

Delegated Cabinet Member Key Decision Report

Decision Maker and Portfolio area:	Cllr Arooj Shah, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Reform & Regeneration
Date of Decision:	1st May 2024
Subject:	Proposed Utilisation of Household Support Fund 5 Grant Allocation
Report Author:	Fran Lautman, Head of Customer and Digital Experience
Ward (s):	All

Reason for the decision: This report seeks delegated Cabinet Member approval to allocate grant funding of £2,419,369.23 from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to Oldham Council to deliver the Household Support Fund over the period 1 April to 30 September 2024. Options for delivery of the scheme are outlined within the report.

Summary: The Household Support Fund is designed to support vulnerable households in most need with the cost of essentials through cash, vouchers or in kind. The fund is intended to cover a wide range of low-income households including:

- families with children of all ages,
- pensioners,
- unpaid carers,
- care leavers,
- disabled people,
- larger families,
- single-person households and
- those struggling with one-off financial shocks or unforeseen events.

The grant should primarily be allocated to support with the costs of energy, food, water and other essential living needs in accordance with DWP guidance.

What are the alternative option(s) to be considered? Please give the Two options have been considered to deliver the scheme funding. Both options are set out within the body of the report. Data and insight have been used to inform the proposed options in addition to engagement with the teams involved in delivery.

reason(s) for recommendation(s):

Three thematic areas have been established to formulate priority areas for allocation of the grant funding:

- children and young people
- access to crisis support and
- housing and homelessness support.

Costs to administer the schemes will also be incurred as in previous rounds of Household Support Fund. This includes staffing the council's Helpline as the central point of resident support in addition to print, postage and communications costs.

The recommended option is set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Household Support Fund 5, Option 2 - Recommended Option

Area of Expenditure	Option 2 (preferred option) £m
Food Support for 19,000 children eligible for Free School Meals including pre-school, young people and care-leavers of college age: £15 over May half-term £60 over summer holidays	1.425
Additional support for the Holiday Activity and Food programme in May half term and summer holiday to expand offer to include universal access	0.150
Additional support for the Warm Homes Team to provide fuel vouchers in crisis situations and small measures to increase energy efficiency	0.200
Supermarket vouchers to support with access to food and essential supplies in crisis situations (HUGGG vouchers)	0.200
Housing and homelessness support	0.200
Local Welfare Provision	0.025
Enlisting support in partnership with funding administered by Action Together, from the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector to provide support across a breadth of low-income households in the following areas: - essential clothing and bedding - essential items including food, toiletries and baby items	0.100
Foodbank - support with stock	0.020
Scheme delivery costs	0.099
TOTAL	2.419
GRANT VALUE	2.419

Recommendation(s): Option 2 reflects a balanced scheme that considers the broadest reach in balancing support across the breadth of low-income households as close to the first point of contact as possible whilst fulfilling the grant funding criteria within the limited time allocation.

Implications:

*What are the **financial** implications?* On 26 March 2024, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) issued final guidance and allocations for round 5 of the Household Support Fund Grant (HSF). Oldham's allocation is £2,419,369.

The grant is to fund expenditure outlined in the grant determination from the 1 April to 30 September 2024. The grant is paid in arrears and Authorities are required to submit a Delivery Plan by 10 May 2024 and make 2 statements of grant and management information returns (MI). The interim MI report is required by 19 July 2024 and this will be used to determine an interim grant payment. The final MI return is due on the 30 September 2022 and following verification a final grant payment will be made.

Option 2, Table 1 outlines the recommended allocation of the grant all of which are in line with the grant conditions. This option covers the spend of the HSG in full with no requirement to augment the offer with additional resources.

(Chris Kelsall, Assistant Director of Finance)

*What are the **procurement** implications?*

As there appears to be no reference to any requirement for spending with third parties in the use of this Grant Funding for the delivery of the Household Support Fund, there are no procurement implications associated with it. However, in any circumstances where in order to deliver the Household Support Fund any third-party support is required, the department should look to engage with procurement at the earliest possible stage to ensure full compliance with Public Procurement Law and Council CPRs.

