

A data-led approach to increasing Free School Meals take up

South Cambridgeshire District Council



South Cambridgeshire

- A rural district consisting of over 100 villages
- Ranked 17th least deprived district in England
- Yet there are 'hidden pockets' of deprivation



Using data to great effect

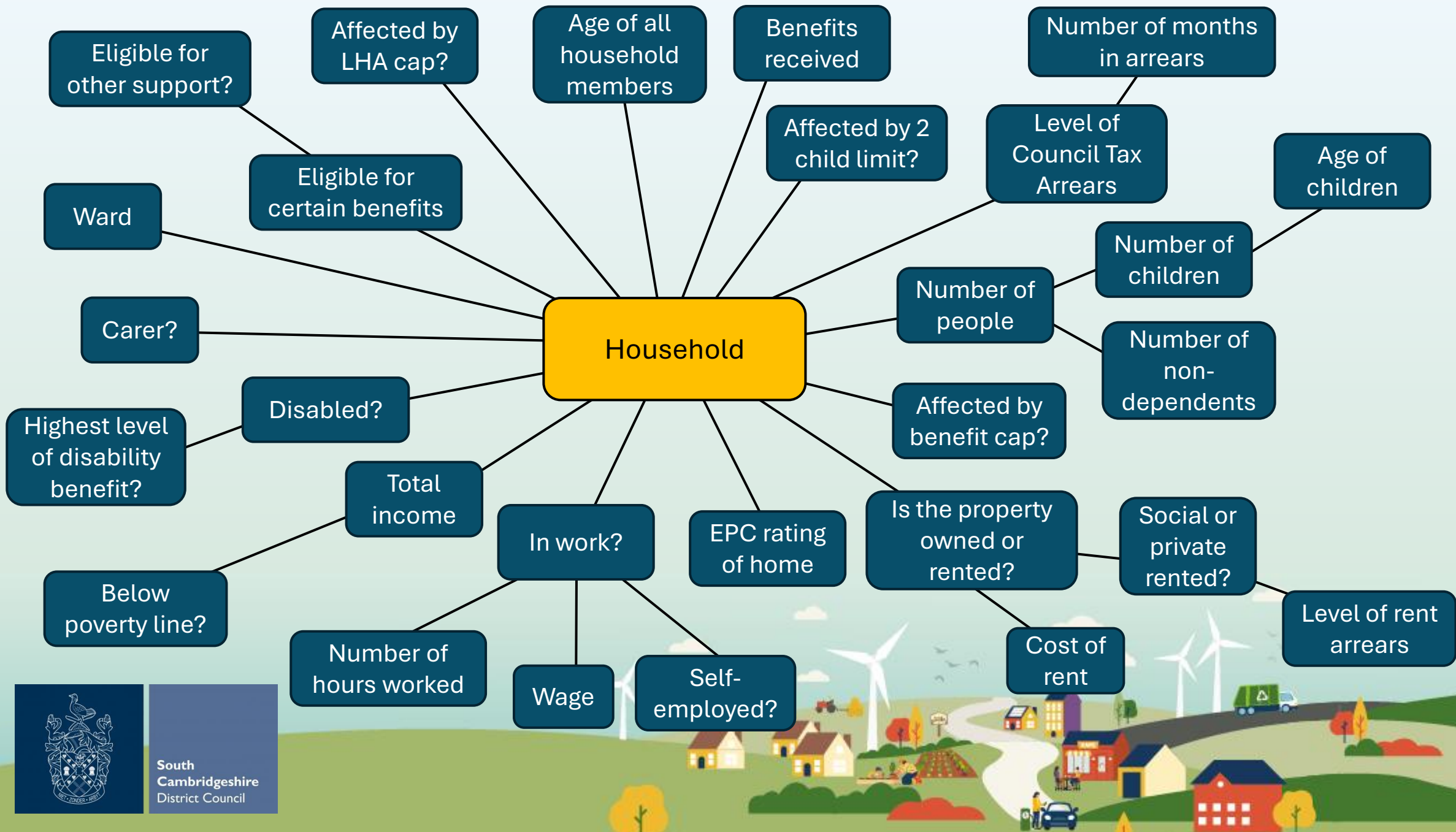
- Previous campaigns focussed on benefit take-up with little to show in terms of outcomes
- Since using LIFT we have secured a projected £4 million directly to residents, all at no direct cost to the Council
- This has included getting 113 households onto Pension Credit, targeting invites to community events, and running a highly successful Healthy Start campaign



What is LIFT?

