

Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment v3

Reference: ECIA606595153

Submitted: 17 April 2024 09:56 AM

Executive summary

Title of policy / decision: Extension to the Household Support Fund (HSF)

Policy / decision type: Key Decision

Overview of policy / decision: On 6th March 2024 the Government announced a 6-month extension to the household Support Fund (HSF) which will again be made available to County Councils and Unitary authorities in England to support those most in need. Final grant conditions were received from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on 26th March 2024, which will run from 1st April to 30th September 2024.

Of this fund, Essex County Council has been allocated £9,436,542.83 by the DWP.

This decision concerns the proposals to allocate the grant as follows:

- £4,122,998 for the provision of supermarket vouchers to those eligible for free school meals, those 2 years olds who are in receipt of free entitlement for early education and those 3 and 4 years olds entitled to either early years pupil premium and / or live in one of the lowest 10%, 20% or 30% geographical wards of disadvantage in Essex. This will be a one-off vouchers for the value of £50 per eligible child for 6 months to 30th September 2024.
- £37,500 for the provision of supermarket vouchers for Young Carer households with the most need for fuel, food and essential items.
- £42,500 for the provision of supermarket vouchers for Care Leavers as a one-off voucher for the value of £50 to 30th September 2024
- £4,031,123 for the Essential Living Fund, a scheme managed on behalf of the County Council by Southend City Council, where access to the fund is through an application process with evidence of need.
- £475,000 for Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) to administer and allocate funding for food banks. This will be managed through grant agreements, where funding will be made available to local organisations through an application process.
- £100,000 fund for a Food Education Programme supported by Active Essex
- £100,000 to voluntary and community sector organisations through grant agreements to support families with essential items.
- £100,000 to the Council's for Voluntary Sector and Citizen Advice Bureau who will provide fuel, supermarket vouchers and essential living items.
- £80,000 for Community Supermarkets
- £346,918 for administrative costs and communication campaigns. Those communication plans will be specifically targeted to people with disabilities, pensioners, and those not in receipt of central government's Cost of Living Payments and energy support.

What outcome(s) are you hoping to achieve?: The decision aligns with the Everyone's Essex Strategy, in particular the strategic aim to create a good place for children and families to grow in and the commitment to family resilience and stability, levelling up outcomes for children, and promoting health, care and wellbeing for all parts of the population that need our help because this decision will provide access to support those in most need.

Executive Director responsible for policy / decision: Helen Lincoln (Children, Families & Education)

Cabinet Member responsible for policy / decision: Cllr Beverley Egan (Children's Services and Early Years)

Is this a new policy / decision or a change to an existing one?: Change to an existing policy / decision

How will the impact of the policy / decision be monitored and evaluated?: Contract Management. It is not a requirement of DWP for us to evaluate and given the nature of the scheme not possible. However, we do collect case studies to evidence the impact the scheme has had for households.

Will this policy / decision impact on:

Service users: Yes

Employees: No

Wider community or groups of people: Yes

What strategic priorities will this policy / decision support?: A good place for Children and Families to Grow

Which strategic priorities does this support? - Families: Family resilience and stability, Safety, Outcomes for vulnerable children, Levelling up outcomes for families

What geographical areas of Essex will the policy / decision affect?: All Essex

Digital accessibility

Is the new or revised policy linked to a digital service (website, system or application)?: No

Equalities - Groups with protected characteristics

Age

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Medium

Disability - learning disability

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Medium

Disability - mental health issues

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Medium

Disability - physical impairment

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Medium

Disability - sensory impairment

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Medium

Sex

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Medium

Gender reassignment

Nature of impact: None

Marriage / civil partnership

Nature of impact: None

Pregnancy / maternity

Nature of impact: None

Race

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Medium

Religion / belief

Nature of impact: None

Sexual orientation

Nature of impact: None

Rationale for assessment, including data used to assess the impact: Age

Essex has an ageing population, data from the 2021 census shows that 20.6% of the population in Essex are aged 65 and over, compared to 18.4% nationally. The Age UK briefing (Poverty in later life 2023) states 18% of pensioners in the UK live in relative poverty.

The ELF grant aims to support people who are in crisis to remain independent in their community, although not designed to resolve wider poverty issues, the grant provides immediate relief for households experiencing exceptional financial pressures. Of the successful ELF applications granted between 1st April 2023 to 29th February 2024, 5.3% (n= 1,108) have a household member aged 65 and over with 39% (n=433) of those applications stating exceptional pressure as their reason for application.

