



Northumberland
County Council

Northumberland County Council Household Support Fund 5 Report

1 April - 30 September 2024



Funded by
UK Government



Contents

Welcome	3
Introduction	4
Northumberland in numbers	5
Delivering impact	6
Targeting household support	7

Improving access to advice and support through digital services

Cost of living support hub	10
Northumberland Frontline	11
Mobilise	12

Reaching further through our trusted partners

Engaging with trusted partners	15
Meet our trusted local partners	17
Age UK Northumberland	18
FareShare North East	20
Full Circle Food	21
Being Woman	22
Carers Northumberland	23

Delivering direct support

Reaching into communities	26
Types of direct support	27
Feedback from foodbanks	29
Understanding specific needs	30
Support with rising energy and associated costs	31

Facts and stats

Total spend	34
Spend by type of support	36
Number of households supported	37
Case studies	39

Continuing to support Northumberland	40
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Welcome

Northumberland County Council cares passionately about the welfare of residents.

The council has worked hard to ensure residents who struggle as a result of the challenges of cost of living and inequalities are able to seek and access to help and support.

The Household Support Fund has provided invaluable support to residents and families across the county who need help with the essentials.

We are very proud in Northumberland of the network of support available through a wide range of trusted local partners, the Voluntary, Community, Social Enterprise and Faith organisations who have helped deliver the Household Support Fund, ensuring access to financial help and support to all those in need in a compassionate, sympathetic and engaging manner.

The council has listened carefully to the feedback from local providers and within the guidance set by DWP ensured that no residents need to go without.

Whilst the Household Support Fund has been welcome, the pressure and challenges facing some communities continues and I am pleased that through our local networks we are able to maintain this help and support through the forth coming winter.

Councillor Veronica Jones

Northumberland County Council Cabinet
Portfolio Holder for Tackling Inequalities



Introduction

Welcome to the Northumberland County Council report on the Household Support Fund 5 (HSF5) which supported the county's most vulnerable residents between 1 April – 30 September 2024.

The Fund was administered by Northumberland Communities Together (NCT), a team based within the Public Health, Inequalities and Stronger Communities directorate in the council.

Partnership is the defining theme of this report, and how we delivered meaningful and targeted impact through HSF5. NCT's extensive links with services, strong relationships with local communities and historic track record in providing help and support where it is most needed all contributed to developing an effective plan, grounded in data-led insights to deliver HSF across the county.

This report sets out our approach and delivery plan, the essential role played by our trusted community partners, with recommendations for where we can improve further as we prepare for Household Support Fund 6.

The Household Support Fund has provided essential support to individuals and families across Northumberland.

With the support of our incredibly hard-working Trusted Partner Organisations, team members and locality coordinators, we have been able to reach deeper into the county to provide support where it is needed most.

Tackling inequalities is a priority for the council and the work of the team in distributing the Household Support Fund has been invaluable in alleviating hardship and helping us learn what works in supporting our communities to become more resilient.

Gill O'Neill

Executive Director
Public Health, Inequalities & Stronger Communities



Northumberland in numbers

Northumberland covers an area of **5,013km²** and is home to **316,000 people**.

97% of the county is classed as **rural** and considered to be **sparsely populated**, with an average of 63 people per km².

Half of the county's population live in the **3% of urban land** found in the south-east of the county.

23.6% of residents are **over 65 years old** - life expectancy at birth for males is 79.0 years and 82.2 years for females.

3% of residents classify themselves as **non-white** with the greatest number of these being Asian.

While **76.5%** of the adult population are **economically active**, unemployment levels are higher than the national average.

80% of residents own their **own home**.

8% of people in Northumberland live in areas within the **10% most deprived** decile of the IMD 2015.



Delivering impact

The Aim

The Household Support Fund is intended to alleviate hardship and support those most affected by the ongoing cost of living crisis. Northumberland County Council was allocated **£2,480,330 for the financial period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024.**

The Approach

Our approach in Northumberland was first and foremost to meet people's immediate and short-term emergency needs by maximising the reach of appropriate support while minimising potential barriers and stigma.

The Solution

Signposting support

We also aimed for long lasting and sustainable impact by using an asset-based approach that connected households with a wider network of support and services. For example, people were referred and signposted along pathways of advice and support covering **benefits, debt, energy and employment to both reduce household bills and maximise household income.**

Technology partners

Alongside community services, technology platforms such as Frontline and Mobilise were employed to reach and support people in new ways, overcoming longstanding barriers of access, remoteness and connectivity.



Targeting household support

Our approach was two-fold. Firstly, to implement a data-driven strategy to enable targeting and tracking of funds. Secondly, comprehensively communicating the help and support available to those most in need, through a mix of personalised digital media and targeted in-person events and interventions.

