

Household Support Fund Survey Report

Research Report

January 2024



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Summary

Background

In January 2024, the Local Government Association (LGA) conducted a survey of single-tier and county councils to identify the impact that is likely to result from the Government's plan not to extend the Household Support Fund beyond March 2024. A total of 93 responses were received from individual local authorities, resulting in a final response rate of 61 per cent.

Key Findings

- **Financial hardship:** Over four-fifths of respondents (83 per cent) said their local authority has a local welfare assistance scheme (or something similar) in addition to the Household Support Fund.
- **Financial hardship:** Over four-fifths of respondents (84 per cent) said that financial hardship had increased in their area in the last 12 months.
- **Financial hardship:** Around three quarters of respondents (73 per cent) said that they expect financial hardship to increase in their area in the next 12 months whilst just under a fifth of respondents (19 per cent) said they expect it to remain about the same.
- **Supporting people with no recourse to public funds:** Just under three quarters of respondents (71 per cent) said they use the Household Support Fund to support people with no recourse to public funds.
- **Continuation of Household Support Fund:** Almost all respondents (99 per cent) said they would support the continuation of the Household Support Fund to at least a small extent. The majority of these (96 per cent) answered to a great extent.
- **End of Household Support Fund:** Almost two thirds of respondents (62 per cent) said they would provide no additional discretionary funding to replace funding lost through the end of the Household Support Fund, whilst just under a fifth of respondents (17 per cent) said that alongside the Household Support Fund ending, they would also be reducing their own discretionary funding for local welfare assistance schemes due to financial pressures.
- **End of Household Support Fund:** When asked how the overall level of funding for local welfare assistance would be impacted, if the Household Support Fund were to come to an end on 31 March 2024, almost half of respondents (44 per cent) said it would reduce by 76 per cent to 99 per cent with a further 13 per cent saying it would reduce by 100 per cent.

- **Supplementary advice services:** Almost half of respondents (45 per cent) said there would be a decrease in the level of provision of advice services if the Household Support Fund were to come to an end.
- **Redundancies:** Around a fifth of respondents (22 per cent) said they would have to make redundancies if the Household Support Fund were to end.
- **Effective welfare system** Almost all respondents (95 per cent) said the current spending guidance allows them to deliver an effective welfare scheme that meets local needs to at least a small extent.
- **Support:** Over nine-tenths of respondents (92 per cent) said the Household Support Fund allows them to meet the costs of administration to at least a small extent.

Introduction

In January 2024, the LGA conducted an online survey of county councils, unitary authorities, metropolitan districts and London boroughs regarding the impact that is likely to result from the Governments plan not to extend Household Support Fund beyond March 2024. The survey gathered the views of respondents with regard to the demand for the fund, the impact on local welfare provision and the impact of the current uncertainty around the future of the fund.

Methodology

The online survey was open between 4 January and 22 January 2024 as an online unique form sent to the Heads of Revenues and Benefits to all unitary authorities, county councils, metropolitan districts and London boroughs in England. The online survey was also made available to members of a cost-of-living support network. A total of 93 responses were received from individual local authorities, resulting in a final response rate of 61 per cent.

The responses to this survey have been weighted to be better representative of all single-tier and county councils in England. The number provided for the base for the tables refers to the **unweighted** number of respondents who answered each question.

The full set of survey questions is included in Annex A for information.

In addition, the following points should be noted about the research methodology:

- Please note that the bases from which percentages were calculated vary throughout the survey, as not all respondents were shown all questions, and all questions were optional, meaning that some respondents chose not to answer them.
- Throughout the report percentages in figures and tables may add to more than 100 per cent due to rounding. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole per cent.
- Where the response base is less than 50, care should be taken when interpreting percentages, as small differences can seem magnified. Therefore where this is the case in this report, absolute numbers are reported alongside the percentage values.

Response rates

As Table 1 shows, by council type, the response rate was highest from county councils (67 per cent) and lowest from London Boroughs (52 per cent).

Table 1: Response rate by council type

	Total number	Number of responses	Response rate
County	21	14	67%
London Borough	33	17	52%
Metropolitan District	36	23	64%
Unitary Authority	63	39	62%
Total	153	93	61%

Regionally, as shown in Table 2, the response rate was highest from the East of England (82 per cent) and lowest from the East Midlands (40 per cent).

Table 2: Response rate by region

	Total number	Number of responses	Response rate
East	11	9	82%
East Midlands	10	4	40%
Greater London	33	17	52%
North East	12	6	50%
North West	24	13	54%
South East	19	13	68%
South West	15	11	73%
West Midlands	14	10	71%
Yorkshire and the Humber	15	10	67%
Total	153	93	61%

Full Results

This section contains analysis of the full results from the survey.

