

Community Pantry and Hardship Fund

of the Benefice of Stoke-by-Nayland with Leavenheath and Polstead,
and Nayland with Wissington

Report on calendar year 2024

1 Summary

The Community Pantry and Hardship Fund (CP & HF) operates in the parishes of Leavenheath, Nayland, Polstead and Stoke by Nayland. Community Pantries (CPs) operated at the churches of those parishes throughout 2024. The Hardship Fund (HF) operated mainly but not exclusively by references from the two Primary Schools.

Income increased modestly compared with 2023. Outgoings on the CPs reduced modestly. Those from the HF fell considerably, partly because of a decision not to offer grants to free-school-meal families at the two primary schools, partly because of a reduction in referrals for specific needs. The largest single element of both income and outgoings was in-kind supplies for the CPs, funded by central government from the Household Support Fund via Suffolk County Council (SCC) and distributed by Community Action Suffolk (CAS). But note that over half the total contributions were local.

1.1 Numbers

The CP & HF started 2024 with reserves of around £10,400 and ended with around £18,500, reflecting income of around £39,800 and outgoings of around £31,700 (in both cases including the estimated* value of the supplies from CAS).

Details for the three calendar years since the start of the CP & HF are given below, and by parish for 2024 on the next page. All values rounded to nearest £100.

<i>Incoming resources</i>	2022	2023	2024
Individuals	£10,600	£13,300	£12,200
Churches	£1,200	£5,000	£800
Public bodies	£1,100	£1,600	£4,300
Walsh Trust	-	£900	£1,200
Other	£3,100	£400	£4,400
Total money receipts	£16,000	£21,200	£22,900
CAS in kind	-	£17,400	£17,400 *
Total	£16,000	£38,600	£40,300 *
<i>Outgoings</i>			
Pantries	£6,100	£30,700	£29,200*
HF grants:			
Specific needs	£1,600	£5,700	£2,400
Free-school-meal families	£1,600	£3,100	
Leavenheath Warm Space			£600
Total	£9,300	£39,500	£32,200 *

*Estimated, CAS in-kind assumed the same as 2023

Outgoings by Civil Parish, 2024

	<i>Nayland</i>	<i>Leavenheath</i>	<i>Polstead</i>	<i>Stoke</i>	<i>Total</i>
Pantries					
Money purchase	£3,700	£900	£3,900	£3,300	£11,300
CAS in kind *	£4,350	£4,350	£4,350	£4,350	£17,400
Total*	£8,050	£5,250	£8,250	£7,650	£28,700
HF grants					
Specific needs	£800	£100	£1,400	£100	£2,400
FSM families					
Warm Space		£600			£600
Total CP & HF*	£8,850	£5,950	£9,650	£7,750	£31,700

1.2 General

Over half the cost of the CPs is met by the supplies in-kind ultimately funded by central government and channelled through SCC & CAS. For much of 2023 and the first half of 2024 this was under threat of non-renewal. We therefore held back on the expenses under our control, specifically grants to free school-meal families, to be in a better position to respond should the government support end. In the event it did not, and also the number of referrals for HF grants to meet specific needs reduced substantially.

A proportion of our funds are restricted, typically to be used to benefit the residents of the donor's parish. The grant of £1,000 from Babergh was to support the – notably successful - Warm Space initiative in Leavenheath Village Hall.

	<i>Nayland</i>	<i>Leavenheath</i>	<i>Polstead</i>	<i>Stoke</i>
Walsh Trust	£1,200			
Stoke Spring Fair				£3,000
Babergh DC		£1,000		
Parish Council	£500		£250	£2,500
Other	£2,000	£800	£450	£200
Total	£3,700	£1,800	£700	£5,700

While we cannot be certain where users of the CPs live, it is reasonable to take it that most of them are from the parish in question. On that basis, where the total of HF specific needs grant and money purchase expenditure considerably exceeds the restricted income, we take it the condition has been fulfilled. That does not apply in the case of the Warm Space initiative, and the unspent funds are going towards the relevant expenditure in 2025. Nor does it apply in Stoke, but here the Spring Fair donation is also going towards 2025 expenditure, since the Spring Fair takes place only every other year.

1.3 Agenda

While it now seems clear that the Household Support Fund will continue, it is not certain that SCC will direct as much to in-kind support of Food Banks and CPs. Nevertheless, the present level of reserves is higher than appropriate. We are looking for ways to increase referrals for HF grants, and would appreciate assistance in this quest.

2 Community Pantries

2.1 What, why and where

CPs make packaged food and other household necessities available for anyone to take freely. They are the rural version of Food Banks: in villages it is not feasible to deploy the administrative effort involved in Food Banks, and in villages the anonymity inherent in the CP is important in a way it is not in towns.

The four CPs are in the four churches of their villages. Initially we sought but did not find alternatives to Polstead and Leavenheath churches, given their remoteness. In the event all CPs have been well used.

2.2 Stocking

CP organisers purchase basic products from low-cost supermarkets and similar retailers. The CAS supplies are similar. The CPs also purchase short-life items such as eggs, bread and fresh fruit. Donations in kind by individuals, direct to the CP, are a modest supplement. Since the end of 2023 Rix's Farms have donated onions and potatoes.

2.3 Abuse

Concern is expressed from time to time about abuse of the CPs. The potential is inherent in the nature of CPs. We believe the level is low. No worthwhile evidence has been put forward that it's on any scale.

What we offer is basics, not luxuries. When people in cars take from Community Pantries, this is less evidence of abuse, than of the lack of alternative transport in rural areas. The choice is between accepting some leakage, or ceasing to provide for those in need. All measures to reduce abuse of benefit systems involve costs, which reduce the resources available to those in need. The CP & HF operates with zero overheads – zero salaries, zero expenses, zero premises costs.

It's also quite possible that someone from one of the four parishes takes from a CP in another. But this will be offset by someone from the second taking from the CP in the first. It's improbable that people from outside the area travel in to take from the CPs. We take steps to avoid the CPs being publicised outside the parishes.

3 Hardship Fund

Initially HF grants were made on the basis of the personal knowledge of, or personal approaches to, our two ordained priests, Revd. Stéphane Javelle and Revd. Val Armstrong. Then grants were offered, via the Primary Schools, to families on free school meals. Latterly we have encouraged the schools, with their close pastoral knowledge, to identify specific individual needs not met by the statutory services.

The CP & HF has miniscule financial resources compared with government, and none of government's resources of professional staff and compulsory powers. It makes no sense for us to do the same as government. But we do have advantages over government. We do not suffer the constraints of rigid procedures. We – especially the schools - have local personal knowledge. So we can operate on the basis of trust, hence very swiftly and confidentially, and of addressing rare or novel or inconspicuous forms of need. We can meet needs government can't. The Walsh Trust, an ancient Nayland charity, has confided their income to us to distribute in line with their Governing Document.

Where we suspect beneficiaries have intractable financial problems our policy is to refer them to professional advisors.