It is estimated that 23% of Essex Children and young people are living in poverty. The majority of households supported by the ELF grant includes children under 18 with 63% (n=13,166) of successful applications for households with children between 1st April 2023 – 29th February 2024.

This decision includes the allocation of £4,031,123 for the Essential Living Fund (ELF), £4,122,998 for one off vouchers to those in receipt of Free School Meals, £37,500 for young carers and £42,500 for care leavers, therefore this decision will have a positive impact on the lives of Essex residents across all ages.

Learning Disability

This decision will have a positive impact on the lives of people with learning disabilities.

Of the successful ELF applications granted between 1st April 2023 – 29th February 2024 12% (n=2,531) have a household member with learning disabilities. The ELF grant provides support to those families experiencing exceptional financial pressure ensuring their basic needs are met.

Nationally, four out of five family members of someone with a learning disability take on unpaid care roles.

Informal carers are much more likely to be living in poverty, 29% of households where one family member is an informal carer in comparison to 20% of households with no informal care needs – Joseph Rowntree Foundation UK Poverty 2024 report. By improving support to these carers, we will increase stability in the lives of people with learning disabilities.

Mental Health

Worry about being able to afford what you need to keep well often contributes to mental ill health. This can exacerbate conditions and create a negative feedback loop. Addressing these issues is at the core of this

decision and by easing some financial worry, particularly around essential items, we will have a positive impact on mental health.

Of the successful ELF applications granted between 1st April 2023 – 29th February 2024 47% (n=9,847) have a household member with mental health condition or impairment. This shows that the ELF grant is reaching a large number of people with mental health conditions, providing access to essential items that ensures their basic needs are met.

Physical Disability

In 2022, 55% of disabled adults were having difficulty affording their energy bills with 7% reporting they were behind on their energy payments. This is 15% and 4% more than non-disabled people respectively. This decision aims to support households who are experiencing exceptional financial pressure with the cost of their energy and utility bills, and to buy food or other essential living costs. People with disabilities may need to use electrical assistive equipment to maintain their health and wellbeing which requires extensive use of electricity therefore this decision will have a positive impact on those households.

Sex

At the core of this decision is supporting households who are experiencing exceptional financial pressure with the cost of their energy and utility bills, and to buy food or other essential living costs. The majority of single parents are women (90%) and their children are more likely to be in poverty than any other household type (49% living in poverty) – LGA 2023 Briefing on support for single parent families.

Of the successful ELF applications between 1st April 2023 – 29th February 2024 47% (n =9,842) are single parents of which 94% (n=9,301) are women. By providing essential support to those households this decision will have a positive impact on the lives of women.

Race

The issues mentioned above also have a disproportionate effect on those from BAME backgrounds. Poverty rates are very high for some minority ethnic groups, in particular in 2021/2022, 50% of people in Bangladeshis, 46% Pakistanis and 43% of Black African households lived in poverty compared with 19% of people in households of white ethnicity - Joseph Rowntree Foundation UK Poverty 2024 report. By providing households in financial difficulty with essential support, this decision will have a positive impact on the lives of people from BAME backgrounds.

What actions have already been taken to mitigate any negative impacts?:

How could you strengthen any positive impact(s)?: We will have different marketing approaches for different groups of people, for example pharmacy bags for carers and for children in receipt of free school meals, the schools will distribute vouchers directly to the families.

We aim to remove barriers to the collection and application process by distributing the funds via as many vehicles and access points as possible within local communities, as well as the Essex wide Essential Living Fund Scheme which can be applied for online and over the telephone.

Supermarket vouchers are given directly to individuals and families so they can purchase goods in accordance with their own preferences and cultural requirements.

Levelling up - Priority areas & cohorts

Children and adults with SEND, learning disabilities or mental health conditions (taking an all-age approach)

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: High

Children on Free School Meals

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: High

Working families

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Medium

Young adults (16-25 who have not been in education, training or employment for around 6-12 months)

Nature of impact: None

Residents of Harlow

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: High

Residents of Jaywick and Clacton

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: High

Residents of Harwich

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: High

Residents of Basildon (Town) housing estates

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: High

Residents of Canvey Island

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: High

Residents of Colchester (Town) - Housing Estates

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: High

Residents of Rural North of the Braintree District

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: High

Rationale for assessment, including data used to assess the impact: Children and Adults with SEND, learning disabilities or mental health conditions (taking an all-age approach)

People with disabilities are at higher risk of living in poverty due to the additional costs associated with disability and ill health and partly due to the barriers to work they face. Nationally, in 2021/2022 31% of disabled people were in poverty and 38% for people with a long term, limiting mental health condition – Joseph Rowntree Foundation UK Poverty 2024 Report.