(Jasmin Banks – Lee, Head of Procurement)

*What are the **legal** implications?*

The recommended option is supported. There is funding available, and the affected individuals would be the most financially in need within the borough. There would likely be a Council reputational risk if the funding is not utilised and administered to those in need within the borough.

It is advised that the Customer Support Centre Team familiarise themselves well with any specific grant funding conditions and ensure that such conditions are adhered to.

The Council is required to send a delivery plan to the DWP on how it intends to administer the funding to applicants. It is important that the Council's plan is as equitable to all as possible and that the Council adheres to its intended delivery plan.

Support and guidance can be sought from the Council's Legal team on a continued basis through-out the grant period.

(Alex Bougatef, Interim Assistant Borough Solicitor)

What are the *Human Resources* implications?

No workforce implications, scheme will be covered within existing workforce capacity.

(Vikki Morris, Assistant Director HR and OD)

Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment

An Impact Assessment has been undertaken to ensure we have considered cohorts with protected characteristics and that the scheme provides appropriate support. This is included at Appendix C.

What are the *property* implications

There are no property implications.

(Katy Webster, Assistant Director Property and Projects)

Risks:

The proposed option of utilising the DWP funding for the round 5 of the Household Support Fund Grant will provide an opportunity to support vulnerable households in Oldham. The service should ensure all grant conditions are complied with and that there is sufficient monitoring of the project to ensure it fits with the allocation guidance and the timelines and for reporting provided by the DWP.

(Vicki Gallacher, Head of Insurance and Information Governance)

Co-operative agenda

HSF 5 provides for emergency financial support and advice to enable residents to cope in a crisis and maximise their income in the longer term. This aligns with the Council's co-operative agenda which seeks to create thriving communities, uplift every resident and support early intervention and prevention.

(Steve Hughes, Assistant Director Policy, Strategy and Performance)

Has the relevant Legal Officer confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution?

Yes

Has the relevant Finance Officer confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget? Yes

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? No

Reason for urgent report This item has not been published on the forward plan for the required 28 clear days and therefore, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has given his consent to this item being considered under the general exception rules.

Reason for exemption from call in The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny has agreed to this item being exempt from call in because of the exceptional timeline to submit the Delivery Plan for the Household Support Fund to DWP.

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- Reason why this Is a Key Decision**
- (1) to result in the local authority incurring expenditure or the making of savings which are, significant (over £250k) having regard to the local authority's budget for the service or function to which the decision relates and
 - (2) to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more Wards or electoral divisions in the area of the local authority.

The Key Decision made as a result of this report will be published within 48 hours.

This item has been included on the Forward Plan under reference ESR-04-24.

There are no background papers for this report

Report Author Sign-off:	
Fran Lautman	Head of Customer and Digital Experience
Date:	Tuesday 30 April 2024

1. Background

- 1.1 Following the announcement from the Chancellor on 6 March in the Spring Budget, DWP wrote to County and Unitary councils on 26 March 2024 with notification of grant funding allocations to deliver the fifth round of Household Support Fund. Oldham Council was allocated £2,419,369.23 over the 6-month funding period 1 April to 30 September 2024.
- 1.2 Scheme guidance from DWP set out the focus for the funding as follows. The Household Support Fund is designed to support vulnerable households in most need with the cost of essentials through cash, vouchers or in kind. The fund is intended to cover a wide range of low-income households including:
 - families with children of all ages,
 - pensioners,
 - unpaid carers,
 - care leavers,
 - disabled people,
 - larger families,
 - single-person households and
 - those struggling with one-off financial shocks or unforeseen events.
- 1.3 The grant should primarily be allocated to support with the costs of energy (for heating, lighting and cooking), food, water (for household purposes including sewerage) and other essential living needs in accordance with scheme guidance.
- 1.4 Councils must determine individual eligibility for assistance and how assistance will be provided whether directly by the Authority or through a third party. The Household Support Fund is not limited to residents in receipt of benefits. As part of their offer, every Authority must operate at least part of their scheme via applications - in other words, residents should have the opportunity to come forward to ask for support.
- 1.5 By exception and where existing household support has been exhausted, councils may allocate grant funds to supporting with specific housing costs. Councils may also allocate a limited proportion of the grant to fund the provision of advice to individuals in meeting their essential living needs in the long term and complement other assistance provided under the scheme.
- 1.6 Authorities must complete a delivery plan in a template provided by DWP to outline the intentions for the fund and the ways in which they intend funding to be allocated. Delivery plans must be submitted to DWP by 10 May 2024. Councils must maintain reliable, accessible and up to date accounting recording with an adequate audit trail for all expenditure.
- 1.7 Councils are required to publish information about how to access support funded by Household Support Fund on their website.
- 1.8 Changes from previous Household Support Fund schemes include funding for evaluation activities is now considered eligible spend as admin costs, any publicity should make clear that funding is provided by UK Government and Delivery Plans must be signed off by the Section 151 officer and responsible Cabinet Member before

