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# Proposed Allocation of the Household Support Fund April – October 2024.

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<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Individual Executive Member Decisions
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	2 May 2024
<b>Portfolio Member:</b>	Councillor Denise Gaines
<b>Report Author:</b>	Sean Murphy
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	ID4537

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## 1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 On the 14<sup>th</sup> December 2023 the Council agreed a range of allocations from the 2023/24 Household Support Fund aimed at facilitating the voluntary sector to deliver against the fundamental aims of the scheme as well as providing support for specific groups of residents.
- 1.2 In March 2024 the government announced that there would be a further allocation of the Household Support Fund to local authorities. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> April the guidance was issued on the use of the funding allocated. In the case of West Berkshire the allocation was £694,849 to cover the period 1<sup>s</sup> April 2024 to 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to propose a continuation of the successful programme delivered with the voluntary sector and our partners at Greenham Trust and agree the allocations for the funding period.

## 2 Recommendation

- 2.1 **APPROVE** the allocations set out at 6.1
- 2.2 **DELEGATE** authority to make adjustments between allocations to the Service Lead – Public Protection and in consultation with the portfolio holder for Highways, Housing and Sustainable Travel and the Section 151 Officer.

## 3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	The Council has been awarded Household Support Funds amounting to £694,849 for the first six months of the 2024/25 financial year. The funding is a ring-fenced grant to provide support and assistance as set out in this report.

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	<p>The scheme is 100% grant funded and reasonable administration costs of up to 10% may be claimed to deliver this scheme.</p> <p>Reporting on spend is required to be made and payment is made to the authority in arrears.</p>			
<b>Human Resource:</b>	<p>It is proposed that there will be one member of staff engaged through the grant funding period to assess and distribute grants. This member of staff will sit within the Housing Service. There will also be some re-chargeable management and other overheads.</p>			
<b>Legal:</b>	<p>The Council has discretion on the use of the HSF providing that the proposals are in accordance with the grant determination and the Guidance provided by the Department for Work and Pensions ('DWP').</p> <p>The guidance is appended to this report.</p> <p>The Guidance requires that local authorities in receipt of an HSF allocation are required to notify DWP how the funds are to be utilised.</p>			
<b>Risk Management:</b>	<p>It is a risk that the fund will not all be committed in the funding period and remain unclaimed. However, based on the previous year's scheme the risk is considered low. All expenditure proposals set out in this report will be subject to monitoring to ensure that monies are being spent in accordance with this decision and the terms of the scheme.</p>			
<b>Property:</b>	None			
<b>Policy:</b>	This report sets out the Council's proposals for use of the HSF in West Berkshire.			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				

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<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	X			See Appendix A
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	X			See Appendix A
<b>Environmental Impact:</b>	X			Funding to purchase white goods and other energy saving initiatives will assist with reducing energy use longer term for applicants.
<b>Health Impact:</b>	X			Providing free school meals as a means of supporting challenging child poverty is recognised as having a significant impact on children’s health during their formative years.
<b>ICT Impact:</b>		X		The HSF has been facilitated by ICT in the past and will continue to be a largely online application process.
<b>Digital Services Impact:</b>		X		HSF has been a primarily online process to date. Enabling the delivery of the fund through charitable agencies will help direct funding to those experiencing digital exclusion.

<b>Council Strategy Priorities:</b>	X			<p>The distribution of the HSF positively enhances the following Council Priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes.</li> <li>• Support everyone to reach their full potential.</li> </ul> <p>This will be achieved through the targeted delivery of additional financial support to vulnerable households who are struggling during the Cost of Living crisis.</p>
<b>Core Business:</b>		X		<p>Contributes to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes</li> <li>• Supporting everyone to reach their full potential</li> </ul>
<b>Data Impact:</b>		X		<p>Bank statements, utility bills and bank account details will be collected.</p> <p>All data will be collected for the purpose of administering this grant only.</p> <p>It will have no impact on the rights of the data subjects.</p> <p>Appendix B attached</p>
<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	Corporate Board, Operations Board, Housing Colleagues and Health and Wellbeing Board have been consulted.			