- LIFT is a software platform that layers multiple datasets held within the Council, alongside some external datasets, and applies modelling to provide insights down to a household level.
- Those within LIFT are those that are claiming either Housing Benefit or Council Tax Support. In South Cambridgeshire this is roughly 6,500 households, or just under 10% of all households in the district.
- Once a household claims one of these, we gain access to a wealth of information on their circumstances







Map type

Ward map

ELIGIBLE AND NOT CLAIMING

Pension credit

- ☒ Yes
☒ No

Savings credit only

- ☒ Yes
☒ No

SDP (HB)

- ☒ Yes
☒ No

Tax credits / UC

- ☒ Yes
☒ No

IS/JSA/ESA or UC

- ☒ Yes
☒ No

DHP target group

- ☒ Yes
☒ No

Means-tested

Free school meals (FSM)

- ☒ Yes
☒ No

Healthy Start / Best Start

- ☒ Yes
☒ No

Warm Homes Discount

- ☒ Yes
☒ No

Water sure

- ☒ Yes
☒ No

NHS prescriptions

- ☒ Yes
☒ No

SDP (DWP)

- ☒ No

Disabled bus pass

- ☒ Yes
☒ No

Free TV license

- ☒ Yes
☒ No

Scottish child payment

No

ELIGIBLE FOR FREE CHILDCARE

18mo - 2yrs

- ☒ Yes
☒ No

2 yrs

- ☒ Yes
☒ No

3-4 yrs

- ☒ Yes
☒ No

ELIGIBLE FOR

DEMOGRAPHICS

Tenure

(All)

Household Type

(All)

Age group

(All)

Age bracket

(All)

Disability

(All)

Carer household

(All)

Economic status

(All)

Self employed household

(All)

EPC rating

(All)

EMPLOYMENT

Barriers to work

(All)

Hours worked

(All)

Earning below

☒ £12.53/hour
☒ £13.85/hour
☒ (None)

CHILDREN & NON-DEPS

Number of children

0 9

Number of non-dependants

0 4

With a child between

and

INTERVENTIONS

DHP

No

HB

(All)

CTS

(All)

EHP

No

HSF

No

Energy reb...

No

Scottish Welfare Fund

No

GEOGRAPHY

Postcode

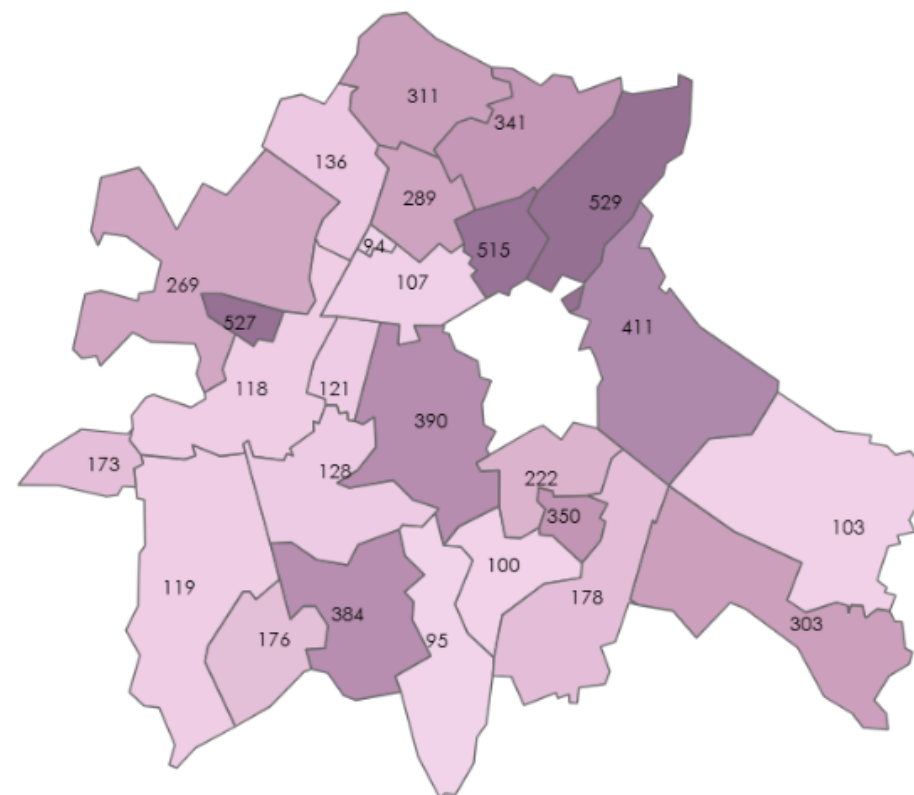
Local authority

South Ca...

Ward

(All)

