

# Welfare & Benefits Volunteer sector briefing



18 July 2023

## Microsoft Teams meeting

### Minutes

#### Attendees

- Andrew Hatcher (FHDC Revenues and Benefits Lead Specialist)
- Cllr Tim Prater (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance & Governance)
- Kath Weeks (FHDC Welfare Specialist)
- Nick Harvey (FHDC Senior Welfare & Training Specialist)
- Jane Worrell (FHDC Revenues & Benefits Senior Specialist)
- Melanie Hamill (FHDC Welfare Specialist)
- Natasha Deeprose (FHDC Welfare Specialist)
- Bev Caplin (FHDC Welfare Specialist)
- Nicola Jones-Vickers (Age UK - Information & Advice Manager)
- Rosie McGill (Age UK)
- Sarah Bourne (FHDC Welfare Specialist)
- Jon Bayford (Age UK)
- Cllr Jackie Meade
- Gill Thomas (Connectwell Kent)
- Cllr Adrian Lockwood
- Jo Taylor (Homestart Shepway)
- Angela Burnett (Christians Against Poverty)

#### Apologies

- Deborah White (FHDC Customer Services)
- Pat Turley (Dover DC)
- Mark Blamey (NHS)
- Alex Sansom (Area Officer)
- Claire Shelton (SEK)
- Cllr Jenny Hollingsbee
- Katie Pope (Connect Well East Kent)
- Brian Thompson (FHDC Chief Financial Services Officer)
- Sue Day (Shepway CAB)
- Jyotsna Leney (FHDC Health, Wellbeing & Partnerships Senior Specialist)
- Ruth Cairns (KCC Homes for Ukraine)
- Michelle Ede (FHDC Housing Advice & Preventions Officer)
- Aimee Strudwick (CGL East Kent)
- Trudi Short (DWP Folkestone & Ashford Partnership Manager)
- Helen Matcham (Baby Basics Folkestone)
- Sue Bunney (FHDC Money and Welfare Advice Specialist)

## Council Tax

- **Council Tax Support payments** still being made to all CTR claims this year.
  - £25 further reduction in bill.
  - 7,631 accounts have received the support so far.
  - £181,056 reduced
  - £250,502 funding for the year.
  
  - 2 courts so far for Council Tax this year, another next week and further courts due for September, November and January. Approx 2000 cases per court.
  - If anyone receives a reminder or summons please contact us to help.
- 

## Council Tax Reduction (CTR)

- Like Housing Benefit, low-income households can apply for a discount from their CTax bill based on household, income & capital.
- Pensioner (national) scheme a sliding scale much like HB.
- Working age (local) scheme is based on a grid system for simplicity:

Band	Single Person Weekly income (£)	Couple Weekly income (£)	Household with 1 Child Weekly income (£)	Household with 2 or more children Weekly income (£)
(1) 75% discount*	0.00 to 132.00	0.00 to 187.00	0.00 to 224.00	0.00 to 315.00
(2) 55% discount	132.01 to 176.00	187.01 to 224.00	224.01 to 257.00	315.01 to 396.00
(3) 35% discount	176.01 to 221.00	224.01 to 257.00	257.01 to 315.00	396.01 to 488.00
(4) 22% discount	221.01 to 326.00	257.01 to 361.00	315.01 to 396.00	488.01 - 574.00

\* If you are in receipt of relevant benefit (Jobseekers Allowance (Income Based), Employment Support Allowance (Income Related) or Income Support) you will receive 75% support.

- 9,490 active claims.
  - Some incomes are disregarded such as CA, CB, DLA, PIP, War Pensions and Housing Element of UC.
  - If working we ignore £25.00 of income
  - If disabled we ignore £40.00 of income.
  - £10.00 Non-Dependant deduction (unless they get ESA, IS, JSA, PC or UC with no earnings)
  - [www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/discounts-exemptions/council-tax-reduction-application](http://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/discounts-exemptions/council-tax-reduction-application)
-

## Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

- Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) are an emergency short term fund to be used to alleviate hardship to allow customers time to find alternative solutions to their shortfall in income.
- Applicant must be in receipt of Housing Benefit or housing element of Universal Credit.
- Set funding from DWP: £205,129 for 2023/24.
- £36,290 allocated so far (end of June 2023)
- 112 applications
- 68 awards
- Largely to support rental top ups and rent in advance/deposits.
- Applications and details of eligibility can be found online:

[www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/benefits-support/discretionary-housing-payment-dhp](http://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/benefits-support/discretionary-housing-payment-dhp)

