



LEAD MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

DECISIONS to be made by the Lead Member for Children and Families,
Councillor Bob Bowdler

MONDAY, 23 MARCH 2026 AT 3.45 PM OR AT THE CONCLUSION OF LEAD MEMBER FOR EDUCATION AND INCLUSION, SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY

REMOTE MEETING VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

AGENDA

1. Decisions made by the Lead Cabinet Member on 10 September 2024 (*Pages 3 - 4*)
2. Disclosures of interests
Disclosure by all Members present of personal interests in matters on the Agenda, the nature of any interest and whether the Member regards the interest as prejudicial under the terms of the Code of Conduct
3. Urgent items
Notification of items which the Lead Members consider to be urgent and propose to take at the end of the appropriate part of the Agenda
4. Crisis and Resilience Fund - East Sussex Delivery Plan Framework (*Pages 5 - 14*)
Report by the Director of Children's Services
5. Any urgent items previously notified under agenda item 3

PHILIP BAKER
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13 March 2026

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NOTE: *As part of the County Council's drive to increase accessibility to its public meetings, this meeting will be broadcast live on its website. The live broadcast is accessible at:*
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LEAD MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

DECISIONS made by the Lead Member for Children and Families, Councillor Bob Bowdler, on 10 September 2024 at Remote Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Councillor Alan Shuttleworth spoke on item 4 (see minute 5)

1. DECISIONS MADE BY THE LEAD CABINET MEMBER ON 14 DECEMBER 2023

1.1 The Lead Member approved as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2023.

2. DISCLOSURES OF INTERESTS

2.1 There were none.

3. URGENT ITEMS

3.1 There were none.

4. REPORTS

4.1 Reports referred to in the minutes below are contained in the minute book.

5. REGIONAL CARE COOPERATIVE PATHFINDER PROJECTS

5.1 The Lead Member considered a report by the Director of Children's Services.

DECISIONS

5.2 The Lead Member RESOLVED to:

- 1) Endorse for East Sussex County Council continuing Regional Care Cooperative Pathfinder activity and in doing so agree for East Sussex County Council to enter into relevant agreements with the Department for Education and other Local Authorities as appropriate;
- 2) Delegate authority to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children and Families, to take other relevant actions, including but not limited to: finalising the terms of and entering into required contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision including negotiating, finalising and entering into relevant legal agreements such as Partnership Agreements or award of contract(s), as required to implement this decision; and
- 3) Agree to receive a further report on the development of the Regional Care Cooperative later in the year when more detailed information about the implications of the project for East Sussex County Council are available.

REASONS

5.3 As outlined in the report the placements market is in a fragile position, Local Authority budgets are under extreme pressure, a significant factor is the current sufficiency of and spend on placements. There is a clear need to do something differently. The Regional Care Cooperative represents the best prospect of developing new and innovative ways to secure the placements needed for looked after children. The Department for Education are providing generous funding to design a new approach and access to capital grants that are not available to authorities who are not part of a Regional Care Cooperative pathfinder.

Report to: Lead Member for Children and Families

Date of meeting: 23 March 2026

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: Crisis and Resilience Fund – East Sussex Delivery Plan Framework

Purpose: To consider the proposed spend of the Crisis Resilience Fund in East Sussex, including services for Children and Families

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Lead Member is recommended to:

- 1) Note the background to CRF and the work that is completed and ongoing to develop our local East Sussex CRF Delivery Plan
 - 2) Agree to the overall approach and high-level Delivery Plan Framework, noting that detail will be further developed and appropriate approvals sought for specific elements of the scheme; and
 - 3) Agree that decisions on the detailed use of CRF is delegated to the Director for Adult Social Care & Health, in consultation with the Director for Children's Services.
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1 Background

- 1.1 The [Crisis Resilience Fund](#) (CRF) is a new national funding programme for local authorities in England, launching on 1 April 2026 and running to 31 March 2029. It was announced as part of the June 2025 Spending Review and formally confirmed in Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) guidance published in January 2026. The CRF provides £1 billion per year to councils on a multi-year, ring-fenced basis.
- 1.2 The CRF replaces the Household Support Fund (HSF) and incorporates elements of Discretionary Housing Payments, with the explicit intention of moving from short-term crisis mitigation towards prevention, financial resilience, and reduced reliance on emergency support such as food banks.
- 1.3 The expected allocation to East Sussex is £6.7m in 2026/27 and in 2027/28, excluding CRF Housing Payments which will go straight to District & Borough Councils in these years. An additional £852,286 will be added to the main Fund in 2028/29 when Housing Payments are merged with the main Fund.
- 1.4 Significant planning and engagement has taken place in East Sussex to develop a set of high-levels proposals for the use of CRF. This development work has included all key stakeholders and will be ongoing throughout the course of the development and implementation.
- 1.5 This paper sets out the expectations of the CRF and requests approval for a Delivery Plan Framework for Year 1 2026/27, which will go on to form the basis of the formal Delivery Plan which will be submitted to the Department of Work and Pensions on 1 July 2026.