75% of people referred to food banks say that they or a member of their household are disabled – Trussel Trust 2023 Hunger in the UK report

Of the successful ELF Applications between 1st April 2023 – 29th February 2024 66.8% (n=13,961) are households where at least one family member have a disability or long term health condition.

Children raised in environments of low socio-economic status show consistent reductions in cognitive performance across many areas, particularly language function and cognitive control (attention, planning and decision making). This is due to the stress of financial uncertainty.

The interventions set out in this decision will have a positive impact on those with mental health conditions and SEND, and the children in these households, by providing those households who are experiencing exceptional financial hardship with support to purchase things that are essential for their wellbeing.

Children on Free School Meals

In Essex, 19.9% of primary and 18.7% of secondary pupils are entitled to free school meals.

In 2023/2024 the Household Support Fund reached 27,97 households with 4-19 year olds and 6,499 households with 2-4 year olds eligible for free school meals, providing support through supermarket vouchers to help with costs of essential living items. This decision includes the total allocation of £4,122,998 for the provision of a one-off voucher to families eligible for free school meals, we will therefore deliver a clear, measurable positive impact for these households.

Working Families

This decision seeks to support working families with positive impact. Nationally, 61% of people in poverty live in a family where someone works at least part time - SMC 2023 Measuring Poverty Report. 20% of people referred to food banks are from a working household, as low pay and insecure jobs still leave them with insufficient income to afford the essentials - Trussel Trust 2023 Hunger in the UK report

The allocation of £675,000 to various support services such as CAB advice and guidance, Essex Association of councils (foodbanks) and voluntary and community organisation support will be beneficial to working families delivering better outcomes for those children and their working parents.

Levelling Up areas

The interventions set out in this decision will have a positive impact on households living in deprived communities such as those listed above.

The ELF data demonstrates a high application rate is from those areas listed. Basildon and Tendring (Jaywick, Clacton and Harwich) have the highest numbers of successful applications to date in 2023/24, with 19.6% (n=4094) in Basildon and 17.8% (n=3730) in Tendring. Colchester, Braintree and Harlow have the 3rd, 4th and 5th highest levels of successful applications.

The allocation of £4,122,998 for supermarket vouchers will also be targeted at children under the age of 19 who live in one of the lowest 10%, 20% or 30% geographical wards of disadvantage in Essex. This will ensure the areas listed above are targeted and receive a specific positive impact as a result of this decision.

What actions have already been taken to mitigate any negative impacts?:

How could you strengthen any positive impact(s)?: We will have different marketing approaches for different groups of people, for example pharmacy bags for carers and for children in receipt of free school meals, the schools will distribute vouchers directly to the families.

We aim to remove barriers to the collection and application process by distributing the funds via as many vehicles and access points as possible within local communities, as well as the Essex wide Essential Living Fund Scheme which can be applied for online and over the telephone.

Supermarket vouchers are given directly to individuals and families so they can purchase goods in accordance with their own preferences and cultural requirements.

Equalities - Inclusion health groups and other priority groups

Refugees / asylum seekers

Nature of impact: None

Homeless / rough sleepers

Nature of impact: None

People who experience drug and alcohol dependence

Nature of impact: None

Offenders / ex-offenders

Nature of impact: None

Victims of modern slavery

Nature of impact: None

Carers

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Medium

Looked after children / care leavers

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Medium

The armed forces community (serving personnel and their families, veterans, reservists and cadets)

Nature of impact: None

People who are unemployed / economically inactive

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: High

People on low income

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: High

Sex workers

Nature of impact: None

Ethnic minorities

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Medium

Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities

Nature of impact: None

People with multiple complex needs or multi-morbidities

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Medium

Rationale for assessment, including data used to assess the impact: Carers

Evidence shows significant numbers of unpaid carers are finding themselves in poverty and financial hardship as a result of their caring role. 28% of carers live in poverty compared to 20% of those not in a caring role – Joseph Rowntree Foundation UK Poverty 2024 report.