Financial hardship

Respondents were asked whether their authority had a local welfare scheme (or something similar) in addition to the Household Support Fund. Over three-fifths of respondents (62 per cent) said “yes” whilst a further fifth (21 per cent) said “yes – something similar”. A range of answers were given when respondents were asked to specify what “yes – something similar” meant and this included comments such as Discretionary Support Scheme; Local Welfare Provision – Emergency Provision); Local Welfare Assistance Scheme; Emergency Support Scheme although funding is limited; small crisis fund; we established a scheme using HSF, but have put additional council resources into this too; Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Handy Person Scheme; and Emergency Financial Support Scheme. Fifteen per cent of respondents answered no whilst one per cent were unsure. The results for this question are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Does your council have a local welfare scheme (or something similar) in addition to the Household Support Fund?

	Response rate
Yes	62%
Yes – something similar	21%
No	16%
Don't know	1%

Unweighted base: All respondents (93).

Respondents were then asked whether they had a standard definition of “financial hardship” (or something similar). Just under a third of respondents (30 per cent) said they did whilst around a fifth (17 per cent) said “yes – something similar”. A range of answers were given when respondents were asked to specify what “yes – something similar” meant and this included comments such as cases dealt with on their own merit; there is detail surrounding who is eligible for support which broadly highlights those we consider in regard to financial hardship; Financial Inclusion Strategy; we have a means test; Financial Vulnerability; household income below £27,500 and household is struggling to afford basic essentials such as food, energy and or housing costs; we have a criteria rather than a definition; and guidance

policy/procedures. Half of the respondents (50 per cent) answered no whilst three per cent were unsure. The results for this question can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Do you have a standard definition of ‘financial hardship’ or something similar?

	Response rate
Yes	30%
Yes – something similar	17%
No	50%
Don’t know	3%

Unweighted base: All respondents (93).

Respondents were then asked how financial hardship in their area has changed in the last 12 months. Over four-fifths of respondents (84 per cent) said that it had increased in the last 12 months. Just under a tenth (8 per cent) said it had remained the same whilst two per cent said it had decreased in the last 12 months. Six per cent of respondents were unsure. The results for this question are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5: How has financial hardship in your area changed in the last 12 months?

	Response rate
Increased in the last 12 months	84%
Remained about the same	8%
Decreased in the last 12 months	2%
Don’t know	6%

Unweighted base: All councils (93).

Respondents were then asked how they expect financial hardship in their area to change in the next 12 months. Around three quarters of respondents (73 per cent)

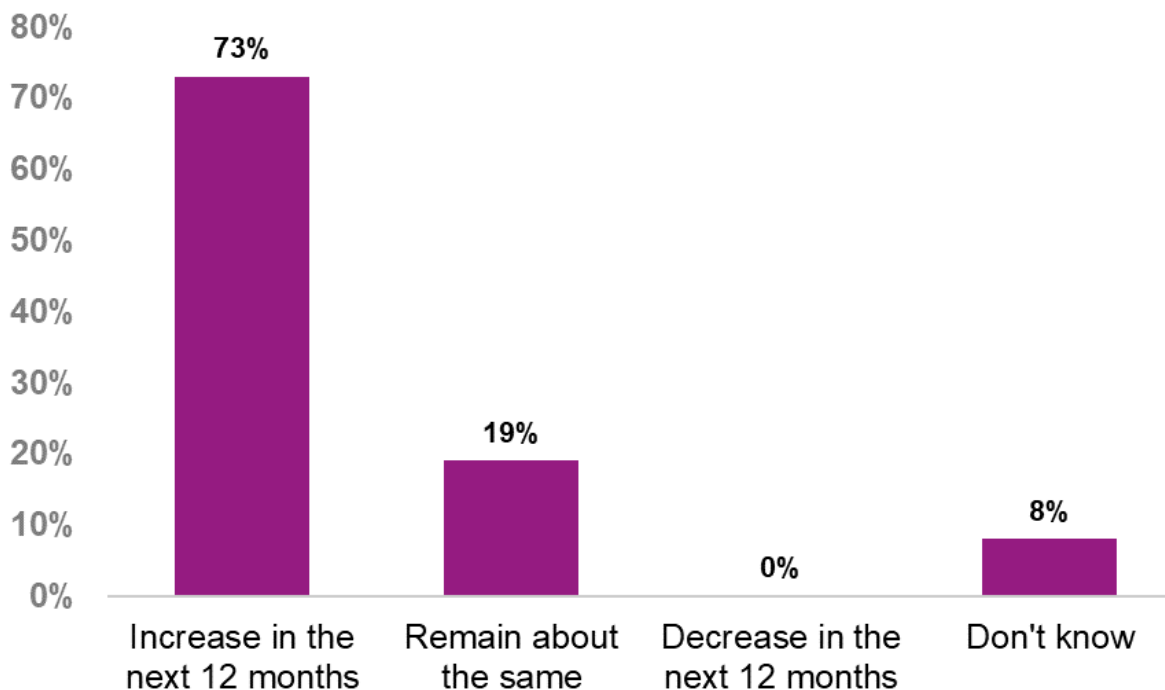
said it would increase in the next 12 months. Just under a fifth of respondents (19 per cent) said it will remain about the same. No respondents said that financial hardship would decrease in the next 12 months whilst eight per cent of respondents were unsure. The results for this question are displayed in Table 6 and Figure 1.

Table 6: How do you expect financial hardship in your area to change in the next 12 months?