submission to DWP. Admin costs should be kept to reasonable levels and around 5% of total expenditure.

2. Approach to developing the Oldham scheme

2.1 The proposed options to deliver the Household Support Fund have been informed by data and insight including from the previous scheme and from the council's cost of living response. Three thematic areas have been established to formulate allocation of grant funding:

Children and Young People

2.2 As at March 2024, 42.2% of children in Oldham are living in Relative Poverty (DWP, Children in Low Income Families). A significant allocation of funds continues to be allocated as in previous schemes to prevent child hunger during the summer holiday period and extending access to the Government funded Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) scheme.

2.3 As of January 2024, Free School Meals eligibility was 32.7% across Oldham. Several neighbourhoods had significantly higher rates than the Oldham average including Holts at 63.8% and Higginsshaw/ Oldham Edge at 62.7%.

2.4 The preferred option continues the scheme delivered in the first six months of 2023/24 including May half-term at £15 per eligible child and £60 over the school holiday period. This captures a cohort of 19,000 children from preschool age up to and including young people and care leavers of college age.

2.5 The preferred option continues (as delivered in the first six months of 2023/24) our local decision to expand the Government funded HAF scheme to include low-income households above the Free School Meals threshold to ensure that children from low-income households can receive a hot meal and enriching activity. We will ensure that the 688 children (as at April 2024) living in Temporary Accommodation can also access the offer.

Crisis support

2.6 Council and partner services continue to experience increased demand for crisis support. The council Helpline received a 35% increase in calls in January and February 2024 in comparison to the same period in 2023. Within this same period, Oldham Foodbank delivered 8% more deliveries compared to 2023. All options include sustaining Helpline capacity and expertise (captured within scheme delivery costs) to ensure residents can access crisis support and be signposted and/or referred to partner services for wider support including personal budgeting, debt advice and health and wellbeing. We will also proactively promote the Helpline service targeting the range of low-income households outlined in the DWP guidance. The preferred option also includes a one-off award of £20,000 to the Foodbank to increase and sustain stock levels to meet current levels of demand. Current stock levels are challenging, and this funding reflects that position.

2.7 According to the Spring Greater Manchester Residents Survey, 55% of Oldham residents reported that it's difficult to afford energy costs in comparison to 48% average across GM. All options considered continue to invest in the emergency fuel

voucher scheme as delivered by the Warm Homes team. This provides essential and a swift response to residents across all low-income households to keep their homes and families warm. We will actively promote the Warm Homes scheme to the low-income cohorts outlined within the scheme guidance.

- 2.8 The recommended option focuses on bolstering existing crisis funds accessible to all low-income households including emergency fuel support via Warm Homes Oldham and supermarket vouchers (HUGGG) to support with food and essential items. The demand for HUGGG vouchers exceeded the amount allocated in 2023/24. The breadth of teams who can issue supermarket vouchers will be increased particularly to those working with low-income households outlined within the scheme guidance to ensure crisis support can be provided at the first point of contact wherever possible.
- 2.9 As in previous Household Support Fund schemes, provision has been made for crisis support delivered directly by the council and partners across the voluntary, community, faith, and social enterprise sector co-ordinated by Action Together. This ensures that residents can access support via several routes depending on their needs and circumstances across the range of low-income households outlined in the DWP guidance. Evaluation data from Action Together demonstrates the breadth of support provided. From April - December 2023, 10,992 awards were provided. 82% supported households with children, 9% with pensioners, 6% with disabilities and 3% other. Moving forward, we will continue to work with Action Together to ensure that support is provided across all cohorts.

