

Meeting date: 28 May 2026

Report to: Full Cabinet

Report title: Crisis Support and Housing Payment Policy

Report from: Director of Resources

Report author/lead contact officer: Joanne Robinson, Head of Income & Awards
joanne.robinson@solihull.gov.uk
Jane Smith, Awards Operations Manager,
janesmith@solihull.gov.uk

Wards affected:

- All Wards | Bickenhill | Blythe | Castle Bromwich | Chelmsley Wood |
 Dorridge/Hockley Heath | Elmdon | Kingshurst/Fordbridge | Knowle |
 Lyndon | Meriden | Olton | Shirley East | Shirley South |
 Shirley West | Silhill | Smith's Wood | St Alphege
-

Public/private report: Public

Exempt by virtue of paragraph: N/A

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) is a national programme for local authorities in England designed to provide a strengthened local welfare safety net by supporting low-income households who experience sudden financial shocks, while also investing in services that build longer-term individual and community financial resilience. It brings together crisis support, housing-related assistance and preventative service into a single, flexible framework, and replaces Discretionary Housing Payments with a new Housing Payments strand from April 2026.
- 1.2 The CRF is funded by the UK Government as a consolidated, ringfenced revenue grant delivered through the Local Government Finance Settlement with policy oversight from the Department for Work and Pensions. The CRF operates for a defined three year period from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029, after which arrangements will be subject to review.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with details of the Council's approach to awarding crisis support and housing payments as part of the CRF and to present a policy for approval.

2. Decision(s) Recommended

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to approve the Crisis Support and Housing Payment Policy attached at appendix A to take effect from 1 April 2026.
- 2.2 Cabinet is asked to delegate authority to the Head of Income and Awards to make minor operational updates to the policy where required to remain aligned with Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) guidance, subject to annual review.

3. Matters for Consideration

- 3.1 The Council has provided support to low-income households for many years via the Household Support Fund and the Discretionary Housing Payment Fund.

Household Support Fund (HSF) – Overview and Delivery

- 3.2 The Household Support Fund (HSF) was introduced by the DWP in October 2021 as a temporary national scheme to help households facing financial hardship due to rising living costs. The HSF was extended several times in response to ongoing cost of living pressures and operated locally until its conclusion on 31 March 2026. The HSF has now ended and has been replaced by the Crisis Resilience Fund.
- 3.3 In Solihull, delivery of the crisis element of the HSF was predominantly led by the Council's Financial Inclusion Team, working closely with other council teams such as Connect and partner organisations. The Council applied its existing Discretionary Crisis Fund (DCF) policy to determine eligibility, allowing the HSF crisis support to be embedded quickly and effectively within established local support arrangements.
- 3.4 The HSF provided essential, practical assistance to vulnerable residents, primarily of working age, with pension-age support delivered predominantly through Age UK. Support included:
 - Food vouchers and food parcels
 - Fuel and energy vouchers and top ups
 - Essential household items, such as white goods, beds and mattresses
 - Warm clothing and school uniforms
- 3.5 Between October 2021 and March 2026, the Financial Inclusion Team supported over 7,235 working age households, delivering a total of £955,575 in financial crisis support. Some households received help more than once or received assistance across multiple needs, reflecting the complexity and persistence of financial hardship during this period.
- 3.6 During 2025/26 the Financial Inclusion Team have continued to deliver a consistent and controlled HSF crisis scheme focussed on mitigating cost-of-living pressures for vulnerable households. Delivery has remained compliant with grant conditions, with funding prioritised towards, food, energy and wider essentials and a sustained emphasis on households with children, disabled residents and those of working-age.
- 3.7 The total HSF spend for crisis support delivered during 2025/26 as part of the Council's DCF increased during the year reflecting rising demand for support. Total spend for 2025/26 was £209,934 with spend peaking during Autumn and Winter months (£67.6K Oct – Dec 2025 and £59.9k Jan – Mar 2026)
- 3.8 The number of households supported increased slightly during the latter half of the year with 309 households supported from April to September v's 376 households

supported from October to March.