## 4 Executive Summary

4.1 Wet Berkshire Council has successfully managed the Household Support Fund (HSF) scheme since its inception. There have been four allocations up until the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. For the financial year 2023/24 the Council was awarded a total of £1.39M. Following previous decisions by the Council the 2023/24 scheme was delivered in partnership with the voluntary sector and Greenham Trust with the following final allocations from the scheme:

- £346K in direct payments to residents who met the scheme criteria. This was administered by the Council's Housing Service.

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- £404K for provision for those on ‘free school meals’ during the school holiday period. This amounted to 6 weeks funding over the various holiday periods for over 4,000 children.
  - £120K support for those on housing benefit who were not eligible for other cost of living support payments.
  - Additional £20K match funding allocated to the shared Cost of Living Grant Fund administered by Greenham Trust making a total of £70K.
  - Over £350K of support delivered through the voluntary sector, including support for pensioners; support for those in temporary and emergency accommodation; essential household goods including white goods and carpets, curtains and mattresses and support with food and energy costs.
  - 10% of the fund was used for administration in line with the scheme allocation and guidance.
- 4.2 On the 5<sup>th</sup> April there was a partnership meeting between the Council and its delivery partners in the voluntary sector and Greenham Trust. The feedback from partners was that the new approach had been a success and the joint working had allowed for a range of innovations to support the local community in a timely and focussed manner. It was also reported that despite the falls in some financial costs to households that there were still a number of residents facing severe financial hardship and demand for many areas of support was continuing to rise.
- 4.3 On the 26<sup>th</sup> March 2024 the Council was notified that it had been awarded **£694,849** to meet the stated aims of the Household Support Fund of supporting the vulnerable or those that cannot pay for essentials. The funding period for this round of support runs from April until 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024. It is not known if there will be another round of funding at this stage.
- 4.4 By way of background, the grant allocation letter states that the *“The purpose of the grant is to provide support to certain local authorities in England for expenditure lawfully incurred or to be incurred by them in accordance with the Grant Conditions to provide support to households, who would otherwise struggle to buy food or pay essential utility bills or meet other essential living costs or housing costs (in exceptional cases of genuine emergency) to help them with living costs”*.
- 4.5 The Council must ensure that the grant is *‘primarily allocated to support with the costs of energy (for heating, lighting and cooking), food, water (for household purposes, including sewerage) and other essential living needs in accordance with the Scheme guidance’*.
- 4.6 In terms of communications the government must follow the requirements of the ‘funded by government communications manual’.
- 4.7 The purpose of this report is to set out allocations of funding from the 2024/25 grant allocation. A copy of the ‘Grant Conditions’ is set out at **Appendix C** to this report.

- 4.8 The Health and Wellbeing Board receives regular report on the Council and its partners response to the cost-of-living challenges and local support for those in poverty. This includes updates on the Household Support Fund.

## 5 Supporting Information

### Introduction

- 5.1 The Household Support Fund aims to provide crisis support to vulnerable households most in need of support to receive financial support to help with significantly rising living costs.
- 5.2 It was announced that West Berkshire would receive an allocation of £694K for the period April to 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024.

### Working with the Voluntary Sector

- 5.3 West Berkshire Council has a close and effective working relationship with the Voluntary Sector. A feature has included an allocation of funds to a match funded appeal with Greenham Trust. The existing fund will continue.
- 5.4 Regular meetings have taken place with the voluntary sector and in particular those organisations most associated with assisting those who are facing financial pressures. Whilst some of these factors such as inflation and energy costs have fallen many residents face distinct financial challenges. It is also worth noting that food inflation is still running at 4%. Whilst energy costs have fallen significantly from their peak they are still substantially above 2021 levels with a current price cap £1690 as opposed to £1042 in 2021.
- 5.5 A number of concerns have been reported to us by the voluntary sector including:
- Significant increases in demand across all sectors including a significant demand for replacement appliances, mattresses etc.
  - Increase in very specific demand caused by the number of people in emergency accommodation.
  - Increasing numbers of complex mental health issues being identified requiring significant support.
  - Significant increase in 'real-time' debt issues with many individual and families struggling with day-today living costs.
  - Ongoing high running costs for all the organisations including energy, transport wages etc. This is set to increase due to the recent living wage increase announcements.
  - Specific costs are being incurred for expensive items such as baby formula and follow on formula.

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- Overall, the feeling was that what the sector was seeing was a worsening and not improving situation.