---

## Financial Support Payments (FSP)

- A Financial Support Payment is designed to assist persons who have applied for Council Tax Reduction and who are facing 'exceptional hardship'. This is to provide further assistance where an applicant is in receipt of Council Tax Reduction but the level of support being paid by the Council does not meet their full Council Tax liability.
- £53,343 allocated so far (end of June 2023)
- 179 applications
- 120 awards
- Arrears payments also considered outside of the FSP scheme through Section 13A (1C) of Council Tax regulations.
- 23,221 awarded (end of June) for 30 households.
- Applications and details of eligibility can be found online:

<https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/council-tax/financial-support-payment-scheme>

---

## Cost of Living Support update

### **Energy Bill Support Alternative Funding (EBSS AF)**

- FHDC funding is £636,800 at £400 per application.
- 238 applications received.
- 206 awards made (£82,400)
- Only 13% of funding spent, this is the national average.

### **Alternative Fuel Payment (AFP)**

- Funding is £97,000 at £200 per application.
- 171 applications received.
- 158 awards made (£31,600)
- 8% national average so higher take up locally.

- Schemes are now closed for applications with some appeals still being heard by Government who manage the application process.

### **Cost of Living Payments**

- One million eligible claimant families receiving tax credits, and no other means-tested benefits, will get the first 2023-24 Cost of Living Payment from Tuesday 2 May 2023.
- For tax credit-only customers to be eligible for the £301 Cost of Living Payment, they must have received a payment of tax credits in respect of any day in the period 26 January to 25 February 2023, or later be found to have been entitled to a payment for this period.
- This has now been made.
- The payments are part of a package of wider government support announced to tackle the cost of living in 2023-24, including:
  - a further £300 Cost of Living Payment for eligible families in autumn 2023, with a payment of £299 in Spring 2024
  - a £150 Disability Cost of Living Payment for eligible disabled people to be paid during summer 2023, this has started.
  - a £300 Pensioner Cost of Living Payment to be paid during winter 2023-24.
- This means that the most vulnerable can receive up to £1,350 in direct payments over the coming financial year if eligible.

---

## **Household Support Fund**

- In October 2021 Government allocated additional funding to Councils to support vulnerable households under a new scheme called the Household Support Fund.
  - Funding is devolved from KCC:
    - Phase 1 ran from January 2022 to March 2022: FHDC funding £171,359 (Council received a further £50,000)
    - Phase 2 ran from August 2022 to September 2022: FHDC funding £459,699 (Council received a further £45,600)
    - Phase 3 ran from December 2022 to March 2023: FHDC funding £207,246 (Council received a further £43,000)
    - Phase 4 began from April 2023  
FHDC funding £414,492
    - £76,280 already allocated (end of June)
    - 778 applications
  - Current focus on supermarket vouchers, warm clothing and other incentives later in the year. Limit to one award per six months currently.
  - Apply online:  
[www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/help-support-cost-living/household-support-fund](http://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/help-support-cost-living/household-support-fund)
-

## Home Essentials Fund

Funding from UK Shared Prosperity Fund bid. Funding for this year and 2024/25 for support with:

- Heated throws/slow cookers
  - Boiler replacement
  - Boiler service
  - Oil tune up and support
  - White goods
  - Beds/mattresses
- Limited numbers for white goods/beds so handled on priority need.
  - On receipt of application customer is advised they have been placed on a waiting list and will hear if they are successful by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the following month.
  - Highlights: 21 beds and 27 white goods delivered (end of June)
  - Over £152,000 for support this year, over £257,000 for next year.
  - Apply online:  
[www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/help-support-cost-living/home-essential-fund](http://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/help-support-cost-living/home-essential-fund)

---

## Questions

Jo Taylor asked about timeframes on DHP applications. Andrew Hatcher (AH) advised that DHP decision are normally made within 48 hours of the final piece of information being received. This is handled by a different team (much like FSP and other welfare work) by different officers at the Council that manage the other Housing Benefit work. If further information is needed the officer will email/phone the applicant to ask.

Angela Burnett asked what if people cannot go online. AH told the group that appointments can be made by contacting the Contact Centre who can then do this in person if required. The Council does also have a visiting facility to go into resident's homes but it can take a little while to get these set up due to workloads and demand.

Cllr Jackie Mead asked if there has been an increase in support being requested. Whilst it is difficult to say with some schemes (such as HSF where each round is slightly different) there is certainly not a decrease in demand and spends in areas such as FSP have increased. Some of this is also reflective of the increased publicity and campaigns run by the Council to offer the support.

