

Slough Borough Council

Report To:	Cabinet
Date:	20 April 2026
Subject:	Crisis and Resilience Fund
Lead Member:	Cllr Bedi, Finance, Children and Lifelong Learning
Chief Officer:	Ian O'Donnell, Executive Director Corporate Resources (S151)
Contact Officer:	Andy Jeffs, Director of Revenues and Welfare Services
Ward(s):	ALL
Purpose of report:	For decision
Key Decision:	YES
Exempt:	NO
Decision Subject To Call In:	YES
Appendices:	Appendix A – CRF Policy Appendix B – Housing Payments Policy Appendix C – Equality Impact Assessment

1. Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1 On 15 December 2025, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) confirmed the guidance on distributing the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF), which replaces the Household Support Fund (HSF) on the 1 April 2026.
- 1.2 This report seeks approval for the proposed allocations and delivery approach for the CRF.
- 1.3 The proposed CRF distribution aligns with the Council's Corporate Plan priorities and supports delivery of preventative, resident-focused services that reduce long-term demand.

Recommendations:

- Cabinet is asked to note in respect of the scheme:
 - a) That the Council's allocation of the Crisis and Resilience fund is £2.735m per annum from 1 April 2026 until 31 March 2029.
 - b) That the Section 151 Officer will certify and submit Management Information returns to DWP, in accordance with the grant conditions.

- Cabinet is asked to agree the following:
 - c) To approve the policies set out in Appendix A and B.
 - d) To delegate authority to the Executive Director of Corporate Resources (S151), following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Children and Lifelong Learning, to make minor alterations to the CRF policy to remain compliant and allocation of the CRF to optimise its use.
 - e) To delegate authority to the Executive Director of Corporate Resources (S151), following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Children and Lifelong Learning, to make minor alterations to the Housing Payment policy to remain compliant and optimise its use.

Commissioner Review

The Council has discretion on exactly how the Crisis and Resilience funding is used within the scope set out in the grant determination and the guidance issued by the Government. The policies are in line with current guidance and Commissioners are content for this report to be considered.

2. Report

Proposed approach to distribution of the Crisis and Resilience Fund

- 2.1 The HSF, introduced by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in 2021, will conclude on 31 March 2026. From 1 April 2026, the government will implement the CRF as a successor scheme. CRF is designed to provide targeted support for households facing financial hardship, while also building longer-term resilience and community co-ordination.
- 2.2 The CRF is a three-year grant covering the period 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029. It brings together funding previously provided through separate arrangements, including Discretionary Housing Payments, into a single, flexible framework designed to provide immediate crisis support and longer-term resilience building for low-income households.
- 2.3 The grant is a consolidated revenue grant and will be ringfenced to be spent as detailed in the CRF guidance.
- 2.4 Funding of £2.735m per year is confirmed for Slough Borough Council until March 2029.
- 2.5 The recommendations for distribution, are strategically aligned with **Slough Corporate Plan 2023-27**, specifically:

A town where residents can live healthier, safer and more independent lives.

- 2.6 The CRF's focus on crisis support, housing payments, income maximisation and financial resilience directly supports residents to:
 - avoid financial shock and homelessness
 - access essential living costs

- reduce reliance on emergency services
- increase financial confidence and independence.

This aligns with the Corporate Plan priority to enable residents to live healthier, safer and more independent lives by targeting the root causes of crisis, not just the immediate symptoms.

A cleaner, healthier and more prosperous Slough

2.7 The CRF funding contributes to prosperity by:

- supporting households to stabilise financially so they can participate in the local economy
- funding debt advice, employment support, savings and income-maximisation services
- helping households remain in work or move into employment.

These outcomes align with the Corporate Plan's strategic priority to improve the borough's overall health, economic opportunities, and quality of life for residents.

A borough for children and young people to thrive

2.8 The CRF indirectly contributes by:

- stabilising family finances so children live in secure, healthy homes
- reducing the risk of crisis-related negative outcomes (such as unstable housing or food insecurity)
- supporting resilience which improves outcomes across childhood and family wellbeing.