Data-driven insights

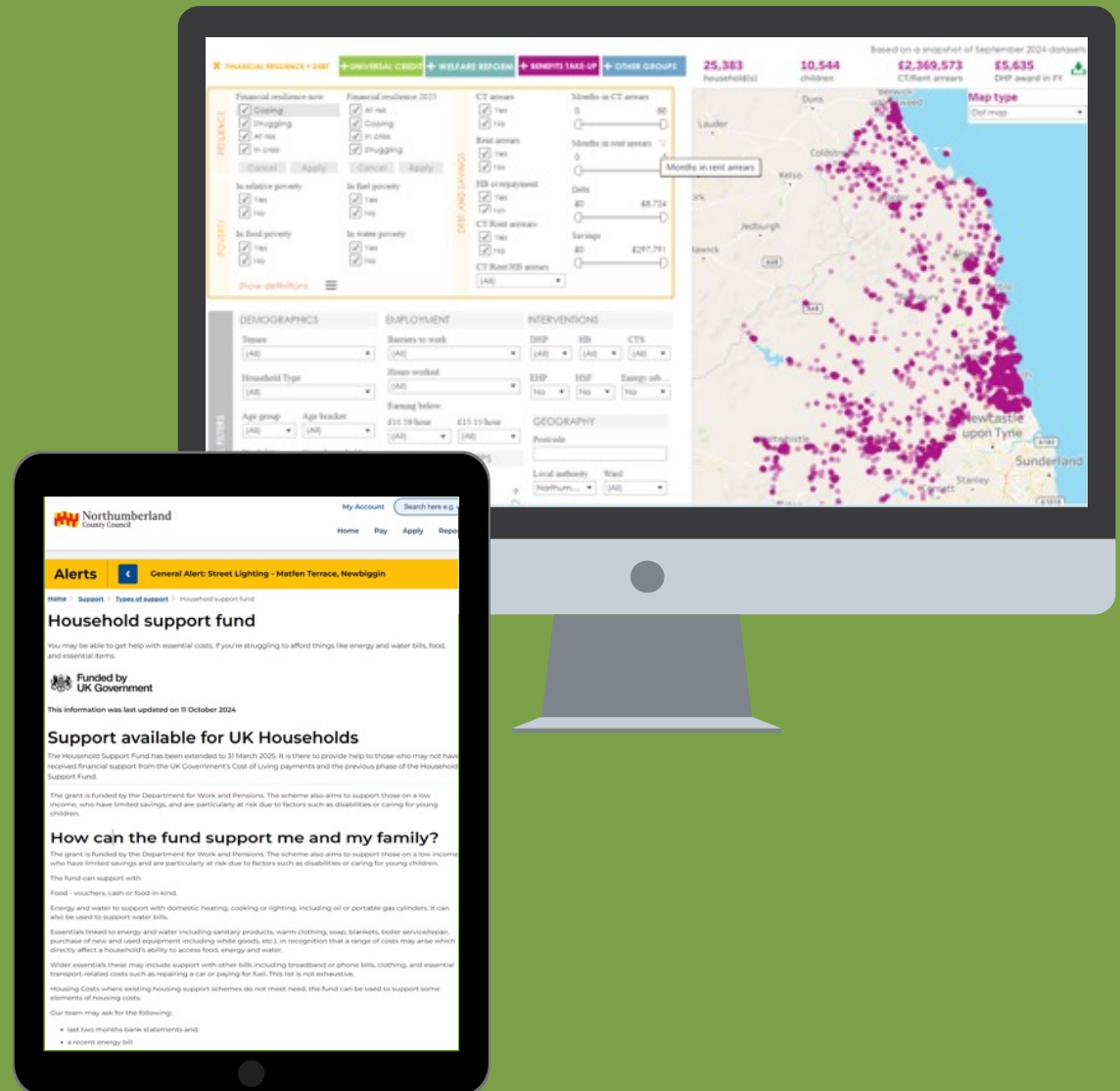
To help ensure the Household Support Fund in Northumberland was able to target residents effectively, the council purchased the *Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT)* tool through Policy in Practice.

LIFT helped the council understand where best to target support by drilling down to data on individual households.

Clear communication

A comprehensive *Cost of Living Hub* on the council's website helped people navigate towards advice and support as well as providing the locations of warm spaces, links to key partners and an online benefits checker.

Through this multi-faceted approach, we feel the Household Support Fund has been communicated effectively and made more accessible in Northumberland.



