

# Household Support Fund How-to Guide



This guide offers more detailed information and advice for those who may be interested in adopting or adapting the initiative in their local area.

This document comprises the following sections (click hyperlink to skip to that section)

- [Initial Idea](#)
- [Early Development of the Project](#)
- [Accessing the Service and Engaging with Service Users](#)
- [Working with People with Lived Experience of Poverty](#)
- [Leadership, Governance and Partnership Working](#)
- [Links to Wider Policies, Strategies and Statutory Requirements](#)
- [Funding](#)
- [Staffing and Resources](#)
- [Monitoring and Evaluation](#)
- [Reach and Impact](#)
- [Learning from Experience](#)

<b>Title</b>	Household Support Fund
<b>Organisation</b>	Falkirk Council
<b>Category</b>	Fully Validated Practice
<b>Poverty Impact</b>	Mitigation and Prevention
<b>Introduction to the Project</b>	
The Household Support Fund was developed by Falkirk Council to provide cash-first support to low-income families living in the Falkirk Council area. Its primary objective is to help reduce the need for crisis support, encourage engagement with advice services, and break the stigma often associated with receiving other types of support such as vouchers or food parcels. The fund is overseen by the Fairer Falkirk team, working in partnership with trusted referral partners.	

## Household Support Fund How-to Guide



### Initial Idea

<b>Who had the initial idea?</b>
During the pandemic the need for immediate support was recognised. The initial concept was tested in January 2021 when we started to provide £20 'data top up' payments to help low-income households stay connected during the lockdown restrictions, as well as £75 'fuel' payments to people living in a low-income household who were asked to self-isolate. A cash first approach was taken with these payments, with the money going to the household and not via a voucher or other type of scheme.
<b>How did the idea for the project come about?</b>
Scottish Government provided local authorities with funding to support low-income families during the pandemic – the Household Support Fund was created from this allocated funding and built on our initial approach with data top up and fuel payments..
<b>Did you draw on any published reports / papers / research evidence or practice you had seen elsewhere to inform your plans?</b> <i>If so, please add details to the box below.</i>
Research pointing to the strength of cash first approaches was central to the project – everything was designed around this aspect. We also learned from the experience of other Councils providing similar schemes, in particular Argyll and Bute and Moray who shared details of their schemes and met with us to discuss the benefits and challenges.
<b>Who was involved in developing the initial idea of the project?</b>
Falkirk Council Fairer Falkirk Team and Revenues and Benefits Team.
<b>Were those with lived experience of poverty involved in developing the initial idea of the project?</b>
Not directly, although feedback from those who had received fuel or data top up support helped to justify the benefits of the cash first approach.

# Household Support Fund How-to Guide



<b>What funding was used, if any, to support the development of the initial idea of the project?</b>	
Additional funding from the Scottish Government to support people experiencing financial insecurity supported the initial work in this area. Falkirk Council have added further funding to allow it to continue.	
<b>What in-kind resources were needed when developing the initial idea of the project?</b>	
Facilities	Staff resources within Falkirk Council as well as trusted partner organisations
Equipment	N/A
Local Knowledge	N/A
Food and Drink	N/A
<b>What, if any, barriers did you have to overcome when developing the initial idea of the project?</b>	
Getting knowledge of the fund out to referral partners, making clear guidance, developing consistent communications - i.e., making sure our messages to referral partners and customers are consistent, understandable, and fair.	
<b>What, if anything, was helpful when developing the initial idea of the project?</b>	
Trialling the concept during Covid allowed us to test the value of cash first support on a small scale.	
<b>What was the timeline between the initial idea and the start of the project?</b>	
The fund initially ran between January 2022 and April 2022. Due to its success, further funding was secured, and the fund re-opened for a second phase in September 2022. This second phase ended in May 2023, with funding already agreed and in place for a third phase planned to open in September 2023.	
<b>Who made the decision to introduce the project?</b>	
Fairer Falkirk Manager with support from senior managers and Council Executive.	