- 3.9 Across all four periods, households with children consistently represented the largest cohort of households at 50% of those supported, followed by other working-age households (38%) and disabled residents (12%).
- 3.10 The large number of households with children is expected following the effective targeting of support in collaboration with Family Hubs.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP's) – Overview and Delivery

- 3.11 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP's) were a government funded scheme that enabled local authorities to provide short term financial support to residents struggling with housing costs. Eligibility was restricted to residents in receipt of housing benefit or the housing element of universal credit.
- 3.12 In 2025/26, Solihull Council received DHP funding of £239,499. A total of 630 applications were received during 2025/26 with 289 awards made. The funding allocation was spent in full. 61% of funding was awarded to households in North Solihull (£145,895) with 39% awarded to households in South Solihull (£93,604).
- 3.13 The majority of awards (around 80%) supported universal credit claimants awaiting their first payment, helping to prevent rent arrears during the initial transition to universal credit. DHP's were also used to assist households affected by the benefit cap or the social sector size criteria, as well as tenants living in temporary accommodation.
- 3.14 In addition, DHP funding was used more flexibly to support homelessness prevention and relief, including reducing rent arrears, and funding rent deposits and rent in advance payments to help households move into suitable more affordable housing.
- 3.15 Data shows that households with children formed the largest cohort by spend (£97k) followed by other households such as care leavers and single occupiers (£95k). Disabled residents were the next supported cohort (£41k) followed by pensioner households (£6k). This data is in line with expectations in terms welfare reforms impacting those of working age.
- 3.16 Social sector accommodation saw the biggest awards by spend at 55% followed by privately rented accommodation at 39%. Support provided to those in temporary accommodation accounted for 6% of spend. This data is in line with expectations demonstrating the DHP's role in homelessness prevention and tenancy sustainment.
- 3.17 The activity and learning from the HSF and DHP delivery has helped to inform the development and operation of the Crisis Support and Housing Payment Policy

Crisis Support and Housing Payment Policy

- 3.18 The Crisis Support and Housing Payment Policy forms part of the Council's delivery of the CRF funded by Central Government and guided by the DWP. The policy replaces the Discretionary Crisis Fund Policy and Discretionary Housing Payment Policy effective from 1 April 2026 and establishes a clear, consistent and transparent framework for the award of emergency crisis support, housing-related payments and referrals to resilience services.
- 3.19 The policy has been developed to ensure local delivery remains fully aligned with national CRF guidance, while reflecting local priorities around:

- Resilience services such as support with health, debt or financial issues
- Early intervention
- Prevention of crisis escalation
- Trauma-informed, person-centred support

3.20 Key features of the policy include a strong focus on resident support. The policy places residents at the centre of decision-making and ensures that financial assistance is delivered alongside access to wider support. Key principles include:

- Person-centred and needs-based assessments
- Trauma-informed practice
- A 'no wrong door' approach, ensuring residents are supported even where CRF is not the most appropriate intervention
- Wraparound support and referrals to wider resilience services such as debt advice, welfare rights and income maximisation