In 2023/2024 the Household Support Fund reached 1,250 young carers living in Essex, providing support through supermarket vouchers to help with costs of essential living items. One of the voluntary organisation set up to distribute the HSF funds to informal carers reached 349 households in 2023/2024, providing financial support with costs of energy bills, food, and other essential items to keep them and the cared for person well. The interventions set out in this decision will have a positive impact on carers by providing support to those in exceptional financial hardship with essential items, helping to improve their wellbeing and that of their care recipient.

Looked after Children (Care Leavers)

Government statistics have shown that care leavers are three times more likely to not be in education, employment or training (NEET) compared to other young people. In 2021, 41% of care leavers ages 19-21 were NEET. This has been associated with negative long-term outcomes, including higher rates of homelessness, mental health problems and increased interactions with the criminal justice system.

In 2023/2024 the Household Support Fund reached 859 care leavers living in Essex, providing support through supermarket vouchers to help with costs of essential living items. This decision includes the allocation of £42,500 for the provision of a one-off payment to care leavers for essential items such as food and energy costs therefore will have a positive impact on the outcomes listed above.

People who are unemployed/ economically inactive and people on low income

In 2021 9% of Essex residents had income at or below the poverty line and 19% of working age Essex residents were in receipt of benefits. People who are unemployed or on low incomes are more likely to struggle to afford the things they need to keep themselves well. The interventions set out in this decision will have a positive impact on these cohorts by providing those who are experiencing exceptional financial hardship with access to essential items that ensures their basic needs are met.

Ethnic Minorities

As mentioned previously, there is a disproportionate effect on those from BAME backgrounds. One in four (24%) people from an ethnic minority group experience food insecurity, almost twice the rate (13%) for white people - Trussel Trust 2023 Hunger in the UK report . By providing households experiencing exceptional financial hardship with essential support, this decision will therefore have a positive impact on the lives of people from BAME backgrounds.

People with multiple complex needs/ multi morbidities

People with disabilities are at higher risk of living in poverty due to the additional costs associated with disability and ill health and partly due to the barriers to work they face. Nationally, in 2021/2022 31% of disabled people were in poverty and 38% for people with a long term, limiting mental health condition – Joseph Rowntree Foundation UK Poverty 2024 Report. The allocation of £4,031,123 for ELF will provide these individuals with support in being able to live independently and ease some of the financial strain whilst they manage their own complex needs.

What actions have already been taken to mitigate any negative impacts?:

How could you strengthen any positive impact(s)?: We will have different marketing approaches for different groups of people, for example pharmacy bags for carers and for children in receipt of free school meals, the schools will distribute vouchers directly to the families.

We aim to remove barriers to the collection and application process by distributing the funds via as many vehicles and access points as possible within local communities, as well as the Essex wide Essential Living Fund Scheme which can be applied for online and over the telephone.

Supermarket vouchers are given directly to individuals and families so they can purchase goods in accordance with their own preferences and cultural requirements.

Equalities - Geographical Groups

People living in areas of high deprivation

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: High

People living in rural or isolated areas

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: High

People living in coastal areas

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: High

People living in urban areas

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: High

Rationale for assessment, including data used to assess the impact: As mentioned above, the interventions set out in this decision support households in exceptional financial hardship, particularly in deprived areas. The allocation of £4,122,998 for vouchers specifically targeted at households with children under the age of 19 who live in one of the lowest 10%, 20% or 30% geographical wards of disadvantage in Essex. These wards, often found in urban and coastal areas will therefore have a positive impact as a result of this decision which aims to alleviate some of the challenges faced by these communities.

What actions have already been taken to mitigate any negative impacts?:

How could you strengthen any positive impact(s)?: We will have different marketing approaches for different groups of people, for example pharmacy bags for carers and for children in receipt of free school meals, the schools will distribute vouchers directly to the families.

We aim to remove barriers to the collection and application process by distributing the funds via as many vehicles and access points as possible within local communities, as well as the Essex wide Essential Living Fund Scheme which can be applied for online and over the telephone.

Supermarket vouchers are given directly to individuals and families so they can purchase goods in accordance with their own preferences and cultural requirements.