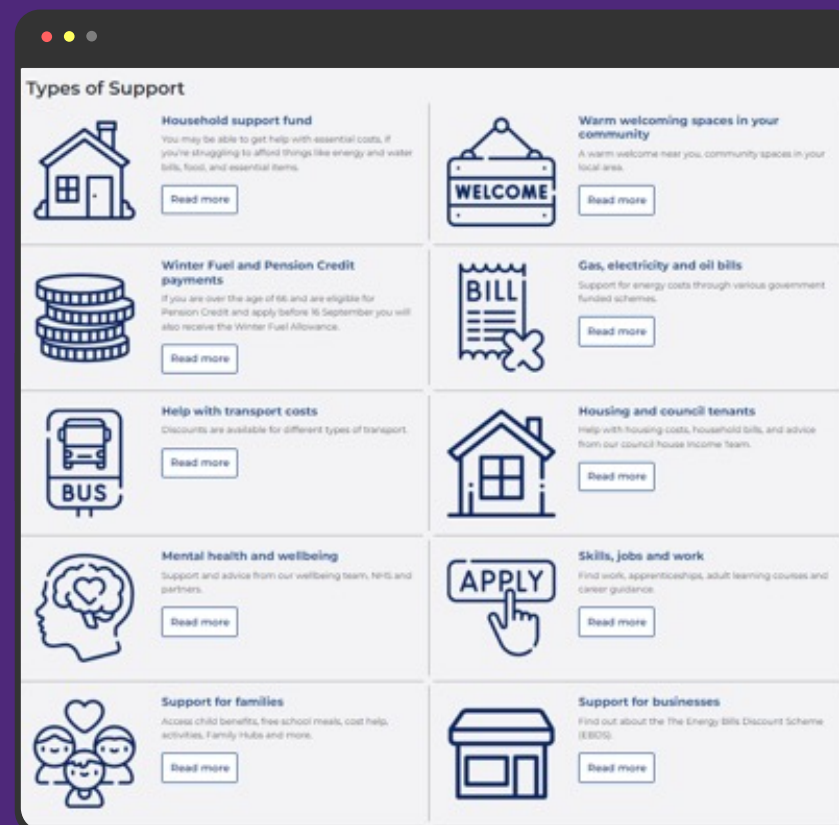


Improving access to advice and support through digital services



Cost of living support hub

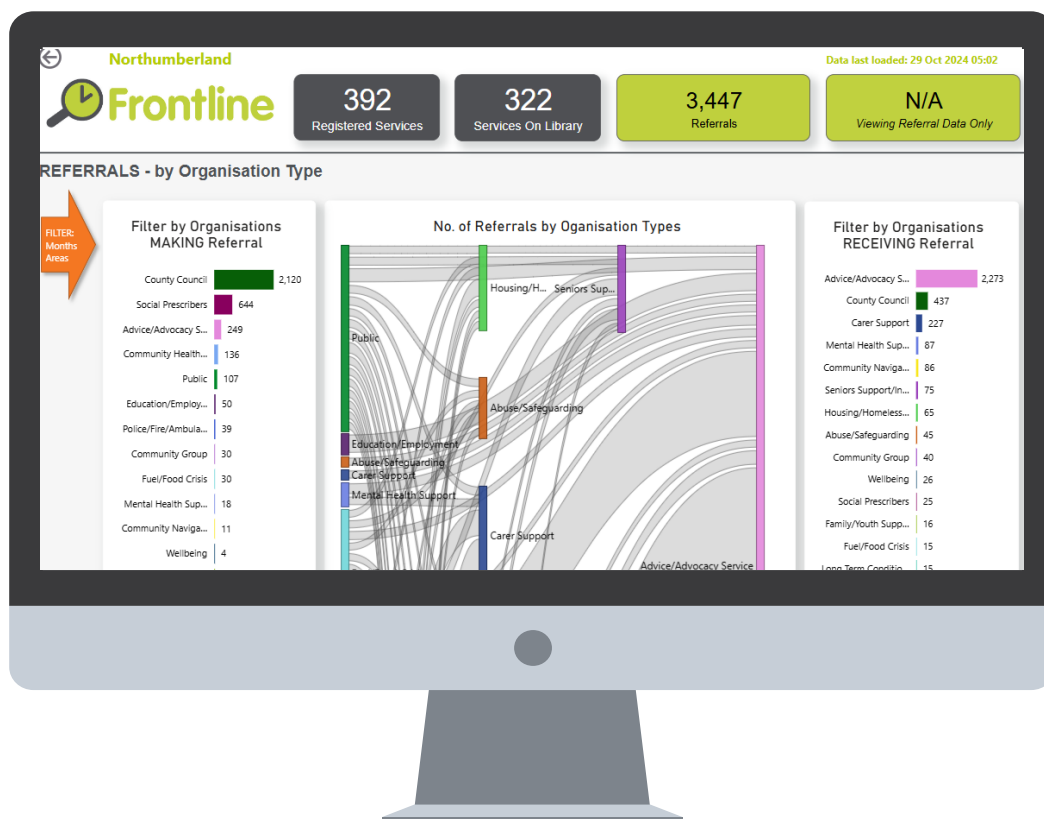
Northumberland County Council's Cost of Living Hub on its website continues to provide information on a range of support available to vulnerable residents. This includes a significant section dedicated to the Household Support Fund, during the time period 1 April – 30 September it was viewed 8,494 times.



Northumberland Frontline

Comprehensive help finding health and wellbeing services

Northumberland Frontline has been an invaluable tool for support workers, volunteers and the wider public to find and contact local health and wellbeing services and activities. It has made signposting simpler and its inbuilt referral process and made responses both faster and more reliable.