This supports the overall Council vision of closing the healthy life expectancy gap and enables conditions where children can thrive.

2.9 In line with statutory guidance, it is proposed that the Council distributes the CRF across the four required components:

- **Crisis Payments** – providing timely, cash-first support to households experiencing sudden financial shock, such as loss of income or unexpected essential costs.
- **Housing Payments** – supporting households with housing cost shortfalls to prevent homelessness and tenancy breakdown.
- **Resilience Services** – funding preventative support such as income maximisation, debt advice and financial capability services to reduce repeat crisis.
- **Community Coordination** – strengthening referral pathways and partnership working across statutory and voluntary sector organisations.

Proposed allocations

2.10 The proposed model prioritises year-round access, multiple application routes and a person-centred cash-first approach, ensuring support is accessible to residents who may be digitally excluded or multiple disadvantage. Flexibility will be retained to adjust allocations between components annually in response to demand, performance data and emerging pressures and best practice.

Help during the school holidays

2.11 The CRF is a needs-based, crisis-focused fund, not a universal welfare provision. As such, it is different to the HSF in terms of provision of Free School Meals (FSM). CRF does not permit automatic, blanket vouchers for all FSM families. Instead, CRF allocations must prioritise support for the poorest families during school holidays through targeted, needs based help, by assessing individual hardship, choosing the most appropriate form of assistance, and linking families to wider resilience services. Therefore, the FSM allocation for 2026/27 will be £600,000 and will be phased out and will no longer be included as part of the CRF from September 2026, post the school summer holiday break.

2.12 To mitigate this, a provision of £165,000 in 2026/27 will be made within other allocations including the Holidays, Activities and Food Programme (HAF) or similar schemes.

2.13 There are also national policy changes that will reduce pressure on low-income families to help mitigate this:

- Removal of the Two Child Limit: the two-child limit has long been associated with deepening child poverty; its removal ensures larger families receive full benefit entitlement again.
- Expansion of Universal Credit-Linked FSM eligibility: starting in 2026, all UC households will qualify for FSM.
- Increased investment in family hubs, early years, and school-based provision: wider government commitments in the Spending Review include expanded childcare and family support services, which indirectly reduce household costs, which will be complemented by local provisions through CRF.
- Expansion of Breakfast Clubs: to contribute to dietary stability, reduces morning hunger, and improves attendance and concentration in the absence of FSM provision.

Crisis payments

2.14 **Crisis Payments** address immediate, short-term needs caused by sudden financial shocks as lost income, urgent bills, or unexpected events. Funding allows one-off emergency help for essentials like food, utilities, and basic household items. The focus is rapid, flexible support delivered either through the Council, or through partner organisations to stabilise households in crisis.

2.15 Crisis payments will primarily be distributed by the Financial Inclusion Team, who previously administered the HSF. It will continue to be an application-based scheme, and applicants will be signposted or referred on for additional resilience

help, whether that is debt and money advice or other services. It is proposed that the Crisis Payment pot receives an allocation of £753,454.

- 2.16 In the proposals, £275,000 is allocated to the **Council Tax Support Hardship Scheme**. This provide support to those households who are financially vulnerable due to recent changes to the level of support provided through the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2026/27. Cabinet also agreed to carry forward £80,000 of unspent funding from 2025/26 to 2026/27, so the total available CTS Hardship Scheme funding in 2026/27 will be £355,000.

Resilience Services

- 2.17 It is proposed that £40,000 is made available to support the ongoing work with our care leavers.

Community Co-ordination

- 2.18 The CRF will fund initiatives in the Voluntary and Community Sector and Faith sector for advice and other community support. A proposed allocation of £160,000 has been set aside to fund this, and officers will work in conjunction with key stakeholders to develop a model that reflects the current needs of the borough and recognises changing priorities.