Filter HB Ref#



ADDITIONAL FILTERS

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Pension credit

☒ Yes
 ☒ No

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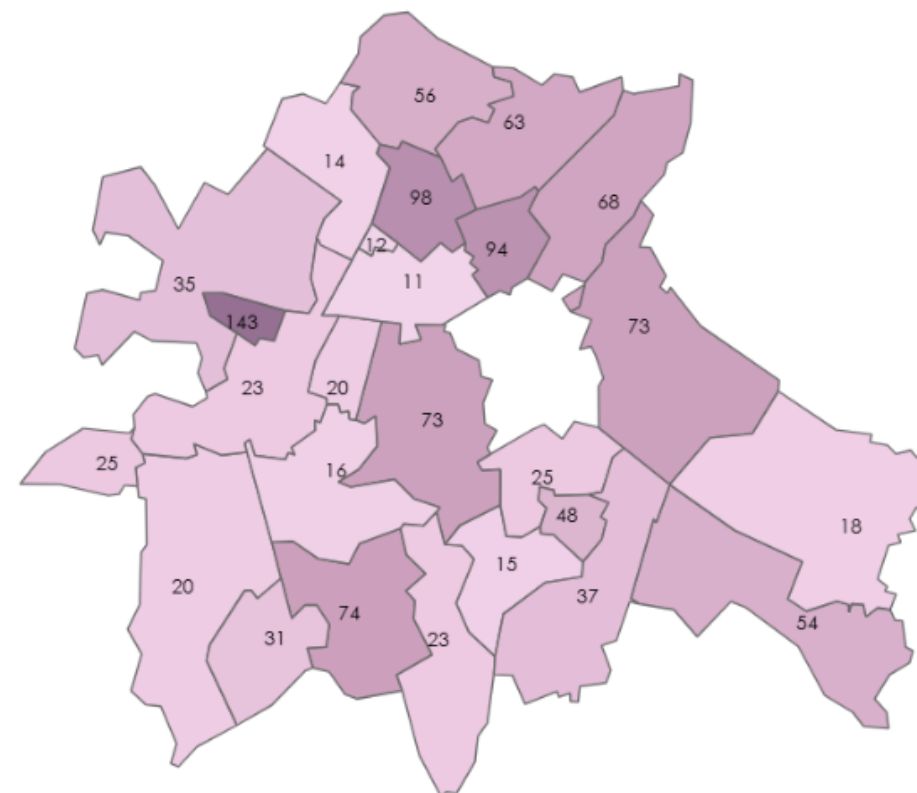
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Ward map



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With a child between

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GEOGRAPHY

Postcode

Local authority

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Filter HB Ref#

The Campaign

- Although we could see who was eligible, we did not know who was already claiming.
- To combat this, a Data Sharing Agreement was signed with Cambridgeshire County Council to share data across both authorities.
- This allowed us to see households eligible and not claiming free school meals.



The Campaign

- 113 households were identified as eligible and not claiming free school meals
- All households were contacted by letter and email, followed up with a phone call, and then contacted by text if we had not heard from them
- The campaign also promoted further support such as the Household Support Fund, a £110 one-off payment for low-income households in Cambridgeshire.



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Mr Chris Riches
South Cambridgeshire Hall
Cambourne
Cambridgeshire
CB23 6EA

Contact: Chris Riches
Email: supporthub@scambs.gov.uk
Phone number: 01954 713000

Date: 19/09/2025

Dear Chris Riches,

Important: Possible unclaimed Free School Meals

We are contacting you because we believe you are likely to be eligible for Free School Meals that you are not currently claiming. This is based off information you have already provided to receive either Council Tax Support or Housing Benefit.



Possible unclaimed Free School Meals



Support Hub - South
Cambridgeshire District Council

11:22

To You



Dear Chris Riches,

We are contacting you because we believe you are likely to be eligible for Free School Meals that you are not currently claiming. This is based off information you have already provided to receive either Council Tax Support or Housing Benefit.

We also think you are likely to be eligible for a one-off payment of £110 from the Household Support Fund. For details on how to apply for the Household Support Fund, please see the bottom of this email.

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SCDC >

This is a message for Chris Riches from South Cambridgeshire District Council.

We are contacting you because you have been identified as likely to be eligible for Free School Meals that you are not claiming.

If you have not done so already, please apply online at <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals>.

This will take you less than 5 minutes and you must do so before Thursday 2nd October.

If you claim Free School Meals, you will also be able to claim supermarket vouchers over the school holidays, worth £15 per week per child. Your child's school will also receive up to £1,500 additional funding to support their education.

Even if you do not wish to use the Free School Meals, please still apply so you and your child's school can still benefit.

The Campaign

- In just over a week, we spoke to 68 people over the phone, left 19 voicemails, and completed 54 Household Support Fund applications
- Following completion of the phone calls, everyone who we were not able to get through to was sent a text message to encourage take up if they hadn't done so already



The result

- 81 children from 56 families are now receiving free school meals that weren't previously
- The free school meals will be worth £314,184 over the lifetime of these children's education
- The additional pupil premium funding will be worth over £1 million to the schools they attend



Free School Meals

- The benefits of free school meals extend beyond just financial support however, with good nutrition contributing to all of the below:
 - Good early diet lowers risk of childhood obesity by up to 25% (Public Health England)
 - Poor childhood diet is linked to higher risk of heart disease and diabetes later in life
 - Children with adequate nutrition score higher on literacy and maths tests at age 5 compared to malnourished peers



Future campaigns

- We don't plan to stop here
- The campaign will hopefully be repeated yearly, eventually moving towards auto-enrolment



“It really will make all the difference. I’ve been going without things to try and pay for their meals. I’ve gone without things like clothing and haircuts - basic things most people don’t think twice about - because there just wasn’t enough money that month. It’s not just the school meals, although these are absolutely massive - it helps with everything. I had to tell my son that he couldn’t do geography because I couldn’t afford the school trip that went with it. My kids have always come first, and I’m so grateful that they’ll be able to eat well without me having to make those sacrifices.”

- Free School Meals Beneficiary

