>
White goods	<p>X is a partially sighted lady who lives with her adult son, who has autism and is currently awaiting support from the community team. X also experiences challenges related to an eating disorder and has been struggling with various aspects of daily life.</p> <p>X had been sleeping on a sofa for an extended period, which she described as "sleeping with my shadow." This situation had a significant impact on her physical health and emotional wellbeing.</p>

	<p>Following assessment and support planning, a new bed was organised for X from the Household Support Fund. Following up on this support, X confirmed that she received her new bed and expressed immense gratitude and joy. X shared that she had never owned a new bed before, that she has had the best sleep that she has ever experienced, and that it has made a big difference to her life.</p> <p>X reflected on the positive impact this change has had, especially given the difficulties she has been facing. She was very appreciative of the support provided and stated, "All the times I have spoken to you, you have made my day."</p> <p>This small, low cost but timely, intervention has had a significant impact on this client's situation. Without the HSF support, this individual would have been continuing to sleep on her couch which was progressively worsening the individual's mental and physical health, which would have resulted in the case being escalated if not addressed.</p>
Wider Essentials	<p>X, a resident of Crewe, was referred by their Mental Health Nurse following a home visit prompted by concerns about their living conditions. X suffers from Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and prolapsed discs, which cause significant daily pain. Without access to prescribed pain relief, X had turned to self-medicating to manage symptoms - an approach that was both financially unsustainable and detrimental to their wellbeing.</p> <p>These physical health challenges were compounded by mental health issues, including depression, low mood, and low self-esteem. X had become socially isolated, avoiding visitors due to embarrassment about the state of their home.</p> <p>The condition of the home was described as one of the most drastic and severe ever encountered by the team. The property was cluttered, unsanitary, and posed a serious fire hazard. There was a real risk of death posed on the individual, as well as eviction or intervention by</p>

	<p>services or the landlord if the situation was not addressed urgently.</p> <p>Without support, X faced not only a deterioration in physical and mental health but also the potential loss of their home - placing them at risk of homelessness and further crisis.</p> <p>Thanks to the Household Support Fund, X received support to declutter and clean the home, providing them with the urgent help they needed. The intervention not only improved the safety and cleanliness of the home but also restored dignity and gave X a renewed sense of hope.</p> <p>They have since been referred to a Pain Management Clinic and are actively working toward reducing their reliance on self-medication.</p>
Transport	<p>HSF7 has facilitated home-to-school transport for siblings who had to move to an emergency foster care placement, and the foster carer was unable to transport them to school due to having other children to take to a different school.</p> <p>This was a short-term arrangement for just over 2 months and allowed the foster care placement to remain stable and prevented the young people from being uprooted and moved to alternative accommodation.</p> <p>The impact of not supporting this family would have meant a foster care placement further away, or the siblings being unable to continue to be educated in their current school, where they have established friends and support of the staff at the school which was crucial at this time of instability.</p> <p>The HSF monies prevented a crisis in the young people's placement and an uprooting of their lives, both of which would have increased their likelihood of a deterioration of their circumstances.</p>
Adult's	<p>This individual was living in a 3-bedroom house. It was his childhood home; he had lived here with his parents</p>

and his brother and now lived there alone. He is now 70, the house had become very run down, cluttered, very unkempt, where the fire risk was increasing and the conditions becoming dangerous for the inhabitant.

Where he had initially always been unwilling to accept support, he was now experiencing health issues affecting his motivation, which were worsened by the conditions in the home.

After a referral to the hoarding group and working with the Housing Association for his property, suitable accommodation was offered near his relative. However, it was stipulated that he would need to clear the house. He was supported to get quotes for specialist removals. There was very little he could take, due to its extremely poor condition, most was beyond repair and functional use.

A request to HSF enabled this gentleman to remove and clear his house, as stipulated under his tenancy. For him to be able to move forward with his life in good living conditions, a safe environment, and remain in the area he has lived all his life.

Without the HSF support, this individual would still be living in unsafe conditions, which were rapidly progressing towards crisis. The grant has been fundamental to the improvement and recovery of his circumstances.