Crisis Payments

- 3.21 Crisis payments provide short-term financial support to residents facing sudden financial shocks that could otherwise escalate into more serious hardship. Payments focus on essential living costs including food, utilities, clothing, appliances and emergency housing-related costs.
- 3.22 Eligibility is intentionally broad and includes residents not in receipt of benefits ensuring support reaches those who may fall outside traditional welfare systems but are nonetheless vulnerable to crisis.
- 3.23 In line with DWP guidance the Council will adopt a cash-first approach as the primary method of crisis support, recognising that cash first is the most flexible and person-centred way of helping residents meet essential needs. Where appropriate, Crisis Payments will be delivered through bank transfer or cash-out vouchers, enabling households to prioritise spending based on their individual circumstances. Alternative payment methods, such as vouchers may be used where a case is deemed unsuitable and where this is in the individual's best interests.
- 3.24 The policy also provides for the direct provision of goods where this is more appropriate, cost-effective or necessary to address presenting need. This may include the supply and delivery of essential furniture such as beds, mattresses or white goods such as washing machines or cookers that meet required safety and energy efficiency standards. Food parcels will be provided in exceptional circumstances, alongside referrals to local food support services. The use of goods rather than cash will be determined by officers on a case-by-case basis, taking into account value for money and the applicant's wider circumstances.
- 3.25 Decisions on crisis awards will be made following a needs-based assessment of income and expenditure, ensuring awards are proportionate, targeted to essential living costs and aligned with the purpose of preventing or alleviating immediate crisis. A holistic approach will be taken that links immediate crisis support with longer-term resilience and support services. In cases where a resident submits more than two applications within a six-month period, consideration of any further award will be subject to the provision of additional information on the resilience support offered and taken up.

Housing Payments

- 3.26 Housing payments provide targeted financial assistance to residents who are entitled to Housing Benefit or the housing costs element of Universal Credit but require additional support to meet essential housing related costs. The scheme is intended to prevent homelessness, sustain tenancies, and support residents to secure or move into more affordable accommodation.
- 3.27 Housing Payments may be awarded to cover rent shortfalls, rent deposits, rent arrears, rent in advance and other reasonable housing-related costs. Awards may be made as one-off or time-limited payments and are discretionary based on an assessment of the applicant's income, circumstances and housing need.
- 3.28 Payments may be made to applicants, landlords, agents or where appropriate directly to the rent account of the applicants, ensuring flexibility while safeguarding the effective use of public funds. Housing Payments cannot be used to meet costs arising solely from benefit sanctions, overpayment recovery, suspended benefits or ineligible service charges.
- 3.29 Decisions will consider sustainability and affordability, and where appropriate officers will link financial support with wider housing and resilience services. This approach ensures Housing Payments operate not only as short-term financial relief but with a broader, preventative aim of reducing housing insecurity and financial hardship across the borough.
- 3.30 For those not eligible for a Housing Payment (because they are not in receipt of Housing Benefit or the housing cost element of Universal Credit) support can still be considered in the form of a crisis payment.

4. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?

- 4.1 The policy is predominantly based on DWP Crisis and Resilience Fund guidance and sets out the Council's approach to dealing with and considering applications for crisis support and housing payments.
- 4.2 The policy is required to replace the existing Discretionary Crisis Fund and Discretionary Housing Payment policies. The new Crisis Support and Housing Payment policy will ensure:
- Compliance with national expectations and funding conditions
 - Consistency with the approach taken when considering applications
 - Robust governance, monitoring and reporting arrangements

5. Reasons for recommending preferred option

- 5.1 Approval of the policy attached at appendix A is recommended because it:
- Strengthens support for residents at risk of financial crisis or housing insecurity
 - Provides a clear and transparent framework for decision-making
 - Ensures local delivery is aligned with DWP guidance and funding requirements
 - Embeds trauma-informed and resilience-focussed approaches that mitigates the risks of future financial crisis
- 5.2 The policy includes provision for the annual review or earlier updates should DWP revise national guidance, ensuring the Council remains responsive to changes at a

national level. Cabinet is asked to delegate authority to the Head of Income and Awards, in consultation with the Director of Resources (S151) to make minor operational updates to the policy where required.

6. Implications and Considerations

6.1 State how the proposals in this report contribute to the ambitions in the [Council Plan](#):

Ambition:	Contribution:
1. The right conditions for everyone to thrive.	Crisis support and housing payments are available to support with a financial shock with a focus on resilience services to mitigate the risk of future financial issues.
2. Services that people need in the right time at the right place.	N/A
3. Children and young people have the best possible outcomes.	Crisis support and housing payments are available to families with children.
4. Adults are supported to maximise wellbeing and independence.	Crisis support and housing payments are available to any adult over the age of 18 and ordinarily resident in Solihull
5. A vibrant economy with increased access to opportunities.	N/A
6. Opportunities and fairer outcomes by acting on climate change.	N/A
7. An attractive and aspirational place.	N/A

6.2 Consultation and Scrutiny:

6.2.1 The Crisis Support & Housing Payment Policy has been shared with key internal stakeholders such as Adult Social Care, Children Services, Employment & Skills, Connect and Communities Team.