2 Supporting information

2.1 Key Objectives of the Crisis Resilience Fund

The primary objective of The Fund is to both provide a safety net for those on low incomes who encounter a financial shock and to invest in building local financial resilience to enable individuals and communities to better deal with crises in the long-term, reducing crisis need.

National guidance identifies three main outcomes that all local schemes are expected to address:

- **Provision of effective crisis support**

Rapid, dignified assistance for households facing a financial shock (for example sudden loss of income, unexpected essential costs, or housing pressures).

- **Improving individual's financial resilience**

Activity that helps people stabilise their finances and better withstand future shocks, including advice, income maximisation, and debt support.

- **Bolstering local level support landscape**

Strengthening the wider local support landscape, including partnership working with voluntary and community organisations, to provide joined-up and preventative responses.

2.2 **Key Beneficiaries**

The primary beneficiaries of the CRF are low-income households experiencing, or at immediate risk of, financial crisis, including individuals with disabilities, substance dependency, those experiencing homelessness, care leavers, single-person households, unpaid carers, families with children and Pension age households.

Local authorities retain discretion to determine eligibility and targeting, within national expectations and reporting requirements.

2.3 **Key Expectations of Local Authorities**

Under the CRF, councils are expected to:

- Deliver a Crisis Payment scheme that operates all year round.
- Adopt a “cash-first” approach, prioritising direct financial assistance over vouchers or in-kind support wherever appropriate.
- Develop a local support landscape which ensures that people accessing crisis support are linked to resilience services and that links between these services are more joined up.
- Design schemes that balance immediate crisis response with preventative and resilience-building activity.
- Work in partnership with district and borough councils, the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, and advice providers.
- Develop and submit a formal three-year Delivery Plan to DWP (required by 1 July 2026).
- Collect and submit management information and outcomes data across crisis, housing, resilience, and community coordination activity.

2.4 **Relationship to the Household Support Fund (HSF)**

2.4.1 HSF was introduced in 2021 as a temporary response to the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis and was delivered through a series of short-term extensions, typically 6 or 12 months at a time. It was primarily focused on meeting immediate needs (food, energy, water, essential items) and offered limited ability for councils to plan strategically or invest in long-term prevention. Support was primarily delivered through cash, vouchers or in-kind direct support to households.

2.4.2 In contrast, the CRF is a multi-year (3-year) settlement, providing stability and planning certainty. There is an explicit shift towards prevention and resilience, not solely crisis mitigation, and a stronger emphasis on cash-first support and reducing dependency on emergency food parcels (including through food banks). There is a revised national framework for outcomes, monitoring, and data collection and CRF incorporates elements of housing-related crisis support, enabling more joined-up responses. It will incorporate CRF Housing Payments (previously Discretionary Housing Payments or DHPs) in Year 3.

2.5 Potential Contribution to East Sussex County Council (ESCC) Strategic Priorities

The CRF presents significant opportunities to support key ESCC priorities, including:

- Preventative approaches in Adult Social Care by addressing financial stressors that exacerbate health, care, and safeguarding needs.
- Children and families' objectives, particularly in relation to Earlier Intervention and Family Help.
- Cost-of-living resilience for residents, maximising resident income, reducing escalation into statutory services.
- VCSE sustainability and partnership working, supporting local organisations within a strategic, longer-term funding framework.
- Place-based and system working, aligning with district and borough councils and system partners.

2.6 Local Engagement with Stakeholders

To develop our proposals for the use of CRF, significant stakeholder engagement has taken place and continues. This includes:

- ESCC participated in **DWP policy development sessions** in summer 2025, for which the Partnerships Team gathered local stakeholder feedback to inform the development of CRF.
- Workshop activities with all partners at the **Multi-agency Financial Inclusion Steering Group** - October and November 2025.
- Scoping discussions with **Adult Social Care, Public Health, Children's Services and District & Borough Councils** - November – December 2025.
- **CRF Reference Group** with internal departments and external stakeholders represented.

The CRF Reference Group has endorsed the proposals set out in this report.

2.7 Local Draft Delivery Plan Framework

2.7.1 Our outline proposals for CRF are set out in Appendix 1 to the report. These are organised into the following CRF components, which will be required by the DWP for our formal Delivery Plan:

- Crisis Payments: Providing support to those in crisis.
- Resilience Services: Funding for services delivered by Authorities or external providers to improve financial resilience.
- Community Coordination: Investment in activities that connect and enhance the local support landscape.