	Response rate
Increase in the next 12 months	73%
Remain about the same	19%
Decrease in the next 12 months	0%
Don't know	8%

Unweighted base: All councils (93).

Figure 1: How do you expect financial hardship in your area to change in the next 12 months?



Unweighted base: All councils (93).

Use of Household Support Fund

Respondents were then asked what percentage of their Household Support Fund allocation was spent on in-kind hardship support (e.g. food vouchers, white goods), cash-first crisis support and advice services. The percentage breakdown that respondents gave for each of the three areas was weighted and resulted in the following average percentage allocations for each area: 65 per cent of councils' Household Support Fund allocations were spent on in-kind hardship support (e.g. food vouchers, white goods), 26 per cent on cash-first crisis support and five per cent on advice services.

Respondents were then asked whether they use Household Support Fund money to support people with no recourse to public funds. Just under three quarters of respondents (71 per cent) said they use Household Support Fund money to support people with no recourse to public funds. A fifth of respondents (20 per cent) answered no, whilst nine per cent were unsure. The results for this question are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Do you use Household Support Fund money to support people with No Recourse to Public Funds?

	Response rate
Yes	71%
No	20%
Don't know	9%

Unweighted base: All councils (93).

Continuation of the Household Support Fund

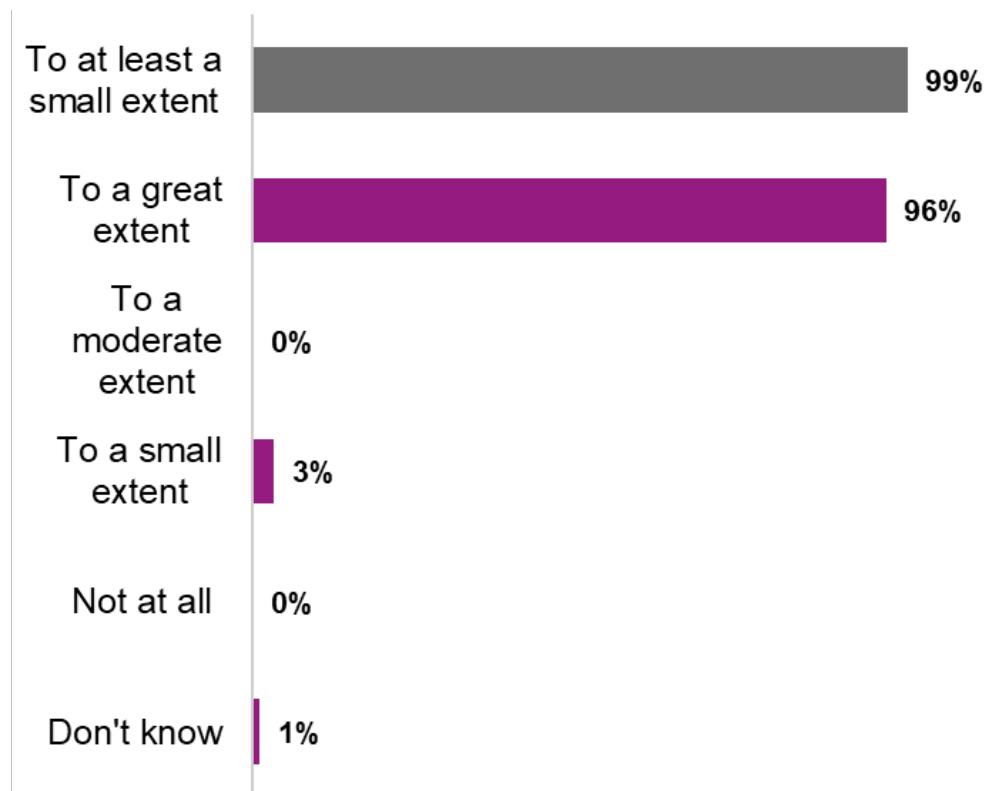
Respondents were then asked to what extent, if at all, their council would support a continuation of the Household Support Fund (or an equivalent) beyond March 2024. Over nine-tenths of respondents (96 per cent) said to a great extent. Three per cent answered to a small extent with no respondents saying not at all. One per cent of respondents were unsure. The results for this question are displayed in Table 8 and Figure 2.

Table 8: To what extent, if at all, would your council support a continuation of the Household Support Fund (or an equivalent) beyond March 2024?

	Response rate
To a great extent	96%
To a moderate extent	0%
To a small extent	3%
Not at all	0%
Don't know	1%

Unweighted base: All councils (93).

Figure 2: To what extent, if at all, would your council support a continuation of the Household Support Fund (or an equivalent) beyond March 2024?



Unweighted base: All councils (93).