Housing and Homelessness

- 2.10 In response to the housing crisis, it is proposed in accordance with DWP guidance that a proportion of funds are used to support sustainable tenancies and families living in Temporary Accommodation to prevent and relieve homelessness wherever possible. As at April 2024, 614 Households are living in temporary and commissioned accommodation including 688 children.

Scheme delivery costs

- 2.11 Costs to administer the schemes will also be incurred as in previous rounds of Household Support Fund. This includes staffing the council's Helpline as the central point of resident support in addition to print, postage and communications costs.

3. Options

- 3.1 Two options are presented for consideration.

Option 1

- 3.2 Option 1 entails delivering the same schemes delivered in 2023/24 with half the funding applied due to the difference in funding period. This is set out in Appendix A.
- 3.3 Option 1 does not provide a viable option as it does not reflect the current data and insight included within this report. Furthermore, it does not reflect the demand for the Holiday Activity and Food programme over the 6 weeks summer holidays or the demand on HUGGG vouchers or the Warm Homes Oldham Scheme.

Option 2 – Preferred Option

3.4 Option 2 is set out in Appendix B and entails:

- Delivering a scheme that maintains support offered in 2023/24 to children and young people eligible for Free School meals during May half-term at £15 per eligible child and £60 over the school holiday period. This includes a cohort of 19,000 children from preschool age up to and including young people and care leavers of college age to ensure support to all age groups.
- Delivering as in the first six months of 2023/24, our local decision to expand the Government funded Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) scheme to include low-income households above the Free School Meals threshold to ensure that children can receive a hot meal and enriching activity.
- Additional funding for Warm Homes Oldham to expand the number of emergency fuel payments that can be issued and small measures to increase energy efficiency.
- Significantly increasing the number of HUGGG vouchers and the teams that can issue them as they identify households in need of food and essential supplies. This will ensure all cohorts of low-income households can access support.
- Additional funding for housing services to enable sustainable tenancies and to provide support for families living in temporary accommodation.
- Additional funding for the council's Local Welfare Provision (LWP) scheme.
- Additional funding for the voluntary, faith, community and social enterprise sector administered by Action Together to provide practical support including essential items, food, bedding, toiletries and baby items. This includes access to support for residents with no recourse to public funds.
- Additional funding for Oldham Foodbank to reflect current stock levels.

4. Preferred Option

4.1 Option 2 reflects a balanced scheme that will have the maximum reach in providing support across the breath of low-income households as close to the first point of contact as possible whilst fulfilling the grant funding criteria within the limited time allocation.

5. Appendices

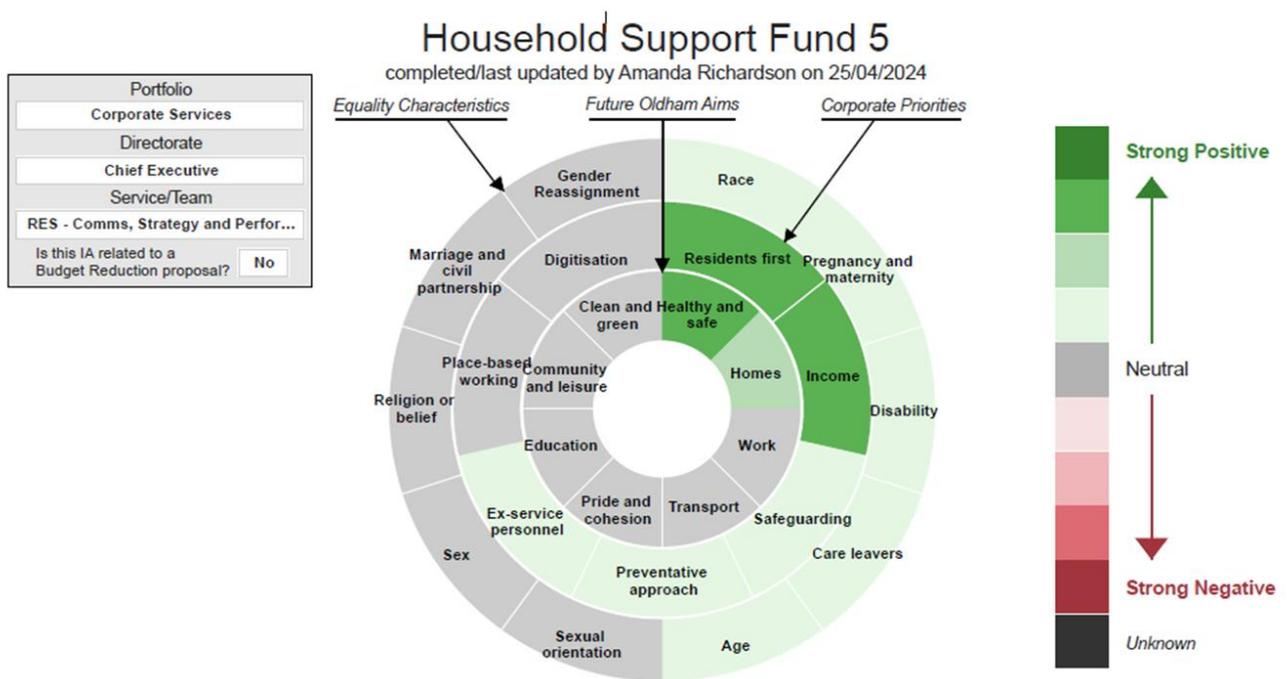
Appendix A: Household Support Fund 5, Option 1