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# Household Support Fund How-to Guide



[Return to Introduction](#)

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# Household Support Fund How-to Guide



## Early Development of the Project

<b>Did you run a pilot project or carry out a feasibility study?</b>	
Yes	
<b>What did you do? Please describe the pilot project or feasibility study.</b>	
We initially tested a cash first approach during the pandemic..	
<b>Who was involved in the work of the pilot project?</b>	
Fairer Falkirk team and Support for People service.	
<b>How, if at all, were those with lived experience of poverty involved in the pilot of the project or feasibility study?</b>	
Feedback from recipients was collated and used to help justify approach and further funding.	
<b>What funding was used, if any, for the pilot of the project or feasibility study?</b>	
Covid funding.	
<b>What in-kind resources were used for the pilot of the project or feasibility study?</b>	
<b>Facilities</b>	Staff time.
<b>Equipment</b>	N/A
<b>Local Knowledge</b>	N/A
<b>Food and Drink</b>	N/A
<b>Was the pilot project or feasibility study evaluated? <i>If yes, please provide details</i></b>	
Data top up project reviewed internally to understand value of approach	
<b>What evidence, if any, from the pilot project was used to confirm that it was working?</b>	

## Household Support Fund How-to Guide



Feedback from those who received the support as well as those referring people for support.

### **Who made the decision to continue with the project beyond the pilot or feasibility study?**

The project was worked up by the Fairer Falkirk team with input from others and approved via usual Council mechanisms.

### **How did the pilot or feasibility study inform the final design of the project?**

It helped to justify the cash first approach.

[Return to Introduction](#)

## Household Support Fund How-to Guide



### Accessing the Service and Engaging with Service Users

**Is there a referral process? If yes, how does the referral process work (self-referral, referred by other agencies, identified from an existing database)**

Specific services in Falkirk Council can refer clients they are working with for a Household Support Fund payment. Falkirk Council's Advice and Support Hubs, Community Advice, Social Work were all referral partners – in addition to external services such as Citizens Advice and local Housing Associations. This has been an effective strategy as the people who typically get support from these services are the people we want to reach with the fund. This means that referrers who typically already have a knowledge/relationship with an individual can refer them on for support at an appropriate time.

**How are potential clients made aware of the project?**

Trusted referral partners make potential clients aware of the project. We also developed a 'declare an interest' form that enabled members of the public not already engaged with support services to make the Council aware that they were interested in support. We shared this form with a charity supporting ethnic-minority households and encouraged them to share the form with people they were working with.

**How do you keep in touch with service users? Do your service users have a preferred method of contact?**

We communicate updates and decisions on referrals to both the referrers and the individuals being referred. We primarily communicate decisions via phone-call or email.

[Return to Introduction](#)

## Working with People with Lived Experience of Poverty

**Are those with lived experience of poverty involved in delivering the project? *If so, please describe below.***

Likely yes. Referral partners and staff members may have lived experience of poverty.

**Are people with lived experience of poverty involved in managing the project or project governance? *If so, please describe below.***

Likely yes.

**Are people with lived experience of poverty involved in any other aspect of the project? *If so, please describe below.***

Likely yes.

[Return to Introduction](#)



## Household Support Fund How-to Guide



### Leadership, Governance and Partnership Working

<b>Who is responsible for managing the project?</b>
Fairer Falkirk Coordinator, Support for People Development Officer
<b>Is this the only responsibility of the person managing the project? <i>If not please describe the manager's wider roles and responsibilities.</i></b>
The Fairer Falkirk Coordinator is responsible for overseeing the delivery of Free Period Products, the Income Maximisation Strategy (the Household Support Fund is one part of this), the Child Poverty Action Report as well as several other duties.
<b>Is there a Project Steering Group? <i>If yes, who is involved in this and how does it work.</i></b>
There is a Household Support Fund steering group comprised of the Fairer Falkirk Team, Advice and Support Hub Managers, Welfare Benefits team, Debt Advice Team, Scottish Welfare Fund Team and shortly the Education & Training Unit will join the group as well
<b>If there is no Steering Group, what governance arrangements are in place to review strategy and performance?</b>
N/A.