Housing Payments

- 2.19 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) mainly help vulnerable households with shortfalls in rent caused by Local Housing Allowance rates not covering full liabilities. They can also cover removal costs and rent in advance.
- 2.20 Although CRF Housing Payments replace DHPs from 1 April 2026, the scheme is fundamentally similar with some slight differences, and the funding provided in years one and two of CRF is the same as the DHP Funding.
- 2.21 The CRF guidance determines the substance of decision-making for Housing Payments, and the policy attached as Appendix B determines the structure and appeals process for decision making.
- 2.22 The DHP budget has been £501,546 for several years. The CRF guidance gives local authorities flexibility to spend +/- 20% of the £501,546 Housing Payment allocation.
- 2.23 Two officers will transfer from the Benefits Team to the Financial Inclusion Team to handling the delivery of the Housing Payments scheme.

Staffing and administration

- 2.23 It is proposed that £235,766 is allocated towards staffing and administration. This includes four officers in the Financial Inclusion Team at the cost of £213,584. This has increased by two officers to meet the changes to the scheme and the required turnaround target.
- 2.24 It is also proposed that the CRF funds £22,182 each year towards the Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) product. This will provide the Council with data analysis to help inform the picture of poverty and risk in the borough, also enabling the Council to target specific households for proactive help.

Options considered

- 2.25 A review has been undertaken of current distribution routes and forms of application, noting that take up for some schemes was far in excess of funding, and in others, leaving funds outstanding. Considering the longer-term nature of the CRF, replacing 6 monthly or annual allocations, it was concluded that other options would not be as effective as those recommended in terms of efficiently disbursing funds to those most in need, whilst keeping within the guidelines set out by the DWP.
- 2.26 Use of supermarket vouchers as the primary source of support distribution has been considered but is in contravention to the DWP aim for the funding to be delivered on a Cash First basis. This is not a cash only basis and there will be an option for vouchers for eligible households where this is preferred or where it is otherwise decided to be in the best interest of the household.

Background

- 2.27 The Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) is a three-year grant covering the period 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029. It brings together funding previously provided through separate arrangements, including Discretionary Housing Payments, into a single, flexible framework designed to provide immediate crisis support and longer-term resilience building for low-income households.

Financial Year	CRF Allocation (£m)
2026/2027	£2.735
2027/2028	£2.735
2028/2029	£2.735

- 2.28 The guidance places a clear expectation on local authorities to move away from purely reactive crisis support and towards a more integrated system that combines immediate assistance with preventative interventions, supporting the development of resilient and capable communities.
- 2.29 Slough continues to experience high levels of financial hardship, driven by housing costs, low incomes and wider cost-of-living pressures. Demand for local welfare support has remained consistently high, with increasing complexity of need among residents presenting for assistance. The Welfare service exists to support these residents with a no front door approach, using a data informed approach, to target interventions where they will have the most impact.
- 2.30 The proposed approach builds on existing local delivery models and partnerships, including the Council's welfare support services and voluntary and community sector provision. Engagement with internal services and partner organisations has informed the emphasis on cash-first support, accessibility and early intervention. The proposals also maintain continuity of housing support previously delivered through Discretionary Housing Payments, ensuring no gap in provision for vulnerable tenants and this will be delivered in partnership with housing services, to seek to prevent evictions, and target support at those who may be precariously housed.

3. Implications of the Recommendation

3.1 Financial implications

- 3.1.1 The funding sources set out in this report are based on the best information currently available. The 2026/27 to 2028/29 Crisis and Resilience Fund is a provisional allocation and yet to be confirmed. The provisional allocations for consolidated grants on the government website sets out that the Council's allocation for CRF is £2.735m in 2026/27, £2.735m in 2027/28, and £2.735m in 2028/29.
- 3.1.2 The Council will spend the grant in accordance with the conditions and not exceed the amount advised by the DWP.
- 3.1.3 The Council is required to provide management information (MI) returns outlining their grant spend and the volume of awards.
- 3.1.4 The grant payments will be made in arrears on receipt of a fully completed and verified MI return.
- 3.1.5 If the Council has not spent the grant in accordance with the conditions, then there is scope for clawback. The service will manage that risk.
- 3.1.6 It has been agreed that 50% (£22,182) will be allocated to the cost of the LIFT product from a grant received by Housing.
- 3.1.7 The report proposes delegating authority to the Executive Director of Corporate Resources (S151) following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Children and Lifelong Learning to make alterations to the CRF and Housing Payment Policies and allocation of the CRF to maximise its use.