59%

increase in
services on
the library



1k

referrals and nearly
4,000 signposts in 1st
quarter of 2024/25



45%

of referrals are generated
by trusted partners and other
agencies outside of NCC



96%

of referrals have
a successful
outcome

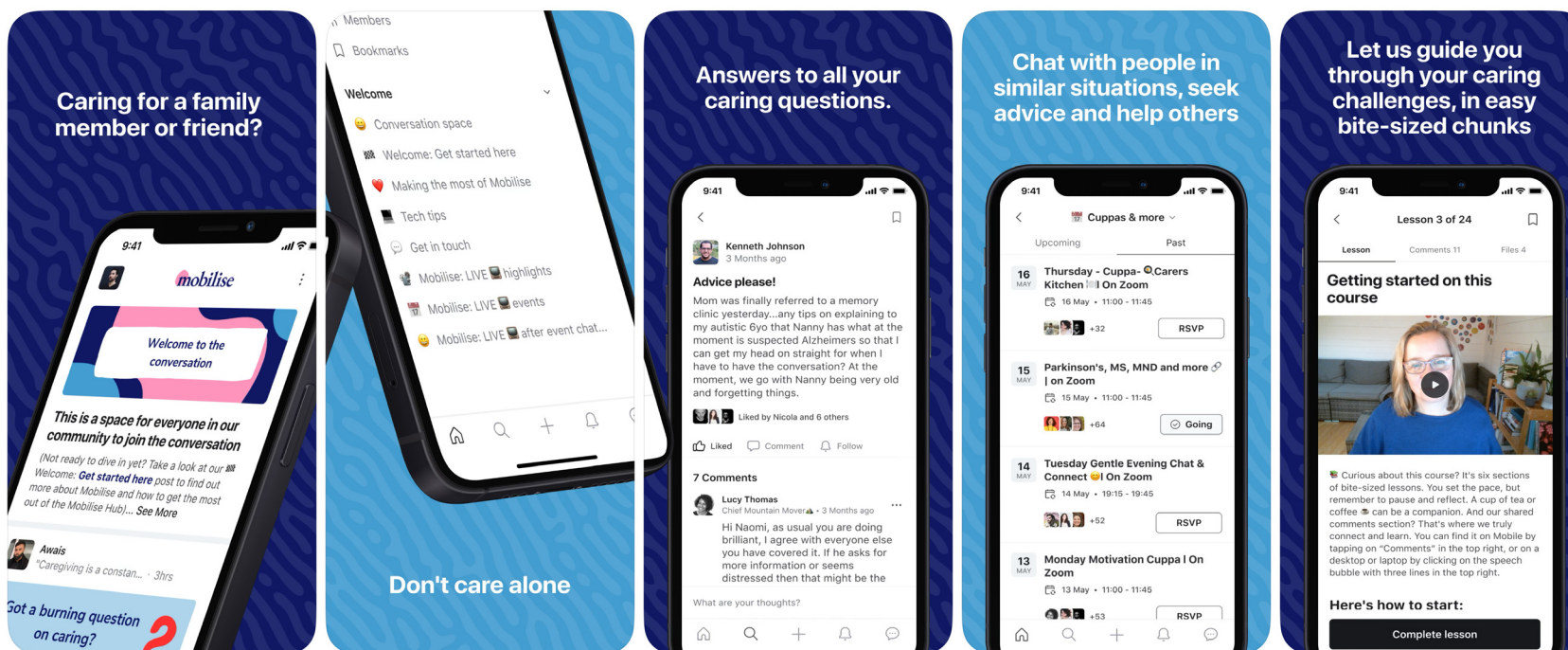


Mobilise

Supporting carers from the palm of your hand

Using the Household Support Fund, Northumberland County Council commissioned Mobilise to provide additional support to carers who, due to their commitments, often find more traditional forms of support hard to access.

Mobilise is a digital platform accessible seven days a week including evenings and weekends. Positive benefits for carers have included support to claim Carers Allowance, developing a better understanding of carers assessments and connection with over 7,000 other carers throughout the UK.





**Reaching further through our trusted
partners**



Engaging with trusted partners

Just over a quarter of all the HSF5 funding was distributed through proactive, targeted support via trusted partners. Their detailed local knowledge, positive reputations and strong relationships with local communities helped to ensure funding and support was offered to vulnerable residents who may not have accessed support independently.

Together we reached out to

10,639

vulnerable households



11,450

vulnerable households reached out
to us



Meet our trusted local partners

Partnerships have been vital to the success of the fund. Meet our phenomenal community partners, helping us support those most in need, and find out about the incredible impact these partnerships have created.

Many hundreds of community organisations, volunteers and staff across Northumberland have been tirelessly supporting our communities through the cost of living crisis. We'd like to express our thanks to all of them. The following organisations helped Northumberland County Council distribute the Household Support Fund:

Age UK Northumberland

Alnwick Food Bank

Being Woman

Berwick-Upon-Tweed Community Trust

Citizens Advice Northumberland

East Bedlington Community Centre

Full Circle Food Project

Glendale Gateway Trust

Northumberland Community Enterprise Ltd

Seaton Delaval Community Centre

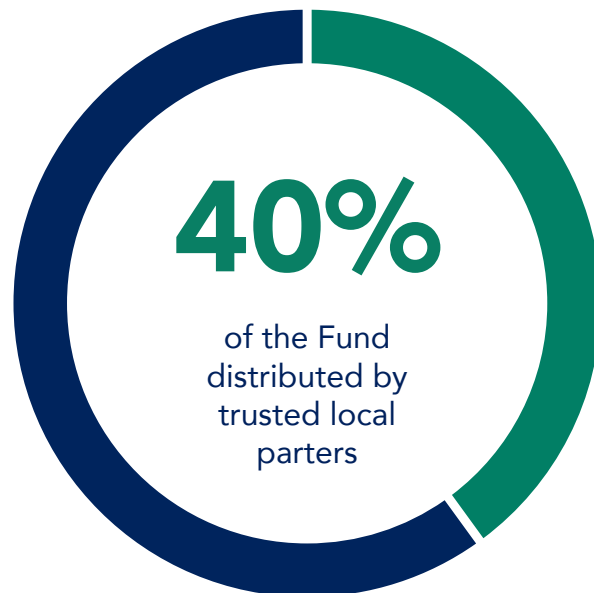
Seghill Food Hub

Stocksfield Methodist Church

Vision Northumberland

West Northumberland Food Bank

We call these organisations our 'Trusted Local Partners'. These voluntary and community organisations hold a unique position of trust in many communities and are ideally placed to identify and reach those most in need of support. They ensured the HSF5 extended its reach as far as possible, distributing £956,607 (40%) of the Fund to an additional 6,611 vulnerable households.



Age UK Northumberland

Providing a one-stop-shop for cost of living support

Age UK Northumberland is a leading charity for older people providing a huge range of services across Northumberland. These include care at home, advice, specialist support such as help coping with bereavement, a friendship line, veterans support and many social groups and events throughout the year.