[Return to Introduction](#)

## Household Support Fund How-to Guide



### Links to Wider Policies, Strategies and Statutory Requirements

**Is the project part of a wider anti-poverty strategy? *If so, please give details.***

The Household Support Fund is a key aspect of our Income Maximisation strategy. Part of this strategy focuses on using data more effectively to target people we know are living in poverty. In the third phase of the Household Support Fund, which is due to begin in September 2023, we will use data gathered through HSF to identify those who may benefit from a more comprehensive financial health check. By using HSF data, we aim to encourage further uptake of long-term financial advice, focusing on delivering complete benefit checks to ensure individuals are receiving all the support they are entitled to.

**Is the project part of any other strategy? *If so, please give details.***

Fairer Money and Fairer Access – two aspects of the Towards a Fairer Falkirk strategy.

**Is the project delivering a service that is a statutory commitment. *If so, please give details.***

No.

[Return to Introduction](#)

## Household Support Fund How-to Guide



### Funding

<b>Who funds the project? <i>Please give details.</i></b>
Scottish Government and Falkirk Council..
<b>How much does the project cost?</b>
Approximately £975k was paid out through the first two phases of the fund. We have over £1m for the third round of the project.
<b>Is future funding based on pre-agreed outcomes or outputs being delivered?</b>
It is based on supporting an estimated number of low-income households.

[Return to Introduction](#)

## Household Support Fund How-to Guide

### Staffing and Resources

<b>Which paid staff are involved in delivering the project?</b>	
Falkirk Council, Citizens Advice, Local Housing Associations	
<b>Are volunteers involved in delivering the project? <i>Please describe their role and their contribution.</i></b>	
Fairer Falkirk Manager, Falkirk Falkirk Co-ordinator, Support for People Development Officer, Fairer Falkirk Graduate, four Modern Apprentices.	
<b>What in-kind resources do you need to deliver your project?</b>	
<b>Facilities</b>	N/A
<b>Equipment</b>	Nightingale – in-house database
<b>Local Knowledge</b>	N/A
<b>Food and Drink</b>	N/A
<b>For each of the in-kind resources listed above, who provides it?</b>	
<b>Facilities</b>	N/A
<b>Equipment</b>	Falkirk Council
<b>Local Knowledge</b>	N/A
<b>Food and Drink</b>	N/A
<b>Did you have to buy or develop new IT systems, software (databases, apps) or technology to deliver your project? <i>Please describe below.</i></b>	
We had to create the webform to capture key details about the referrer, the person being referred and their circumstances. We also tweaked an existing in-house system to allow us to store data and manage cases.	
<b>Was additional staff training required to deliver your project? <i>If so, please describe.</i></b>	

## Household Support Fund How-to Guide



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[Return to Introduction](#)

## Household Support Fund How-to Guide

### Monitoring and Evaluation

<b>What information, if any, do you collect about your project?</b>	
<b>Number of users</b>	5705 households
<b>Profile of users</b>	Individuals with low income and struggling financially
<b>Experience of users</b>	N/A
<b>Anything else</b>	Feedback from trusted referrers on the impact of the fund and how it has helped to incentivise further engagement
<b>How often is data collected? Who collects the data?</b>	
Every time a referrer submits a referral form this creates new data for us to consider. Our in-house database system collects the data and we can run reports when required.	
<b>Do you have baseline data on what things were like before the start of the project or before users started the project? <i>Please describe the type of baseline data that you have.</i></b>	
We undertook a 25-person case study after the most recent phase of the fund closed. This involved speaking to referrers about the individual's circumstances before the referral, how the payment helped and what, if any, changes occurred because of the payment..	
<b>Do you produce an annual report? <i>Please provide details of what this includes.</i></b>	
After each phase of the fund closes, a report is written to highlight the achievements of the fund, where improvements could be made, and future challenges/recommendations for next phases of the fund.	
<b>In what ways, if at all, do you use the data that you collect to adapt the service that you provide?</b>	

## Household Support Fund How-to Guide



We use the data to check we are reaching a range of people. For example, we can see what kind of people are accessing the fund. We monitor age, sex, ethnicity, individuals with health conditions or impairments, no recourse to public funds, care leavers etc. This allows us to see if certain groups are not being targeted enough.

**Have you employed an external organisation to formally evaluate your project? *If yes, please provide details.***

No.