6.3 Corporate Parenting Implications

6.3.1 Specific referral pathways for care experienced young people have been agreed providing a clear, consistent route for practitioners to identify need and ensure timely access to financial and practical support for those eligible. Referrals will be made through established pathways enabling a coordinated response that complements ongoing personal advisor involvement and resilience services.

6.4 Financial implications:

6.4.1 Solihull Council has received ringfenced Crisis Resilience Funding of £2.4 million per year for the period 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029 – total allocation over the programme, approximately £7.2 million. The funding is provided by the Department for

Work and Pensions (DWP) and replaces both the Household Support Fund (HSF) and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP's) bringing them into a single, longer-term local welfare framework.

- 6.4.2 Of the £2.4 million per year, £564,247 has been allocated to the administration and awarding of crisis support and housing payments. This figure is based on previous similar spend of the HSF and DHP's. Regular reviews will take place to monitor demand and funding allocations.
- 6.4.3 The remainder of funding allocated to Solihull is being directed towards other forms of crisis support, the commissioning and delivery of resilience services, as well as community coordination – as per the UK governments requirements for the funding. For 2026/27 there will be some interim arrangements through the continuation of relevant and eligible schemes that were funded through the HSF. This will be complemented by the new investment in the Information and Advice Service that is currently being procured, as well as increased offers for families through the Family Hubs and Holiday Activity and Food programme.
- 6.4.4 Funding guidelines confirm that expenditure is not required to be fully utilised within each individual financial year. Any unspent funding from Years 1 and 2 of the CRF may be carried forward in line with programme requirements. Any unspent funding at the end of Year 3 could be recovered by DWP.
- 6.5 Legal implications:
 - 6.5.1 The proposed policy governs the delivery of centrally funded crisis and resilience support. Delivery arrangements comply with relevant national guidance.
- 6.6 Risk implications, including Risk Appetite:
 - 6.6.1 The Crisis Support and Housing Payment policy provides a robust and compliant framework for supporting residents during periods of acute financial hardship. Not having an approved and published policy could leave the Council open to legal challenge.
- 6.7 Equality implications:
 - 6.7.1 Information covered in section 3 of this report has included key equality allocation of the crisis support delivered as part of the Household Support Fund and housing support as part of the Discretionary Housing Payment Fund.
 - 6.7.2 A full assessment of equalities based on the proposed Crisis Support and Housing Payment policy is included within Appendix B – Crisis Support and Housing Payment Policy – Fair Treatment Assessment.
 - 6.7.3 The assessment identified no adverse impacts from the proposed policy. Eligibility criteria, application processes and decision-making arrangements are designed to be flexible and responsive to individual circumstances, with discretion built in to ensure fairness. Potential barriers related to accessibility, digital exclusion, language needs and awareness of support have been considered with mitigating actions in place including assisted applications, clear communications and signposting to wider resilience services.
 - 6.7.4 Ongoing monitoring will continue to ensure fair access, consistency of decision-making and that support reaches those most in need. Overall, the assessment confirms that the proposed Crisis Support and Housing Payments policy aligns with

the Council's commitment to fairness, financial inclusion and supporting residents in financial hardship.

6.8 Linkages to our work with the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and / or the Birmingham & Solihull Integrated Care System (ICS):

6.8.1 None

7. List of appendices referred to

7.1 Appendix A – Crisis Support and Housing Payment Policy

7.2 Appendix B – Crisis Support and Housing Payment Policy Fair Treatment Assessment

8. Background papers used to compile this report

8.1 [Crisis and Resilience Fund: Guidance for local authorities in England](#)