For Age UK Northumberland, the HSF5 has been invaluable. It has ensured a responsive service to get help where it is most needed. This has included bags of essential food and toiletries hand delivered to those in need. Carers have been able to visit vulnerable residents more regularly and free breakfast and lunch groups have supported those most in need.

In addition, being able to offer a comprehensive 'one stop shop' of support centred around the cost of living avoided many older people having to search for support from unfamiliar sources, especially where access to the internet/digital literacy was a barrier and the risk of scamming was a growing concern.

Age UK Northumberland reported that the wider impact of providing meals in a social setting has proven invaluable in improving health and wellbeing by reducing social isolation, encouraging mobility and maintaining independence.

“To achieve the greatest and most long-lasting impact, building connections with people is essential and every contact with a person counts. It is a priority to ensure options for people seeking support are available everywhere.”

Jill Lloyd
Head of Charitable Services
Age UK Northumberland





FareShare North East

Reaching the remotest communities

FareShare North East is part of a UK national network of charitable food redistributors. They take good quality surplus food from across the industry and distribute it to charities and community groups serving vulnerable households across Northumberland. These include local foodbanks, luncheon clubs, community cafes and community pantries.



FareShare North East has been supported by HSF5 to extend its distribution network to community organisations in the most remote rural areas of the county including isolated border communities. This has included fresh vegetables, meat, and dairy products which have significantly improved the quality and health benefits of the offer for local groups serving their communities.



Full Circle Food

Cooking up a storm

The Full Circle Food Project is a charity that builds skills and knowledge around food cultivation, preparation and healthy living.

HSF5 enabled the project to deliver more preventative support to help people grow and cook their own fresh produce. This, in turn, has led to improved health and wellbeing outcomes, as well as greater financial resilience among vulnerable households.



The team welcomed the extra help from the Household Support Fund. It has enabled them to expand and diversify provisions and meet the immediate needs of different communities and cultures facing financial hardship.



Being Woman

Supporting cultural inclusion

Being Woman is a charity working to challenge all forms of prejudice and discrimination in society. Supported by HSF5, the team delivered culturally tailored support to diverse communities in Northumberland, meeting their specific needs to overcome identified barriers.

For example, by being aware of cultural sensitivities around money or family issues, by using community languages or by ensuring food was halal where required, Being Woman was able to engage with people otherwise at risk of being excluded from support.

Its role was particularly valuable in improving reach into communities which historically experience higher levels of disadvantage but lower levels of access to support services.



Carers Northumberland

Delivering more kindness for carers

Carers Northumberland was established in 2008 to improve the lives of unpaid carers in Northumberland. The organisation strives to be responsive, trusted and caring by providing tailored services that embody its core values of kindness, empathy and compassion.



Unpaid carers are often in a uniquely difficult and vulnerable position and can face many barriers to accessing help and support. Carers Northumberland ensures unpaid carers can discuss any cost-of-living difficulties they are experiencing with someone who already knows and understands their situation.

Equally, by more effectively reaching carers, HSF5 was able to support the cared-for and ensure they were accessing appropriate advice and support. Carers Northumberland provided practical support to vulnerable people towards heating costs (often a considerable burden due to being unable to leave their homes), cookers, fridge freezers, warm clothing and essential repairs.

Feedback indicates this approach proved particularly effective in ensuring some of those exposed to the impact of rising costs were supported in a dignified, personalised and empathetic way.





Delivering direct support



Reaching into communities

Our county is rural and many residents who live beyond the urban hubs are hard to reach. We complemented our digital communications with in-person events, and partnerships with trusted partners to gain a deeper reach into communities, acting as ambassadors for the fund.

The reach of the scheme was extended through a programme of over 140 'We're Here for You' events held in towns and villages across the county. These were organised by our Locality Coordinators in partnership with voluntary organisations and local groups.

Details about the Household Support Fund were also included in Council Tax letters sent out to all households, in community newsletters, via social media, and in thousands of leaflets and through the local media such as the Northumberland Gazette.

The council also posted periodic bulletins alongside DWP publicity to engage residents to get in touch.

A telephone helpline and an email service complemented web-based support while a wide network of local community partner tailored messaging to their local communities.

Evaluation carried out in June 2024 confirmed the importance of reaching communities via organisations they trusted.



Pegswood Fire Station 'We're Here for You' event
June 2024

Types of direct support


Working with community partners and schools, we supported a range of direct provision including financial payments – both vouchers and cash – alongside the supply of food and other essentials through a network of foodbanks, holiday activities and 'meet and eat' social groups.

Vouchers and cash ensured emergency support reached households quickly and discreetly while providing recipients with a dignified and flexible way to meet the particular needs of their household.

Financial support was made available for food and associated costs such as energy and water supply and the purchase of white goods for cooking and safe food storage.

The direct provision of food was accompanied by sanitary products, soap, clothing and blankets were included to support people overcome their most immediate needs.

All direct provision came with a wider offer of advice and support to ensure households could stabilise and improve their immediate situation.



A main positive impact is that it has helped to reduce the shock factor that can be extra apparent during the cost-of-living crisis as households can swiftly change from a position of financial security to crisis following a couple of emergency expenditures...

Age UK Northumberland



Feedback from foodbanks

Five food banks in Alnwick, Berwick, Blyth, Wansbeck and West Northumberland were supported through grants, ensuring residents could obtain emergency food and other essentials quickly and efficiently wherever they lived in the county.