5.6 The Community Resource Project and the Foodbank have previously reported that the biggest single source of referrals was West Berkshire Council.

5.7 Beyond these groups discussions have previously taken place about the programme to target assistance for pensioners.

5.8 It is a known problem that those moving into permanent accommodation often move into properties without curtains and carpets. This makes keeping properties warm and draught proof difficult and also impacts on energy spend or increases issues around damp and mould etc.

## 6 Proposals

6.1 Based on the successful scheme operated in 2023/24 it is proposed that the following allocations be made from the 2024 grant allocation:

<b>Scheme</b>	<b>Detail</b>	<b>Indicative Allocation</b>
Assistance for Food and Energy	<p>That urgent enquires to the Council for food and energy support (in and out of hours) are handled by local charities. These requests are generally for £30 or under. This service will also be used by West Berkshire Council services for urgent need referrals.</p> <p>The advantage is it will be available a lot quicker than a payment arranged by WBC. It will also be available out of hours.</p>	£15,000
Essential Household Goods Scheme	<p>Additional funding to support the provision of white goods, cookers, beds, furniture, utensils and more.</p> <p>The scheme is provided by Newbury Community Resource Centre.</p>	£20,000
Support for those in Emergency Accommodation	<p>Targeted funding for working with a number of providers to support those in emergency and temporary accommodation including the provision of hot food and / or food suitable for heating in an emergency accommodation setting.</p>	£10,000
Discretionary Assistance Fund	<p>WBC work with social housing providers, Community Resource Project and other</p>	£30,000

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	providers to create a fund that allows residents to apply for assistance with respect to provision of carpets and curtains where those eligible move in and none are provided. This will also assist with reducing energy consumption.	
School Holiday Meal Provision	It is proposed to allocate £3 per child per day for 4 weeks of the school summer holiday period. Based on 4200 young people eligible this amounts to £252K	£252,000
Targeted support for Pensioners	Working with a number of charities This money will be used to provide targeted support including subsidised hot meals, support with energy costs, boiler and other repairs, provision of microwave cookers etc.	£20,000
Support for Young Carers and those leaving care	200 children are identified as carers by the Council (with more unidentified). No national funding is available for young carers.  In addition, those leaving care also face a number of challenges.  This expenditure will be used to provide support in partnership with statutory and voluntary sector partners for e.g. cooking courses, clothing fund - energy vouchers.	£30,000
Main Fund	This is the fund for allocation following application to the Council based on the following criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only one grant per household per funding period</li> <li>• Maximum claim per family - £300</li> <li>• Maximum claim per individual - £150</li> </ul>	£202,849
Administration of the fund	This will cover the assessment of grant applications to the Council along with any signposting and management oversight.	£65,000
Shared Cost of Living Grant Fund	This is an allocation to the shared cost-of-living grant fund with a view to match funding by Greenham Trust (subject to confirmation by the Trust)	£50,000



<b>Total</b>	<b>£694,849</b>
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- 6.2 In addition, it is proposed that the current grant application criteria for the joint ‘cost of living’ fund administered by Greenham Trust is open to applications for West Berkshire provision from charities for increased demand for core services as well as new projects where the fund criteria are met.
- 6.3 Each allocation will be accompanied by conditions regarding spend, record keeping etc. to ensure that all spend is in accordance with scheme conditions. Monies cannot be spent on core costs but on direct distribution through new projects or increased demand. This will be regularly monitored.

## 7 Options for consideration

- 7.1 Options to meet the aims and objectives of the fund are constantly kept under review. The new scheme only has six months to run and further adjustments may need to be made at short notice. At the time of writing these are considered to be the most deliverable options to meet the requirements of the scheme.

## 8 Conclusion

- 8.1 The outlook for many residents remains challenging. At the time of writing headline inflation had fallen but food inflation is over 5%. Regardless of falls in inflation the significant increases in food and grocery prices are now factored in going forward.
- 8.2 Energy prices have fallen from their peak last winter but are still higher than in early 2022. Fuel prices stand around 150p per litre for petrol and 160p per litre for diesel.
- 8.3 To meet these challenges the ability to get support to where it is needed in a timely manner is critical for those needed that support. The Council is not always best placed to do this and nor is it cost effective.
- 8.4 The scheme last year delivered a significant level of innovation and partnership working to build on the aims and objectives of the scheme. The proposals set out in this report build upon this approach.