Respondents were then asked, if the Household Support Fund were to come to an end without any replacement funding after 31st March 2024, how that would affect the local welfare offer they provide. Almost two thirds of respondents (62 per cent) said they will provide no additional discretionary funding to replace the funding lost through the end of the Household Support Fund. Just under a fifth of respondents (17 per cent) said that alongside the Household Support Fund ending, they would also be reducing their own discretionary funding for local welfare assistance schemes due to financial pressures. Five per cent of respondents said they will provide additional discretionary funding to replace some of the funds lost by the Household Support Fund ending. Fifteen per cent responded “other” and provided further information. Respondent’s comments highlighted concerns such as the impact of uncertainty with the possibility of no extra funding for local welfare provision; the impact on local welfare provisions with the discontinuation of local welfare assistance schemes; the consideration of alternatives to support vulnerable households post April 2024; and the impact on services and staffing if the fund ends, resulting in smaller teams and less time spend on cases. No respondents said they would continue to provide the same level of support by using local authority funds to match the previous Household Support Fund grant for 2023/24. The results for this question are shown in Table 9.

Table 9: If the Household Support Fund were to come to an end without any replacement funding from central government after 31st March 2024, how would this affect the local welfare offer you provide?

	Response rate
We will continue to provide the same level of support by using local authority funds to match the previous Household Support Fund grant for 2023/24	0%
We will provide additional discretionary funding to replace some of the funds lost by the Household Support Fund ending	5%
We will provide no additional discretionary funding to replace the funding lost through the end of the Household Support Fund	62%
Alongside the Household Support Fund ending, we will also be reducing our own discretionary funding for local welfare assistance schemes due to financial pressures	17%
Other	15%
Don't know	2%

Unweighted base: All councils (93).

Impacts

Respondents were then asked how the overall level of funding for local welfare assistance would be impacted, if the Household Support Fund were to come to an end on 31 March 2024. No respondents said that their overall level funding for local welfare assistance would increase or remain the same. Two per cent of respondents said it would reduce by up to 25 per cent, whilst seven per cent said it would reduce by 26 per cent to 50 per cent. Twelve per cent of respondents said it would reduce by 51 per cent to 75 per cent. Almost half of respondents (44 per cent) said it would reduce by 76 per cent to 99 per cent with a further 13 per cent saying it would reduce by 100 per cent. A tenth of respondents (10 per cent) gave an “other” reason.

Respondents included comments such as, “our emergency assistance would continue, however there is no provision for current HSF applicants to qualify for this”; “our existing crisis fund would continue as is”; “the welfare assistance service receives core funding from the County Council. The value of this has reduced and will continue to do so if further funding is not found”; “we will revert back to our pre pandemic model”; and, “it has been proposed to end our own welfare support provision for 24/25 and therefore we would have no funds at all and may not have a scheme if we cannot find the funding”. Four per cent of respondents were unsure. The results to this question are displayed in Table 10.

Table 10: Consequently, if the Household Support Fund were to come to an end on 31 March 2024, how would the overall level of funding for local welfare assistance be impacted?

	Response rate
It would increase	0%
It would be the same (our local authority would top up the funding to replace funding lost by the end of the Household Support Fund)	0%
It would reduce by up to 25%	2%
It would reduce by 26% to 50%	7%
It would reduce by 51% to 75%	12%
It would reduce by 76% to 99%	44%
It would reduce by 100 % (our current local welfare offer is 100% funded by HSF and ending HSF would result in the local authority not having a discretionary local welfare offer)	13%
Other	10%
Don't know	4%

Unweighted base: All councils (93).

Respondents were then asked how their supplementary advice services that they offer would be impacted if the Household Support were to come to an end. Almost half of respondents (45 per cent) said there would be a decrease in the level of provision of advice services. Around a third of respondents (32 per cent) said their level of provision of advice services would continue as normal. Just over a tenth of respondents (11 per cent) said there would be no change whilst a further ten per cent said gave an “other” reason. Some respondent’s comments noted an increase in demand for advice services. Other comments included, “advice services are not specifically funded through HSF alone”; “we will revert back to our pre pandemic model”; “no financial support will be available for white goods etc via referrals”; and, “in the event that funding is not available it will mean that there is a reduced number of specialist advisors available and more residents will experience debt and mental health issues without the resource to support them”. Five per cent of respondents said there would be an increase in the level of provision of advice services whilst five per cent said their advice services would end. The results for this question can be seen in Table 11.

Table 11: If the Household Support Fund were to come to an end, how would this impact any supplementary advice services you offer e.g. debt and money, income maximation, energy efficiency advice?

	Response rate
Increase in the level of provision of advice services	5%
The level of provision of advice services continuing as normal	32%
Decrease in the level of provision of advice services	45%
Advice services ended	5%
Other	10%
No change	11%

Unweighted base: All councils (93).

Staff

Respondents were then asked how they are resourcing the scheme in their area and whether they have a dedicated Household Support Fund Officer(s), or whether it forms part of wider roles. Over half of respondents (54 per cent) said it forms part of

wider roles whilst a quarter of respondents (27 per cent) said they have dedicated staff. A fifth of respondents (19 per cent) gave an ‘other’ reason. The majority of these ‘other’ comments talked about how the respondent’s council have a mixture of both dedicated staff and those that form part of wider roles, with the remainder of the ‘other’ responses including comments such as; “(we have) a mixture of pre-existing welfare support staff and additional staff that have been recruited to deal with the surge in demand”; “existing staff are trying to cover this alongside their main job role”; “it forms part of one person's wider role”; “this is included within our LWP and benefit offering”; and, “our HSF officer is a Benefits Assessor doing dual roles”. The results for this question can be seen in Table 12.