3.2 Legal implications

- 3.2.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval to the arrangements and allocation of the new Crisis and Resilience Fund which replaces the Household Support Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments System for the period 1 April 2026 until 31 March 2029. The new fund comprises Crisis Payments, Housing Payments, Resilience Services and Community Co-ordination. As these are 'key decisions' they are therefore being made by Cabinet in accordance with the Council's Constitution (as Article 13 (Decision Making) paragraph 4(b) of the Constitution of 15th May 2025).
- 3.2.2 The CRF grant is being paid to the Council by the government in accordance with S31 of the Local Government Act 2003. The CRF will normally be distributed by the Council in accordance with Section 1 Localism Act 2011, but other more statutory powers may be used, including section 17 Children Act 1989.
- 3.2.3 The CRF will need to be operated in accordance with the DWP Guidance referred to in the report. Officers will also need to ensure that any grant payments to voluntary sector and community organisations to assist in its distribution to individuals in need comply with Subsidy Control rules (previously State Aid). The 'de minimis' regulation exception should be considered where relevant. Also, specifically any Housing Payments should take into account the case law referred

to in the guidance to avoid any duplication of payments. In this regard, appropriate, legal advice will be sought and obtained by officers operating the CRF.

- 3.2.4 The Equality Act 2010 states that public bodies, when carrying out their functions, must have 'due regard' to equalities objectives namely the need to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a 'protected characteristic' and those who do not (Equality Act 2010, Section 149). Cabinet will need to do this when considering this report.
- 3.3 Risk management implications
 - 3.3.1 Failure to endorse the recommendations presents a risk that the Council will be unable to submit its CRF Delivery Plan to the DWP by the 1 July 2026 deadline.
 - 3.3.2 The funding of posts within the Council from 1 April 2026 also depends on approval.
 - 3.3.3 There is a risk that other organisations allocated CRF funding and are reliant on these funds to support the most vulnerable people and households in the borough, may struggle if the funding is not confirmed.
- 3.4 Environmental implications
 - 3.4.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report. However, funding is proposed for energy advice and fuel poverty that is aimed at helping households to achieve greater energy efficiency or reduce energy use.
- 3.5 Equality implications
 - 3.5.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment for the CRF is attached as Appendix C
 - 3.5.2 One of the changes for CRF is the withdrawal of FSM vouchers in the school holidays. The reduction in funding for FSM is covered in the body of the report and the EIA. This could impact intersecting groups due to the large cross-section of low-income households who currently receive the vouchers. The main body of the report deals with the proposed mitigations, and the national conditions that improve the situation for many households.
 - 3.5.3 The changes required in monitoring the CRF will give officers an opportunity to improve the dataset with a view to updating the EIA as part of the co-design process for years two and three of CRF.
- 3.6 Corporate Parenting Implications
 - 3.6.1 It is proposed that £40,000 is made available to support the ongoing work with our care leavers.
- 3.8 Workforce implications
 - 3.8.1 Two officers will transfer from the Benefits Team to the Financial Inclusion Team to handling the delivery of the Housing Payments scheme.
 - 3.8.2 To deliver the CRF there is a requirement for four officers in the Financial Inclusion Team. This has increased by two officers from those delivering the HSF to meet the

changes to the scheme and the required turnaround target. Due to the three-year commitment in funding, it is proposed the roles will be on Fixed Term Contracts.

4. Background Papers

4.1. None.