“

The HSF grant meant we were able to provide a consistent service to regular clients and welcome new clients for our usual 12 weeks of emergency food.

”

“

We currently support those who are referred but given the latest news on fuel allowances for pensioners, we will be looking to help those who fall just outside the qualifying income for fuel support.

”

“

We also use vouchers to enable residents to have choice and control over the food they want which ensures dignity and respect and means residents are treated ethically.

”

“

The end of the Household Support Fund will be catastrophic, lots of hardship following conclusion of grant. Funding should be given to grassroots organisations, as communities tend to speak to their communities rather than go higher.

”

Understanding specific needs

A total of £1,069,300 was distributed as Free School Meal vouchers to ensure eligible families maintained a healthy diet throughout the school holiday period.

We asked parents about the impact of this scheme through a survey conducted in May 2024, shortly after the Spring half term holiday.

We received 799 responses from parents, of which over 70% said they were finding it difficult to cope or they weren't coping at all.

This along with data and case studies from our network of providers confirms the ongoing need for support for many households in Northumberland who continue to struggle meeting the cost of necessities such as food, utilities and clothing.



Support with rising energy and associated costs

Where the need has arisen, our support has been extended to boiler servicing and repairs and the purchase of household electrical goods including fridges, freezers and ovens. We recognise that for households struggling to cope with increased day-to-day costs, the unexpected and often significant outlay of replacing broken or damaged equipment can tip a household into crisis.

Similarly, we have financially supported the Citizens Advice Bureau to enable emergency gas or electric to be available to vulnerable residents within 24 hours so they can continue to cook, bathe and heat their homes.

Our Northumberland Communities Together (NCT) team also accept referrals and have worked with households and suppliers to ensure water and energy connections are retained or restored as quickly as possible.

Households are frequently referred to our Warm Homes Team and voluntary sector partners who support them to take full advantage of any available heating and insulation upgrades to improve their living conditions and bring down their long-term costs.

NCT works alongside our Warmer Homes Team and, collectively, we developed a pathway to support our vulnerable residents with sustainable energy up-grades.

This collaborative approach was recognised by The Energy Efficiency Awards Team, naming the council the 'Best Vulnerable Customer Support' in the region.





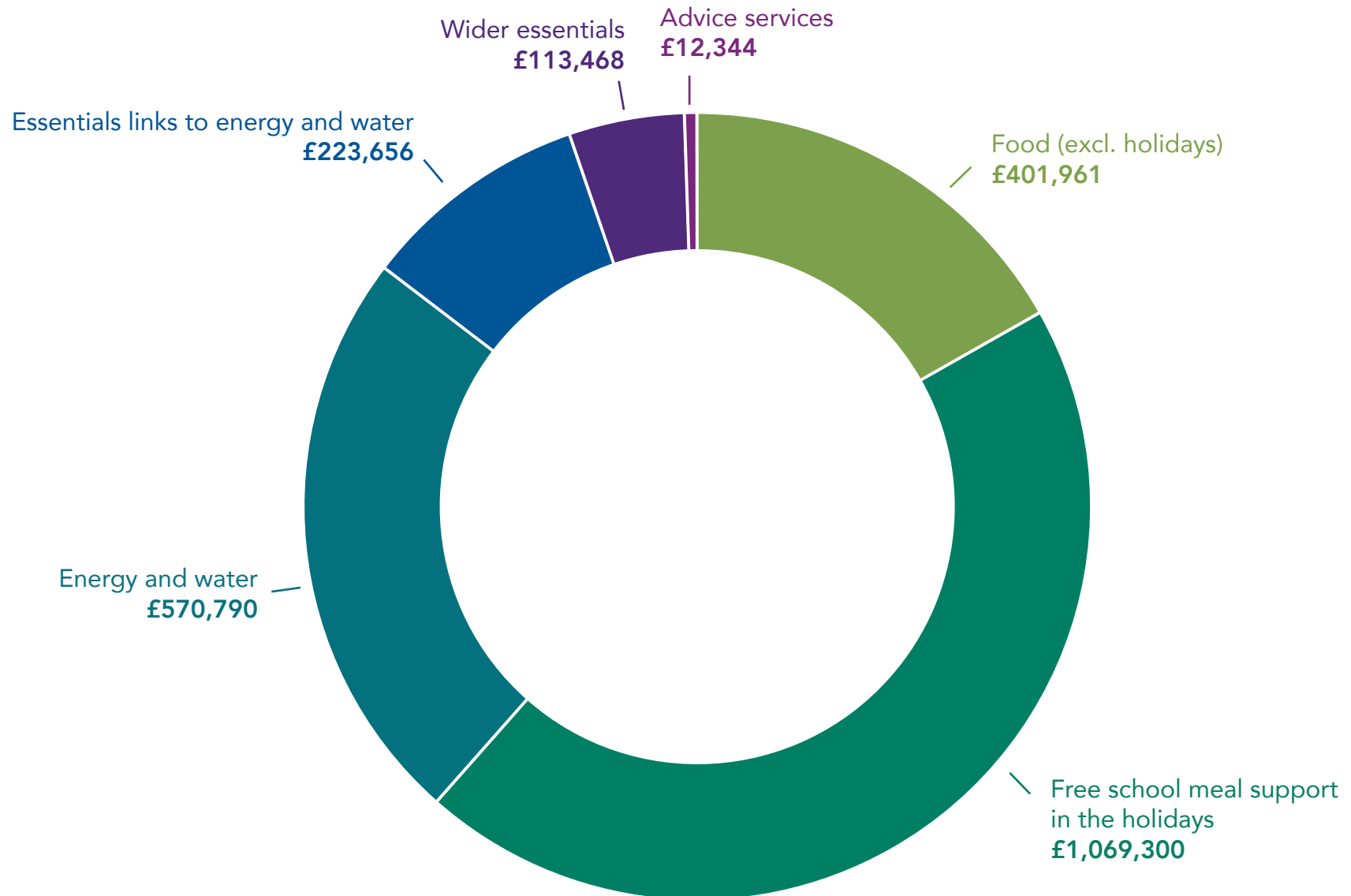
Northumberland County Council won recognition for supporting vulnerable residents with rising energy costs

Facts and stats



Total spend

The council has spent and accounted for all grants and payments for the full £2,391,519 for the period.