**Do you intend to employ an external organisation to evaluate the service that you provide in the future? *If yes, please provide details.***

No.

[Return to Introduction](#)

## Household Support Fund How-to Guide



### Reach and Impact

#### What difference has the project made?

The project has provided much needed financial support to individuals at a time of great difficulty. The project has encouraged greater levels of engagement – though we recognise there is more to be achieved here. We have also been able to make connections from the project – for example strengthening the partnership between the Council and third-sector organisations.

A woman was referred to the Household Support Fund by Citizens Advice in mid-December. The case was added to the payment file on the same day the referral was made. The member of staff who was assigned the case raised it as a potential concern. The woman had no power and no money. The member of staff dealing with the case raised it as an issue to their line manager. The line manager then contacted Citizens Advice and discussed the individual's situation. The line manager was then able to contact the Scottish Welfare Fund and discuss the options available to her. Unfortunately, the individual was maxed out on their crisis grant applications, however the referrer was able to arrange for the repairs team to drop a heater off to the woman that evening – a short term but ultimately necessary action. The following morning, we paid out £260 to the woman through the Household Support Fund..

#### How do you know this? What evidence demonstrates impact (metrics, interviews, feedback)?

Interviews with referrers, feedback from recipients of the fund..

#### To what extent have the aims of the project been achieved?

Overall, the project has been successful, however there is consensus amongst stakeholders that the fund could be used to bring about even greater change than it has already. The fund is already making a positive impact in the sense that it is providing cash directly to households who really need it, however we want to use the fund to increase the number of households claiming the benefits they are entitled to, as well as raising awareness around in-kind support offerings. We can use all this information to provide an estimated financial gain per household. This will provide more concrete evidence of the extent of the fund's success.

#### How, if at all, have conditions changed since the project was introduced?



## Household Support Fund How-to Guide



The cost of living has increased significantly – this means more and more people are requiring support. Further, crisis support is becoming more common. Although the Household Support Fund is not intended to be crisis support, we are seeing this more and more.

**If yes, has the project had the capacity to meet these changing conditions and demand? *Please describe and explain below.***

We have increased payments in line with the uprate of benefits. Further, we are working closely with our colleagues at the Scottish Welfare Fund to ensure individuals are getting appropriate support at the right time.

**Has the project had any unexpected or unintended outcomes? *If so, whether positive or negative, please describe.***

N/A

**In your opinion, is the project having an impact on tackling child poverty? If so, please describe in what ways.**

During the last phase of the fund, single parents received the highest proportion of the budget by a considerable margin. As we know single parents are more likely to be in poverty, and in greater poverty, it is commendable they received the majority of funding.

The levels of funding that households receive is designed to maximise impact on tackling child poverty. Every additional person in a household received a set amount irrespective of whether they are an adult or a child. There is no upper limit so a large family will receive considerable support, in line with the considerable costs they face

[Return to Introduction](#)

## Household Support Fund How-to Guide



### Learning from Experience

<b>What is working well?</b>
The fund is efficient, easy to use for referrers, making a difference to low-income households and is attracting people to advice services who otherwise wouldn't engage.
<b>What, if anything, is working less well?</b>
The data we are gathering is not that comprehensive – this is in large part because the webform used was designed to be simple and quick to use. For the next phase of the fund, the webform will be tweaked so that better quality information comes with the submissions.
<b>What are the key learning points that you'd like to share with other practitioners? For example, is there anything that you would do differently?</b>
Designing the fund in partnership with stakeholders helps to secure greater buy-in and provides a sense of ownership and control. Communication is key – make your guidance easy to understand.
<b>What plans do you have to develop or expand the project in the future?</b>
The next phase of the fund has a bigger budget than the first two phases of the fund put together. The fund is also part of the Council's Income Maximisation strategy. We hope to use the fund to identify target groups who we know are most likely to be living in or at risk of the worst impacts of poverty.
<b>How easily do you think your project could be replicated in another setting?</b>
The project can be replicated fairly easily – if you have partnerships with services who are already working closely with low-income households and you can develop a tool (e.g., webform) to pass this information on, it is quite a straightforward process.

[Return to Introduction](#)