Proposed Area of Expenditure	Option 1 2024/25 £m
Food Support for 19,000 children eligible for Free School Meals including pre-school, young people and care-leavers of college age: £15 over May half-term £60 over summer holidays	1.485
Additional support for the Holiday Activity and Food programme in May half term and summer holiday to expand offer to include universal access	0.075
Payment to support fuel costs for carers in receipt of Council Tax Reduction	0.050
Payment to support fuel costs for disabled residents in receipt of Council Tax Reduction	0.270
Payment to Housing Benefit claimants not in receipt of Council Tax Reduction	0.030
Additional support for the Warm Homes Team to provide fuel vouchers in crisis situations and small measures to increase energy efficiency	0.100
Supermarket vouchers to support with access to food and essential supplies in crisis situations (HUGGG vouchers)	0.025
Housing and Homelessness support	0.100
Local Welfare Provision	0.038
Enlisting support in partnership with funding administered by Action Together, from the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector to provide support in the following areas: - essential clothing and bedding - essential items including food, toiletries and baby items	0.150
Age UK	0.050
Scheme delivery costs	0.047
TOTAL	2.420
GRANT VALUE	2.419

Appendix B: Household Support Fund, Option 2 – Preferred Option

Area of Expenditure	Option 2 (preferred option) £m
Food Support for 19,000 children eligible for Free School Meals including pre-school, young people and care-leavers of college age: £15 over May half-term £60 over summer holidays	1.425
Additional support for the Holiday Activity and Food programme in May half term and summer holiday to expand offer to include universal access	0.150
Additional support for the Warm Homes Team to provide fuel vouchers in crisis situations and small measures to increase energy efficiency	0.200
Supermarket vouchers to support with access to food and essential supplies in crisis situations (HUGGG vouchers)	0.200
Housing and homelessness support	0.200
Local Welfare Provision	0.025
Enlisting support in partnership with funding administered by Action Together, from the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector to provide support across a breadth of low-income households in the following areas: - essential clothing and bedding - essential items including food, toiletries and baby items	0.100
Foodbank - support with stock	0.020
Scheme delivery costs	0.099
TOTAL	2.419
GRANT VALUE	2.419