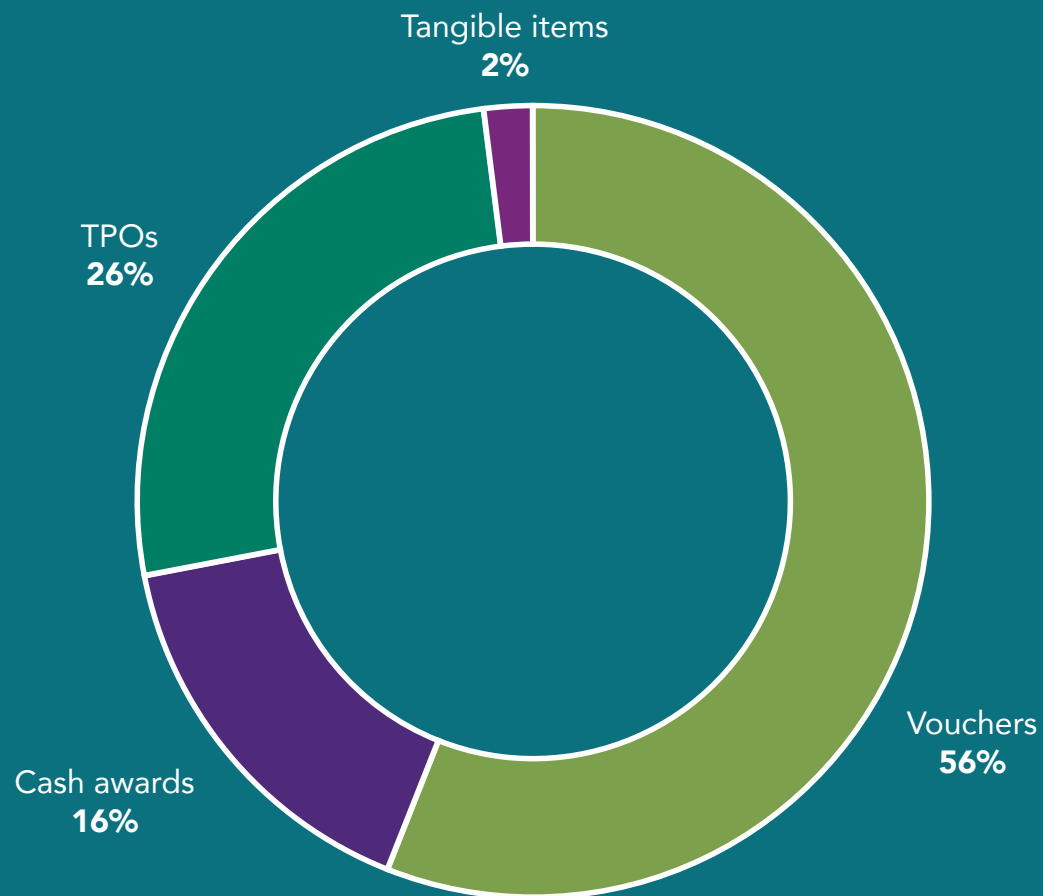


Spend by type of support

Northumberland County Council provided £2,391,519 of HSF5 support to vulnerable households between 1 April and 30 September 2024.

This support has taken the form of vouchers, cash awards and direct support from our local trusted partners.

The recognition of the incredible impact our local trusted partners have when providing support to vulnerable residents is reflected in the proportion of funds allocated to them.