Table 12: How are you resourcing the scheme in your area? Do you have a dedicated Household Support Fund Officer(s) (or similar role), or does it form part of wider roles?

	Response rate
We have dedicated staff	27%
It forms part of wider roles	54%
Other	19%
Don't know	0%

Unweighted base: All councils (93).

Respondents were then asked whether they might have to make redundancies in anticipation of the fund ending. Around a fifth of respondents (22 per cent) said they would have to make redundancies, whilst just under half (47 per cent) said they would not. A quarter of respondents (26 per cent) gave an ‘other’ reason and this included themes such as, having to end fixed term positions; the uncertainty about renewals of positions; the impact on third-party organisations and their potential staffing reductions; staff being placed on protective redundancy due to funding uncertainty and issues of staff who have been seconded from other areas looking to return to their original roles which may have been filled. Six per cent of respondents were unsure. The results for this question can be seen in Table 13.

Table 13: As a result of the current uncertainty as to whether the fund will be extended beyond March 31 2024, will you have to make redundancies in anticipation of the fund ending?

	Response rate
Yes	22%
No	47%
Other	26%
Don't know	6%

Unweighted base: All councils (93).

What other impacts will the current uncertainty have on your ability to deliver the fund effectively?

Respondents were then asked what other impacts the current uncertainty around the Household Support Fund would have on their ability to deliver the fund effectively. Overall, 79 per cent of respondents answered this question.

The most common theme by respondents was the **inability to plan effectively** with the uncertainty around the continuation of the Household Support Fund. This was mentioned by almost half of respondents (47 per cent) who answered the question.

“Affects the authority's ability to strategically plan and resource effective schemes and intelligent commissioning of service providers.”

Metropolitan District

“The more time we have to plan will enable us to spend to maximum efficiency.”

Metropolitan District

“The uncertainty will reduce the council's ability, and the ability of its external partner agencies, to plan for any initiatives beyond April 2024.”

Metropolitan District

Another common theme was the **impact on staff, and the impact losing experienced staff will have on councils' ability to deliver another tranche of funding if the Household Support Fund is extended**. This was mentioned by 26 per cent of respondents who answered the question.

“We may lose staff who are dealing with our crisis claims. If the funding does then continue, we would have lost their experience and would have to recruit and train new staff.”

Unitary Authority

“We have 6 contracts which support the delivery of the scheme. All have been placed on notice of termination or reduction in demand.”

Unitary Authority

“Existing HSF staff are likely to begin finding new roles for themselves knowing that their existing contracts will not be extended. This could lead to lengthening waiting times for members of the public to access support.”

County Council

“If an announcement is not made soon, and the scheme was to continue, our ability to deliver the next tranche of funding would be impacted as we would lose the resource we currently have dedicated to the fund.”

Metropolitan District

Around a quarter of respondents (23 per cent) who answered the question made references to the **impacts on Household Support Funded delivery partners in the voluntary and community sector**.

“It impacts on voluntary and community organisations who have been supporting the distribution as they are unable to plan.”

London Borough

“From our experience its essential to highlight that our robust partnership delivery approach to provide such a diverse range of support takes time to action, it is vital for our 40+ partners to receive a timely response providing clarity of any extension(s), a phased withdrawal of funding and an increasingly more time sensitive update if such a large-scale scheme is ending with no further support. We need to have a timely response in order to provide a partnership communication plan.”

County Council

Another common theme was the impact of the withdrawal **of support on residents**. This was mentioned by just under a fifth of respondents (19 per cent) who answered the question.

“We are unable to plan sustainable interventions to support residents.”

London Borough

“We are unable to let our families know about their future and with no exit plan, we go from a high level of expectation to nothing.”

Unitary Authority

Comments made by a smaller number of respondents in relation to how the current uncertainty is having on their ability to deliver the fund effectively included the following themes:

- **Communications about end of scheme.** For example, one respondent stated “If we do not know if there will be a scheme post March 2024, it will be very difficult to manage the expectations of elected members, third parties and residents. Additionally it would make it very difficult for third parties to manage their own communication about expectations of future funding.” Another respondent said, “We are in an ambiguous position, we are unable to do transition planning and we can't implement any communication strategies until a final decision is made.”
- **Specific concerns about the end of food support for families eligible for free school meals.** For example, one respondent said that “support for families with children on free school meals will have the biggest impact as they will no longer receive money during the holidays to feed their children, and they are already asking now what support they will get in the next holidays - schools will feel this pressure as will other services.”