2.7.2 We have also estimated some of the likely costs of Scheme Management and Development as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

2.7.3 The level of detail underpinning these overall proposals varies, with some elements being based on existing or well-known service models that we will seek to continue or enhance, and others requiring detailed scoping to specify.

2.7.4 Initial conversations have been held with procurement to explore the options and requirements to secure services from external partners. However, our local market of provision in this area is well-developed, supported by existing commissioning and funding arrangements and established partnership working approaches.

2.7.5 The overall intention will be to prioritise local delivery, collaboration, support 'what works' and follow the best practices developed through the VCSE Commissioning Excellence Programme. Stakeholders are agreed that a significant element of CRF are best delivered through local VCSE partners and therefore direct delivery through ESCC or District & Borough Councils will reduce.

2.7.6 The framework of investment from HSF to CRF does represent a significant shift from crisis support to prevention, resilience and infrastructure – but this is required by the guidance and is supported by local stakeholders.

2.7.7 For illustration, approximately 90% of HSF was allocated to direct support to households (in cash, vouchers or in-kind support), whereas in CRF our investment in crisis support is expected to be just under 60% in Year 1. However, our evidence suggests that this is manageable and appropriate because:

- Not all 'demand' for direct support through HSF represents a clear assessed need for crisis support. For example, Huggg vouchers are currently issued with standard eligibility criteria, and District & Borough HSF payments have limited eligibility thresholds and no individual assessment. It is very likely that not all recipients of HSF will come forward for CRF crisis payments, which will have more structured criteria and eligibility requirements.
- Most elements of HSF are delivered without prevention, resilience building and income maximisation. With CRF, the support infrastructure will be significantly increased. This will increase the capacity of local organisations to help households deal with the root causes of their vulnerability and should reduce the need for crisis payments.
- In some areas, HSF was not fully spent at the end of January 2026. Whilst we do expect to use the current round of HSF fully, there is some evidence of a reduction in need/demand for this type of support, but with ongoing high demand for advice and other resilience-building support.
- We anticipate retaining local discretion at an East Sussex level and a scheme management level to monitor, evaluate and adjust funding levels to different parts of the local scheme within Year 1 and particularly between years. This will be important in order to continually assess and respond to changing need and learning from our interventions and delivery partners.

2.7.8 A key opportunity with CRF is to maximise the opportunity to take a one Council approach to supporting households who are financially vulnerable, whether they are families with children or adult households. This means retaining some investment in interventions that support specific household types but also ensuring that all partners are better connected and better understand the range of support that is available to support our households and communities.

2.8 **Key Risks, Opportunities and Considerations – these will be managed through programme and project management arrangements within the ESCC Partnerships Team**

Key Risks

- Demand exceeds available funding, given rising need and static national allocations.
- Transition risk from HSF to CRF, particularly service and staff continuity in the VCSE.
- Procurement and mobilisation timescales to establish new services.
- Inconsistent access if eligibility criteria or referral routes are unclear.
- Recording infrastructure to record crisis payment recipients/ track household-level outcomes required for DWP reporting.
- Data and reporting requirement particularly across multiple service interventions.
- Smooth integration of CRF housing payments from D&Bs to unitary Authority in year 3 of the fund, managed in the context of Local Government Reorganisation.

Key Opportunities

- Ability to move from reactive to preventative support.
- Greater financial dignity and choice for residents through cash-first approaches and greater resilience.
- Improved strategic alignment across welfare, care, housing, advice, employments/skills and community support sectors and between ESCC departments.
- Stronger evidence bases to inform future local and national policy.
- Long-term investment in crisis and resilience infrastructure to positively impact the lives of East Sussex residents.

3 Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 3.1 The Crisis and Resilience Fund provides a significant opportunity to support residents and households in East Sussex and support a number of objectives of ESCC and system partners.
- 3.2 There is an expectation that services will be provided as soon as possible from the beginning of the Fund period (1st April 2026). To meet this requirement and to ensure residents and households in East Sussex have access to support as soon as possible, the rapid development and mobilisation of a number of new or enhanced services is required.
- 3.3 Therefore, the Lead Member is recommended to:
- 1) Note the background to CRF and the work that is completed and ongoing to develop our local East Sussex CRF Delivery Plan
 - 2) Agree to the overall approach and high-level Delivery Plan Framework, noting that detail will be further developed and appropriate approvals sought for specific elements of the scheme
 - 3) Agree that decisions on the detailed use of CRF is delegated to the Director for Adult Social Care & Health, in consultation with the Director for Children's Services.

Carolyn Fair

Director of Children's Services

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None.