Total amount provided to vulnerable households **£2,391,519**

Vouchers £1,336,058

Cash awards £400,000

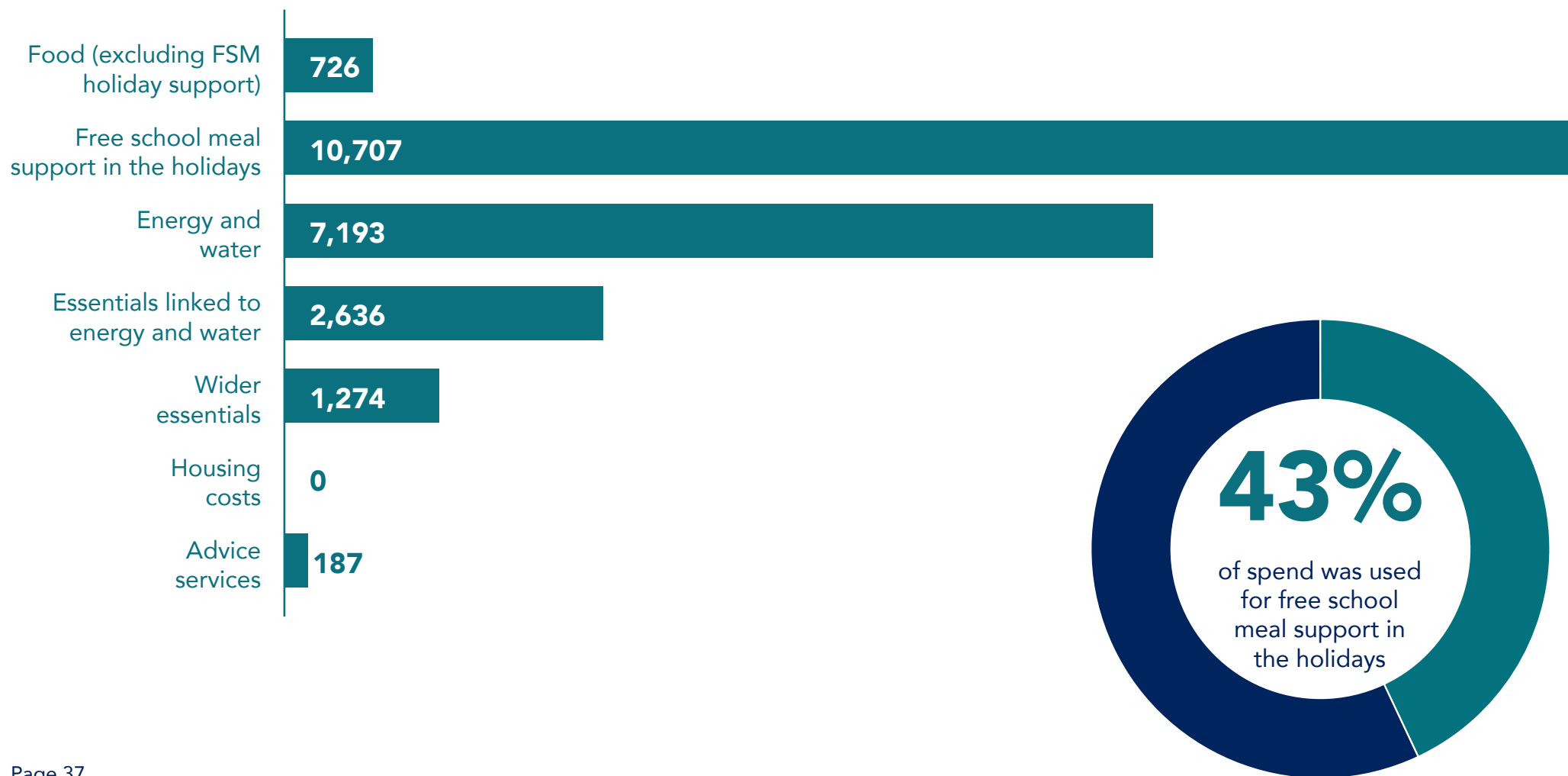
Trusted partner organisations (TPOs) £645,461

Tangible items £50,000

Number of households supported

The council has continued to prioritise direct support for food, utilities and other essentials. In addition, households with children on free school meals (FSM) continued to receive vouchers during holiday periods, accounting for 43% of all spend.

No support with housing costs has been provided in the grant period.



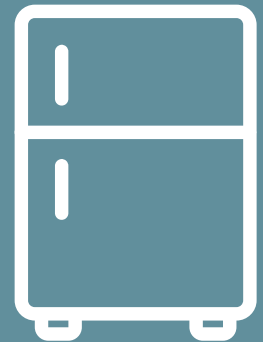


Case studies

Support in action

Practical assistance for a diabetic

The client contacted us as she is insulin dependent diabetic and needs to keep her pens in the fridge. Her fridge had developed a fault and had started to freeze items. She was very scared about freezing the insulin pens and had applied to another grant holder for support but was unsuccessful as they said they were only helping families at present. We were able to offer her £150 towards a new fridge from the Household Support Fund, ensuring that she was able to store her insulin safely.



Pathway of support for a pensioner

The client contacted us as she was struggling with her energy bills due to an old and inefficient boiler. She is 70 years old, lives alone on a very low income, in a home that she inherited. We supported her with a grant from the Household Fund to help her pay her energy bill that month, as she had just paid an invoice from a local plumber for repairs. In addition, we were able to help with an application for Council Tax Support benefit to maximise her income and refer her to the local council scheme for a free gas safety check to ensure the boiler was safe or can be repaired/replaced if needed.

Continuing to support Northumberland

Northumberland County Council together with our community partners have been able to support a huge number of residents through a range of routes, pathways and methods.

Over **33,000 awards** were made in a 6-month period, impacting **15% of households** across Northumberland. The delivery of support has been swift and efficient and always delivered in a compassionate, supportive and non-judgemental way.

A recurring theme throughout this report has been the **strong relationships** and **coordination of support** between the council and its partners. Moving forward, these arrangements will need to continue if residents are to continue receiving this vital help and assistance.

The pressures on households across the county has by no means gone away and its **imperative that support remains** available through a sustained approach and future funding from the Household Support Fund.

Something that would be extremely beneficial to our local partners is to improve our impact monitoring in Northumberland. The LIFT tool will be key to both identifying need, measuring impact and supporting data-driven decisions. There is also a keenness to capture social value as it is incredibly hard for organisations to measure impact at a population level.

Together, we can continue to support the **most vulnerable** in our area.

Thank you for your ongoing support to residents in Northumberland who are most in need.





Northumberland
County Council

For more information go to
www.northumberland.gov.uk/support

Tel: 01670 620015