

Community Pantry and Hardship Fund

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

Report on calendar year 2025

1.1 Summary

The Community Pantry and Hardship Fund (CP & HF) operates in the civil parishes of Leavenheath, Nayland, Polstead and Stoke by Nayland. Community Pantries (CPs) operated at the churches of those parishes throughout 2025. The Hardship Fund (HF) operated mainly but not exclusively by references from the two Primary Schools.

Money income from individuals remained steady but from other sources fell considerably. As discussed below, we cannot quantify precisely the volume of supplies in kind from the Government's Household Support Fund (HSF), but it probably declined.

Money expenditure on the CPs increased, doubling in the second half of the year.

Expenditure on the HF roughly trebled, partly because of resuming seasonal grants to free-school-meal (FSM) families but mainly because of a doubling in grants for specific needs.

1.2 Numbers

The CP & HF started 2025 with reserves of around £18,500 and ended with around £11,900, reflecting income of around £32,600 and outgoings of around £39,200.

Details for the four calendar years since the start of the CP & HF are given below, and by parish for 2025 on the next page. All values rounded to nearest £100.

<i>Incoming resources</i>	2022	2023	2024	2025
Individuals	£10,600	£13,300	£12,200	£11,750
Churches	£1,200	£5,000	£800	£850
Public bodies	£1,100	£1,600	£4,300	£1,750
Walsh Trust	-	£900	£1,200	£300
Other	£3,100	£400	£4,400	£550
Total money receipts	£16,000	£21,200	£22,900	£15,400
CAS in kind	-	£17,400	£17,400*	£17,400*
Total	£16,000	£38,600	£40,300*	£32,600*

Outgoings

CPs	£6,100	£30,700	£29,200*	£31,300*
HF grants:				
Specific needs	£1,600	£5,700	£2,400	£5,200
Free-school-meal families	£1,600	£3,100		£2,200
Leavenheath Warm Space			£600	£500
Total	£9,300	£39,500	£32,200*	£39,200*

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

Bank balances at start of year				£18,500
Surplus/(deficit) for year	£6,700	(£900)	£8,300	(£6,700)
Bank balances at end of year			£18,500	£11,800

Outgoings by Civil Parish, 2025

	<i>Nayland</i>	<i>Leavenheath</i>	<i>Polstead</i>	<i>Stoke</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Pantries</i>					
Money purchase	£3,600	£2,800	£4,300	£3,200	£13,900
<i>HF grants</i>					
Specific needs	£500	£800	£1,600	£2,300	£5,200
FSM families	£400	£100	£200	£1,500	£2,200
Warm Space		£500			£500
<i>Total CP & HF</i>	<i>£4,500</i>	<i>£4,100</i>	<i>£6,100</i>	<i>£7,000</i>	<i>£21,800</i>

1.3 General

Maybe half the cost of the CPs is met by the supplies in-kind ultimately funded by central government's HSF and channelled through Suffolk County Council (SCC) & Community Action Suffolk (CAS). It has been about half: we were told the actual figure for 2023, but not since. The administration of the HSF funds by Suffolk is opaque. We don't know the total Suffolk gets, nor how much gets to help our CPs and similar foodbanks.

We do know that significant sums are spent on paid staff doing nothing of value to us.

Our solid base of income comes from local people, not organisations. Steadily, month after month, £11,000 a year. 20 standing orders. Only half are regular churchgoers.

It now happens that when local organisations have surplus funds, eg on winding up, they donate them to the CP & HF.

Some of our income is restricted, typically to benefit residents of the donor's parish.

<i>Restricted donations 2025</i>	<i>Nayland</i>	<i>Leavenheath</i>	<i>Polstead</i>	<i>Stoke</i>
Walsh Trust	£300			
Churches	£250	£100		£500
Babergh DC		£1,250		
Parish Council	£500			
Individuals	£1,800	£100		£200
<i>Total</i>	<i>£2,850</i>	<i>£1,450</i>		<i>£700</i>

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 grants and money purchase expenditure for the parish considerably exceeds the restricted income, we take it the condition has been fulfilled.

1.4 Agenda

Two new issues emerged towards the end of 2025: A sharp increase in expenditure on CPs; and “serial HF claimants”.

The first: Expenditure on CPs during the first half year varied between £400 and £1,100 per month, averaging £750. In the second half year it varied between £900 and £2,800, averaging £1,600. This reflected higher demand, as well as lower HSF supplies.

Combined with a sharp increase in HF expenditure (partly but only partly because of the decision to resume payments to FSM families), it resulted in a substantial deficit, with total expenditure in the 2nd half year nearly double income. If continued, our reserves would be exhausted by the end of 2026.

This has continued in 2026, with monthly average CP expenditure of £1,300.

The second issue: very few of those receiving HF grants for specific needs (as opposed to seasonal grants such as at Christmas) seek, or are referred for, further grants. But in the second half of 2025 there were instances of multiple applications. The underlying reason in any particular instance may not be possible for us to ascertain, given the basis of trust on which we work. It is anyway irrelevant: there is some underlying problem, which we are not equipped to solve. We have to refer them to professional advisors eg Citizens Advice Bureau.

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 alternatives to Polstead and Leavenheath churches, given their remoteness. 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 Beneficiaries

Almost all use of CPs is when no one else is around. Which is entirely natural. Very occasionally we get to know particular users. One instance is where one user, whose family depended heavily on the CP during a crisis, helped organise it once the crisis had passed.

2.4 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.

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.

3 Hardship Fund

3.1 How and why

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. We have made contact with the Chaplains at Thomas Gainsborough School, the main secondary school serving the parishes, but no HF referrals have resulted.

The CP & HF has minuscule 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.

3.2 How many, how much and what for

24 grants, total cost £2175, were made around Christmas to FSM families at the two village primary schools, at the rate of £25 per family plus £25 per child.

38 specific grants, total cost £5275, were made, to 24 households. The amounts varied widely, from £15 to £750. The reasons varied widely. There were emergencies: An employer went into liquidation and wages were unpaid - A freezer failed - Universal Credit mix-ups. There were unbudgeted lump sum expenses: School trips – new glasses – shoes - a house move. A premature baby constituted, in budgeting terms, both an emergency and continuing unbudgeted expenses.

It is important to bear in mind how narrow the margins are for those dependent on benefits. And a single parent is liable to be not only cash-poor, but time-poor.

Please direct any questions to Adam Sedgwick, Administrator of the CP & HF on behalf of the Benefice of Stoke-by-Nayland with Leavenheath and Polstead, and Nayland with Wissington, at adam.sedgwick@yahoo.co.uk