Effective welfare system

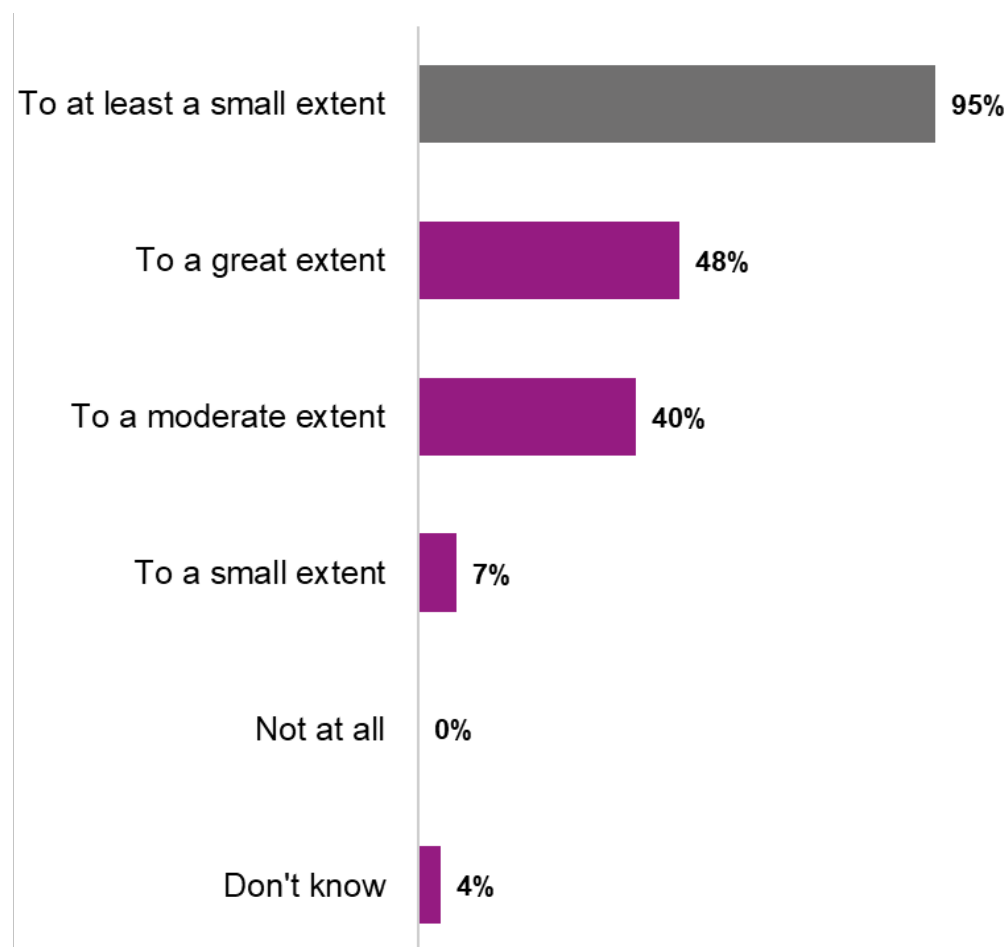
Respondents were then asked to what extent, if at all, the current spending guidance allows them to deliver an effective welfare scheme that meets local needs. Around half of the respondents (48 per cent) answered to a great extent whilst two-fifths (40 per cent) said to a moderate extent. Seven per cent of respondents said to a small extent whilst no respondents said not at all. Four per cent were unsure. The results for this can be seen in Table 14 and Figure 3.

Table 14: To what extent, if at all, does the current spending guidance allow you to deliver an effective welfare system that meets local needs?

	Response rate
To a great extent	48%
To a moderate extent	40%
To a small extent	7%
Not at all	0%
Don't know	4%

Unweighted base: All councils (93).

Figure 3: To what extent, if at all, does the current spending guidance allow you to deliver an effective welfare scheme that meets local needs?



Unweighted base: All councils (93).

Respondents were then asked to explain their reasons for the level of extent they gave. The comments of those who answered “to a great extent” covered the following themes; the flexibility of the HSF guidance allows local authorities to tailor their support according to specific needs and demographics; the positive impact on local communities of providing support for essentials such as food, utilities and financial assistance; how the fund allows for the engagement of local intelligence and resources, making use of local partnerships to deliver effective support; how the fund caters to a diverse range of needs including crisis support; the ability to fund financial advice and debt assistance; appreciation of the autonomy provided by the HSF guidance. Some respondents also expressed concerns about the insufficiency of funding, especially in areas where welfare benefits do not meet basic needs or where the level of funding does not match the extend of need.

The comments of those who answered “to a moderate extent” covered the following themes; appreciation for the flexibility of the HSF guidance allowing local authorities to meet the unique needs of their communities; the challenges in supporting housing costs due to restrictions within the HSF; a desire for more flexibility to allocate funds towards advice services; the continued gap between the demand for support and the available resources; concerns about the short-term nature of the fund and how it doesn’t address the underlying causes of financial hardship; and suggestions on improving Household Support Fund guidance, such as allowing councils to carry over funds from one round to the next and having longer planning periods beyond a year.

Respondents were then asked to what extent, if at all, did the Household Support Fund meet the costs of administration. Just under a third of respondents (30 per cent) answered to a great extent whilst almost two-fifths (39 per cent) said to a moderate extent. Just under a quarter (23 per cent) said to a small extent whilst seven per cent said not at all. One per cent were unsure. The results for this are displayed in Table 15.