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Appendix 1: East Sussex CRF Delivery Framework – Final Draft

- **All figures are indicative** and subject to governance and formal approval processes
- Although this information is presented in 4 categories, in practice there will be significant overlap, e.g. some services categorised as ‘Crisis Payment Scheme’ will have a resilience function/element.

Crisis Payments

- Expected expenditure in Year 1: £3,825,000 (57%) of CRF
- Spending will be dependent on demand and will be monitored throughout Year 1; this is a **maximum** spend
- Spending expected to reduce in Years 2 and 3 as Hugg vouchers cease and other services address need, freeing up additional spend for resilience services and community coordination in Years 2 and 3.
- Spending will include some administration and service costs
- Residents/households in receipt of Crisis Payments will be supported to engage with prevention/resilience support

Outline Proposals:

- Continue HUGGG vouchers for Easter and May half term in 2026 based on FSM pupil numbers of 20,000 and a 94% take-up: Easter holidays - £30 voucher, May half-term - £15 voucher. NB this would then discontinue and families would be signposted to others support from Summer 2026. This is Year 1 only expenditure. Expected cost £850,000
- Deliver Crisis Payments through ESCC Children’s Services departments in the following ways, with all families being supported holistically and with access to prevention and resilience-building services. Expected cost **up to** £1m.
 - Operational teams supporting level 4 vulnerable families
 - Prevention and early intervention through the Family Help service
 - Intentionally homeless families
 - Care Leavers
- Holiday Activities Fund (HAF) – extend scope and reach of HAF to reach more families, targeting areas of highest need. Expected cost - £325,000.
- East Sussex Crisis Payments Scheme – set up VCSE managed service/services for Crisis Payments for all other cohorts not benefitting from other schemes, targeting areas of highest need. Expected cost **up to** £1.5m (inclusive of admin, service costs)
- Goods in Kind – set up a VCSE managed fund to support direct access to goods in kind, where this is the greatest need and most effective solution to address underlying need. Expected cost **up to** £150,000 (inclusive of admin, service costs)

Resilience Services

- Expected expenditure in Year 1: £2,075,000 (30% of CRF)
- Funding is expected to be allocated through grants or existing contracts, to reduce service disruption and maintain flexibility

Outline Proposals:

- A CRF funded Advice Offer, delivered through trusted partners, which will include:
 - General advice services to focus on financial resilience e.g. housing insecurity, barriers related to disability, mental health, caring responsibilities, financial literacy, digital exclusion, community support and social networks, access to income smoothing tools such as affordable credit and insurance. Expected cost £250,000
 - Specialist money advice services – accredited specialist money advice focussing on increasing income, reducing priority debt and building savings. Expected cost £250,000
 - Welfare Benefits services - ensure benefits maximisation support is available all age and cross-County. Expected cost £125,000
 - Funding to support service co-location (see below in Community Coordination)
- Employability support. Employability and wellbeing for NEET young people (16–24) and adults furthest from the workplace across East Sussex. Help with employment skills/progression and with financial literacy/capability. Expected cost £525,000
- Food Partnerships – food sustainability and food security projects. Expected cost £300,000
- Tenancy-finder and tenancy sustainment support - co-located with housing authorities. Expected cost £275,000
- Small Grants programme, accessible to small grassroots organisations working with seldom heard, protected characteristics or specific vulnerabilities which other services may not reach. Expected cost £250,000
- Information, education and capability. Projects will include but are not limited to below. Expected cost - £100,000
 - Income Maximisation campaigns
 - Financial education and capability projects
 - Digital Inclusion projects
 - Support to manage care costs
 - Cost of Living communications

Community Coordination

➤ Expected expenditure in Year 1: £325,000 (6% of CRF)

- Co-located advice. Additional funding to support the co-location of advice and specialist advice in priority locations to support a holistic and person-centred resilience offer. Expected cost £200,000 (NB will be built into advice offer above, increase total advice offer budget to £825,000)
- Training, staff support and development, to support the workforce to be skilled up across the system to take a trauma informed, empowering approach to understanding the behaviours within households/families experiencing poverty, and to support staff welfare and resilience. NB this will link with other related programmes where appropriate. Expected cost £75,000
- VCSE – volunteering/infrastructure support. Expected cost £50,000

Scheme Management and Development

➤ Expected expenditure in Year 1: £450,000 (7% of CRF)

- ESCC staffing. Expected cost £300,000
 - To include staff working in Financial Inclusion Team, Children's Services, Public Health
 - Includes scheme management, administration, development and support, central costs and delivery support costs.
- Evaluation, lived experience, equalities and engagement. Expected cost £150,000
 - Evaluation of the scheme
 - Lived experience and resident/customer engagement
 - Costs of inclusion practice to ensure scheme meets the needs of protected characteristics

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