---

## Folkestone & Hythe Welfare Team

Jane Worrell gave an update:

- **Great liaison with Kent County Council**
  - Signed up for ReferKent
- **Extending links to the wider community**
  - Maintaining links with local community hubs and veteran's groups.
  - Now attending Open Door Project in Hythe once a month.
  - Spoken to Emmaus in Dover on how they can help.
  - Will be speaking to local Lions Club on how we can help each other.
- All qualified as Dementia Friends and extending this to other departments.
- Signhealth Workshop in August.
  
- **Working with analytical lists.**
  - Biggest problem we face is having too many cases and not enough resource.
  - Awareness of what is offered by the council and the welfare team is crucial .
  - Our analytical lists allow us to target customers for relevant support.
  - CTR take up campaigns – run monthly.
  - Pension credit take up campaign – currently ongoing.
  - Boiler replacement campaign to owner/occupiers on a low income.
    - Ongoing, part of the UK Prosperity fund.
  - Tax Credit UC migration campaign – cases identified for when they start in our area.
  
- **Sandgate Parish Project.**
  - Analytics used to conduct a small project for residents in the Sandgate area on a low income.
  - 15 households given the extra support.
    - Cllr Prater added that this was a fund bid for by the Parish Council and they worked with the welfare team to support households in the area and additional support has also been offered through the other schemes in some cases.
  
- **Homelessness prevention work.**
  - Already identified cases where the customer is over accommodated so is receiving reduced housing support.
  - This can put them into arrears making it difficult to move.
  - In March, arrears paid off and some also got a council tax support payment.
  - Enabled two households to move and allowed families to move into the larger accommodation.
  
- **Case Study**
  - Miss X was living with her elderly parent who subsequently died.
  - Lot of animosity in the family, Miss X had poor health and struggled to understand what was going on.
  - Miss X was visited, a claim for UC was completed including the housing element.
  - DHP was claimed and granted for 3 months as Miss X was impacted by the 'bedroom tax'.
  - Miss X wanted to move but has rent arrears which prevented this happening and wasn't on enough income to pay the arrears.

- A HSF payment was awarded to clear her arrears on the 6 April and Miss X worked with welfare and housing.
  - Miss X moved to her new one bedroom property on the 18 May.
  - The Welfare Specialist will continue to support Miss X until she is able to manage things herself.
  - A family are now enjoying the benefits of the three bedroom property vacated by Miss X.
- 

## Universal Credit rollout

- DWP have begun to increase the number of Migration Notices issued to tax credit claimants from April 2023.
  - They are expanding into additional parts of the country and by September 2023, Move to Universal Credit activity will be taking place in all regions of Great Britain.
  - DWP will be beginning to issue Migration Notices to tax credit claimants in Folkestone and Hythe from July 2023.
  - Focus throughout the 2023/24 financial year will be on those households claiming tax credits only (working tax credit and/or child tax credit).
  - Throughout 2024/25, all cases with tax credits (including those on both Employment and Support Allowance and tax credits), all cases on Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance (Income Based) and all Housing Benefit cases (including combinations of these benefits) will be required to move to Universal Credit.
  - At the point of moving over to Universal Credit, all legacy benefit claimants will be assessed for transitional protection and paid where appropriate. The aim of this temporary payment is to maintain benefit entitlement at the point of transition so that claimants will have time to adjust to the new benefit system.
- 

## Childcare costs

- Parents on Universal Credit will be able to claim increased amounts for childcare costs from the end of June.
  - They can claim £951 for one child and £1,630 for two or more children (a 47% increase).
  - This has been frozen since 2010.
-

## Open discussion & service updates

Jo Taylor asked if the KSAS scheme with KCC is now closed. Jane Worrell responds that it isn't but is almost non-existent. And closed for most applications. This is why FHDC have looked at this area for support. We still look at using the HEF fund with priority need, for example, to ensure someone had something to cook with and then a fridge/washing machine choice as well as the beds for new homes being set up.

ClIr Jackie Mead asked the team work with Rotary. Jane Worrell advised that this is not something they currently do but are willing to have those discussions.

---

## And finally ....

- To end on some positive news, the Council has been shortlisted for 4 national awards with the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation (IRRV):



### End of meeting

The next scheduled meeting will be **31 October** invites will be sent out closer to the time. It is not decided if this will be online or at the Civic Centre.