Table 15: To what extent, if at all, does the Household Support Fund meet the costs of administration?

	Response rate
To a great extent	30%
To a moderate extent	39%
To a small extent	23%
Not at all	7%
Don't know	1%

Unweighted base: All councils (93).

Respondents were then asked whether they would favour a more consistent approach to the Household Support Fund if it were extended and if so how. Over a third of respondents (34 per cent) said ‘yes – a more detailed purpose’. A further third (32 per cent) said ‘yes – eligibility criteria’ whilst 19 per cent said ‘yes – provision of administration/referral software’. Over a quarter of respondents said ‘yes – other reason’. A range of answers were given when respondents who answered ‘other’ were asked to provide further detail. Answers included themes such as a desire for a more timely decision on the continuation of the scheme to reduce uncertainty and enable effective planning; the importance of minimising administration costs to maximise support for residents; a desire for longer-term projects alongside the existing crisis support model; greater clarity around the true impact and longer-term goals of the HSF; a desire for a long-term government plan committing to HSF over 1-3 years to enable better planning and the recruitment and retention of staff; and a call for simplicity in administration and autonomy for local authorities to decide the best way to allocate funds. A third of respondents (34 per cent) said no whilst five per cent were unsure. The results for this question are displayed in Table 16.

Table 16: If the Household Fund is extended, would you favour a more consistent approach to the Household Support Fund and if so, how?

	Response rate
Yes – a more defined purpose	34%
Yes – eligibility criteria	32%
Yes – provision of administration/referral software	19%
Yes – other reason	27%
No	34%
Don't know	5%

Unweighted base: All councils (93). Please note respondents could select more than one answer.

Additional comments

Please provide any further comments or suggestions on the topics covered by this survey.

At the end of the survey, respondents were invited to provide any further comments or suggestions on the topics covered by this survey. Overall, 57 per cent of respondents provided additional comments or suggestions.

The most common theme by respondents centred around the **dependency that residents have on the Household Support Fund**. This was mentioned by 40 per cent of respondents who responded to the question.

“The HSF is a vital fund to deliver emergency crisis support to our residents encompassing food, energy, emergency white goods, school uniforms etc. The cost-of-living crisis and the continuing strain on household finances shows no sign of lifting and the Fund enables residents to maintain a standard of living that avoids default into unsustainable debt or illness in many cases.”

Unitary Authority

“We believe that residents now see HSF as part of their yearly income, basically they expect it and come to rely on it. The funding provides support for the most vulnerable and allows the team to offer a flexible service and freedom to make bigger impact on residents’ lives.”

Unitary Authority

“Residents have come to rely on the support available because of the Household Support Fund.”

Metropolitan District

Another common theme was comments around how the **fund could be improved moving forwards**. This was mentioned by just over a quarter of respondents (26 per cent).

“Funding certainty over the medium term would also be welcomed to enable us to plan and be more strategic in the use of the funding.”

Metropolitan District

“Last minute announcements do not enable us to plan effectively. More time would enable us to plan and deliver a consistent and more cost-effective scheme that has the potential to benefit more groups.”

London Boroughs

“It is very difficult to plan with the way the Household Support Fund currently operates. Ideally, we would want a longer-term settlement linked to a vision of where the support is going / what it should look like in five / ten years’ time.”

Unitary Authority

A quarter of respondents (25 per cent) talked about how the fund uncertainty is **preventing appropriate plans** being put in place.

“Lack of information is making it difficult in terms of future planning either for mitigation or continuation.”

Unitary Authority

“Not having confirmation about whether the HSF will continue makes it extremely difficult to plan the future support available for residents.”

Unitary Authority

A smaller number of councils also made references to the **impact on services and redundancies** that would result from the discontinuation of the Household Support Fund. This was mentioned by nine per cent of respondents.

“A significant issue for LAs with the withdrawal of the scheme is the reputational risk this brings. Inevitably this will be seen as councils cutting services.”

County Council

“At present, it is impossible to plan for the future and we risk losing staff and resource who are best placed to support our residents.”

London Borough

Comments made by a smaller number of respondents referenced the following themes:

- **Administrative challenges.** For example, one respondent stated, “The reporting for HSF can be quite administrative heavy and changes each round, which can be difficult.”
- **Maintain the flexibility.** For example, one respondent said that “The needs of residents are different in every area. We would want to keep our local offer and maintain the flexibility of our offer.”

Annex A: Questionnaire

Household Support Fund Survey: January 2024

Throughout the pandemic and ongoing cost of living crisis, the Household Support Fund has allowed councils to significantly expand the provision of discretionary local welfare support for the growing number of people who are struggling to afford the essentials.

The current round of funding is due to come to an end on the 31 March 2024, and the government have not yet confirmed if the funding will be extended. Given the sustained demand for local welfare support, LGA's position is that the funding should be extended for at least another year and that councils must be given urgent clarity on the future of the fund to plan and deliver it effectively.