Appendix C: Equality Impact Assessment



Equality Characteristics

Category	Impact	Likely	Duration	Impact Score	Comment
Gender Reassignment	Neutral	Very Likely	Short Term	0	
Marriage and civil partnership	Neutral	Very Likely	Short Term	0	
Religion or belief	Neutral	Very Likely	Short Term	0	
Sex	Neutral	Very Likely	Short Term	0	
Sexual orientation	Neutral	Very Likely	Short Term	0	
Age	Moderate Positive	Possible	Short Term	1	The HSF is a short term (6 months) programme of investment to assist residents in financial crisis with the costs of essentials. The fund is not being targeted to specific protected groups, hence the impacts are moderately positive rather than strongly positive on those groups; except for residents on low incomes where the impact is stronger.
Care leavers	Moderate Positive	Possible	Short Term	1	The HSF is a short term (6 months) programme of investment to assist residents in financial crisis with the costs of essentials. The fund is not being targeted to specific protected groups, hence the impacts are moderately positive rather than strongly positive on those groups; except for residents on low incomes where the impact is stronger.
Disability	Moderate Positive	Possible	Short Term	1	The HSF is a short term (6 months) programme of investment to assist residents in financial crisis with the costs of essentials. The fund is not being targeted to specific protected groups, hence the impacts are moderately positive rather than strongly positive on those groups; except for residents on low incomes where the impact is stronger.
Pregnancy and maternity	Moderate Positive	Possible	Short Term	1	The HSF is a short term (6 months) programme of investment to assist residents in financial crisis with the costs of essentials. The fund is not being targeted to specific protected groups, hence the impacts are moderately positive rather than strongly positive on those groups; except for residents on low incomes where the impact is stronger.
Race	Moderate Positive	Possible	Short Term	1	The HSF is a short term (6 months) programme of investment to assist residents in financial crisis with the costs of essentials. The fund is not being targeted to specific protected groups, hence the impacts are moderately positive rather than strongly positive on those groups; except for residents on low incomes where the impact is stronger.

Corporate Priorities

Category	Impact	Likely	Duration	Impact Score	Comment
Digitisation	Neutral	Very Likely	Short Term	0	
Place-based working	Neutral	Very Likely	Short Term	0	
Ex-service personnel	Moderate Positive	Possible	Short Term	1	The HSF is a short term (6 months) programme of investment to assist residents in financial crisis with the costs of essentials. The fund is not being targeted to specific groups, hence the impacts are moderately positive rather than strongly positive.
Preventative approach	Moderate Positive	Possible	Short Term	1	Following the initial emergency it is intended to help residents identify the underlying issue of their financial insecurity and provide further advice, support and signposting to enable them to avoid future crisis.
Safeguarding	Moderate Positive	Possible	Short Term	1	By enabling households to manage in a crisis, providing for essentials and ensuring children in receipt of Free School Meals can access food during the holidays, the HSF is likely to contribute positively to safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults.
Income	Strong Positive	Very Likely	Short Term	4	HSF funding is specifically focused on the provision of emergency support when people are in financial crisis and hence residents on lower incomes will very likely benefit as they are more likely to be nearer a point of crisis than other more affluent residents.
Residents first	Strong Positive	Very Likely	Short Term	4	The fund enables the Council and other partners to provide financial advice and support initially in an emergency, but also in the longer term, by helping residents to maximise income.

Future Oldham Aims

Category	Impact	Likely	Duration	Impact Score	Comment
Clean and green	Neutral	Very Likely	Short Term	0	
Community and leisure Education	Neutral	Very Likely	Short Term	0	
	Neutral	Very Likely	Short Term	0	
Pride and cohesion	Neutral	Very Likely	Short Term	0	
Transport	Neutral	Very Likely	Short Term	0	
Work	Neutral	Very Likely	Short Term	0	
Homes	Strong Positive	Possible	Short Term	2	HSF can be used in exceptional circumstances to help maintain sustainable tenancies and help avoid eviction and homelessness.
	Strong Positive	Very Likely	Short Term	4	HSF funding is available to those in need of help in a crisis to ensure that residents can afford the essentials, such as food, energy, clothing and help people in crisis to avoid homelessness by supporting sustainable tenancies.

Strong Positive Impacts that are Possible

Category	Impact	Likely	Duration	Impact Score	What action can be taken to increase the likelihood that positive impacts are realised?	Action(s)	Owner(s)	Timescale(s)
Homes	Strong Positive	Possible	Short Term	2	Action will be relatively limited as the guidance from DWP is that HSF can only be used to help with housing costs in exceptional circumstances where other support is not available.	Ensure within the guidelines that support for homelessness prevention is maximised.	Fran Lautman & Vicky Wood	01/09/2024