Families

Family formation (e.g. to become or live as a couple, the ability to live with or apart from children)

Nature of impact: None

Families going through key transitions e.g. becoming parents, getting married, fostering or adopting, bereavement, redundancy, new caring responsibilities, onset of a long-term health condition

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: High

Family members' ability to play a full role in family life, including with respect to parenting and other caring responsibilities

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: High

Families before, during and after couple separation

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: High

Families most at risk of deterioration of relationship quality and breakdown

Nature of impact: None

Rationale for assessment, including data used to assess the impact: As mentioned above, the interventions set out in this decision aims to provide essential support to households experiencing exceptional financial hardship therefore there will be a positive impact to families within these cohorts listed.

Nationally, 26% of people in couple families with children are in poverty and 51% of people in lone parent families are in poverty - SMC 2023 Measuring Poverty Report.

ELF has a significant impact on families with 63% (n=13,166) of successful application from 1st April 2023 – 29th February 2024 from households with children.

In 2023/2024 the Household Support Fund reached 27,97 households with 4-19 year olds and 6,499 households with 2-4 year olds eligible for free school meals, providing support to families through supermarket vouchers to help with costs of essential living items.

Families going through key transitions

Families experiencing redundancy, onset of long term health conditions or events resulting in resettling into the community may be at risk of financial hardship and not having their basic needs met.

The ELF fund supports families who meet the eligibility criteria to purchase necessities for their children such as food, fuel and furniture. The aim of the fund is also to support families resettling in the community after fleeing domestic abuse, or a stay in a hostel due to homelessness or as a result of an emergency.

Families who have new caring responsibilities and family members ability to fulfil caring roles

Evidence shows significant numbers of unpaid carers are finding themselves in poverty and financial hardship as a result of their caring role. 28% of carers live in poverty compared to 20% of those not in a caring role – Joseph Rowntree Foundation UK Poverty 2024 report.

The interventions set out in this decision will have a positive impact on carers by providing support to those in exceptional financial hardship with essential items, helping to improve their wellbeing and that of their care recipient.

Families before, during and after couple separation

The highest number of applications for ELF was from lone parents who accounted for 47% (n=9842) of successful applications between 1st April 2023 – 29th February 2024, with the majority citing 'exceptional pressure' as the reason for application. Although the interventions set out in this decision is unlikely to prevent separation it can be beneficial after this occurs, delivering better outcomes for those children and their parents.

What actions have already been taken to mitigate any negative impacts?:

How could you strengthen any positive impact(s)?: We will have different marketing approaches for different groups of people, for example pharmacy bags for carers and for children in receipt of free school meals, the schools will distribute vouchers directly to the families.

We aim to remove barriers to the collection and application process by distributing the funds via as many vehicles and access points as possible within local communities, as well as the Essex wide Essential Living Fund

Scheme which can be applied for online and over the telephone.

Supermarket vouchers are given directly to individuals and families so they can purchase goods in accordance with their own preferences and cultural requirements.

Crime & Disorder

Crime and disorder

Nature of impact: None

The misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances

Nature of impact: None

Re-offending

Nature of impact: None

Serious violence

Nature of impact: None

Rationale for assessment, including data used to assess the impact:

The interventions set out in this decision is not designed to prevent crime or substance misuse therefore no impact has been selected.

(If negative impact assessed) What actions will be undertaken to mitigate negative impacts, including timescales:

What actions have already been taken to mitigate any negative impacts?:

N/A

How could you strengthen any positive impact(s)?:

Climate

Does your decision / policy involve development or re-development of buildings or infrastructure?: No

Does your decision / policy take place in, or make use of, existing buildings or infrastructure?: No

Does your decision / policy involve elements connected to transport, travel or vehicles? This includes travel needs / requirements of both service users and staff (including staff you're planning to recruit): No

Are you undertaking a procurement exercise?: No

Does your decision / policy involve the purchase of goods or materials?: No

Will any waste be generated by this decision? This includes waste from construction, waste generated by service users / staff, and waste generated by replacing existing products / materials with new: No

Action plan to address and monitor adverse impacts

Does your ECIA indicate that the policy or decision would have a medium or high adverse impact on one or more of the groups / areas identified?: No

Details of person completing the form

I confirm that this has been completed based on the best information available and in following ECC guidance: I confirm that this has been completed based on the best information available and in following ECC guidance

Date ECIA completed: 17/04/2024

Name of person completing the ECIA: Rachel Amoss

Email address of person completing the ECIA: rachel.amoss2@essex.gov.uk

Your function: Children, Families and Education

Your service area: Commissioning

Your team: Commissioning

Are you submitting this ECIA on behalf of another function, service area or team?: No

Email address of Head of Service: clare.burrell@essex.gov.uk