This survey aims to capture the demand for the fund; the impact of the fund ending on local welfare provision; the impact of the current uncertainty around the future of the fund, and how the fund could be improved if it were to be extended.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. You can navigate through the questions using the buttons at the bottom of each page. Use the 'previous' button at the bottom of the page if you wish to amend your response to an earlier question.

If you stop before completing the return, you can come back to this page using the link supplied in the email and you will be able to continue where you left off. To ensure your answers have been saved, click on the 'next' button at the bottom of the page that you were working on before exiting.

Please complete this survey by noon on Friday 19th January. Please contact us at keiron.watt@local.gov.uk if you encounter any issues in completing your submission.

All responses will be treated confidentially. Information will be aggregated, and no individual or authority will be identified in any publications without your consent. Identifiable information may be used internally within the LGA but will only be held and processed in accordance with our [privacy statement](#). We are undertaking this survey to aid the legitimate interests of the LGA in supporting and representing authorities.

If you would like to see an overview of the questions before completing the survey online, you can access a PDF here: [upload a link to the PDF](#)

Please amend the details we have on record if necessary.

If you are responding on behalf of more than one authority please note this in the

'authority' box below, but please check with us first whether a separate return is needed for each authority.

- Name _____
- Authority _____
- Job title _____
- Email address _____

Does your council have a local welfare scheme (or something similar) in addition to the Household Support Fund?

- Yes
- Yes - something similar (please specify below)

- No
- Don't know

Do you have a standard definition of 'financial hardship' (or similar)?

- Yes
- Yes - something similar (please specify below)

- No
- Don't know

How has financial hardship in your area changed in the last 12 months?

- Increased in the last 12 months
- Remained about the same
- Decreased in the last 12 months
- Don't know

How do you expect financial hardship in your area to change in the next 12 months?

- Increase in the next 12 months
- Remain about the same
- Decrease in the next 12 months
- Don't know

Approximately what percentage of your Household Support Fund allocation is spent on the following areas?

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100



Do you use Household Support Fund money to support people with No Recourse to Public Funds?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

To what extent, if at all, would your council support a continuation of the Household Support Fund (or an equivalent) beyond March 2024?

- To a great extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a small extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

If the Household Support Fund were to come to an end without any replacement funding from central government after 31 March 2024, how would this affect the local welfare offer you provide?

- We will continue to provide the same level of support by using local authority funds to match the previous Household Support Fund grant for 2023/24
- We will provide additional discretionary funding to replace some of the funds lost by the Household Support Fund ending
- We will provide no additional discretionary funding to replace the funding lost through the end of the Household Support Fund
- Alongside the Household Support Fund ending, we will also be reducing our own discretionary funding for local welfare assistance schemes due to financial pressures
- Other (please specify below)

-
- Don't know

Consequently, if Household Support Fund were to come to an end on the 31 March 2024, how would the overall level of funding for local welfare assistance be impacted?

- It would increase
 - It would be the same (our local authority would top up the funding to replace funding lost by the end of the Household Support Fund)
 - It would reduce by up to 25%
 - It would reduce by 26% to 50%
 - It would reduce by 51% to 75%
 - It would reduce by 76% to 99%
 - It would reduce by 100 % (our current local welfare offer is 100% funded by HSF and ending HSF would result in the local authority not having a discretionary local welfare offer)
 - Other (please specify below)
-

Don't know

If the Household Support Fund were to come to an end, how would this impact any supplementary advice services you offer e.g. debt and money, income maximisation, energy efficiency advice?

Please select all that apply.

- Increase in the level of provision of advice services
 - The level of provision of advice services continuing as normal
 - Decrease in the level of provision of advice services
 - Advice services ended
 - Other (please specify below)
-

No change

How are you resourcing the scheme in your area? Do you have a dedicated Household Support Fund Officer(s) (or similar role) or does it form part of wider roles?

- We have dedicated staff
 - It forms part of wider roles
 - Other (please specify below)
-

Don't know

As a result of the current uncertainty as to whether the fund will be extended beyond March 31 2024, will you have to make redundancies in anticipation of the fund ending?

- Yes
 - No
 - Other (please specify below)
-

Don't know

What other impacts will the current uncertainty have on your ability to deliver the fund effectively?

To what extent, if at all, does the current spending guidance allow you to deliver an effective welfare scheme that meets local needs?

- To a great extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a small extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

Please explain your reasons for the level of extent you gave.

To what extent, if at all, does the Household Support Fund meet the costs of administration?

- To a great extent
- To a moderate extent
- To a small extent
- Not at all
- Don't know

If the Household Fund is extended, would you favour a more consistent approach to the Household Support Fund and if so how?

Please select all that apply.

- Yes - a more defined purpose
 - Yes - eligibility criteria
 - Yes - provision of administration/referral software
 - Yes - other reason (please specify below)
-

- No
- Don't know

Please provide any further comments or suggestions on the topics covered by this survey.

Once you press the 'Submit' button below, you will have completed the survey.

Many thanks for taking the time to complete this survey. You are in control of any personal data that you have provided to us in your response. You can contact us at all times to have your information changed or deleted. You can find our full privacy policy here: [click here to see our privacy policy](#)



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