## 9 Appendices

**APPENDIX A** – Equalities Impact Assessment

**APPENDIX B** – Data Protection Assessment

**APPENDIX C** – Scheme Criteria

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### Background Papers:

None

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**Subject to Call-In:** Yes:  No:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
- Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees or Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

**Wards affected:** All

**Officer details:**

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## Appendix A

### Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) - Stage One

<b>What is the proposed decision that you are asking the Executive to make:</b>	To approve an updated Household Support Fund to replace the policy which was used to administer funds for 2022/23.
<b>Summary of relevant legislation:</b>	The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is providing funding to County Councils and Unitary Authorities (including Metropolitan Councils and London Boroughs), under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003, to administer the scheme and provide assistance to households most in need. It is important to stress this covers a wide range of vulnerable households including those with children of all ages and those without children.
<b>Does the proposed decision conflict with any of the Council’s priorities for improvement?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes</li> <li>Support everyone to reach their full potential</li> <li>Support businesses to start develop and thrive in West Berkshire</li> <li>Develop local infrastructure including housing to support and grow the local economy Maintain a green district</li> <li>Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships</li> </ul>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>If yes, please indicate which priority and provide an explanation</b>
<b>Name of Budget Holder:</b>	Nick Caprara
<b>Name of Service/Directorate:</b>	Place/ Development & Regulation
<b>Name of assessor:</b>	Nick Caprara
<b>Date of assessment:</b>	18/4/23
<b>Version and release date (if applicable):</b>	1.0

<b>Is this a .... ?</b>		<b>Is this policy, strategy, function or service ... ?</b>	
<b>Policy</b>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>New or proposed</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

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<b>Strategy</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Already exists and is being reviewed</b>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Function</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Is changing</b>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Service</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		

**(1) What are the main aims, objectives and intended outcomes of the proposed decision and who is likely to benefit from it?**

<b>Aims:</b>	To deliver Household Support Funding to vulnerable clients in the district in line with Government guidance from April 2023 to March 2024.
<b>Objectives:</b>	To provide financial support through delivery of Household Support Fund grant to vulnerable households.
<b>Outcomes:</b>	Delivery of Household Support Fund
<b>Benefits:</b>	Assistance for the most vulnerable households in the community.

**(2) Which groups might be affected and how? Is it positively or negatively and what sources of information have been used to determine this?**

*(Please demonstrate consideration of all strands – Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex and Sexual Orientation)*

<b>Group Affected</b>	<b>What might be the effect?</b>	<b>Information to support this</b>
Age	Targeted delivery to pensioners	Specific fund set aside to target delivery to support pensioners and to tackle digital exclusion. Regular reports will monitor performance
Disability	Targeted delivery reported on support being provided to disabled claimants or carers	Regular reporting will monitor performance
Gender Reassignment		
Marriage and Civil Partnership		
Pregnancy and Maternity		

Race		
Religion or Belief		
Sex		
Sexual Orientation		
<b>Further Comments:</b>		

<b>(3) Result</b>	
<b>Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could contribute to inequality?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Please provide an explanation for your answer:</b>	
<b>Will the proposed decision have an adverse impact upon the lives of people, including employees and service users?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Please provide an explanation for your answer:</b>	

If your answers to question 2 have identified potential adverse impacts and you have answered ‘yes’ to either of the sections at question 3, or you are unsure about the impact, then you should carry out a EqlA 2.

If an EqlA 2 is required, before proceeding you should discuss the scope of the Assessment with service managers in your area. You will also need to refer to the EqlA guidance and template – <http://intranet/index.aspx?articleid=32255>.

<b>(4) Identify next steps as appropriate:</b>	
<b>EqlA Stage 2 required</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Owner of EqlA Stage Two:</b>	
<b>Timescale for EqlA Stage Two:</b>	

Name: Nick Caprara

Date: 18/4/23

Please now forward this completed form to Pamela Voss, Equality and Diversity Officer (pamela.voss@westberks.gov.uk), for publication on the WBC website.

## Appendix B

### Data Protection Impact Assessment – Stage One

The General Data Protection Regulations require a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) for certain projects that have a significant impact on the rights of data subjects.

Should you require additional guidance in completing this assessment, please refer to the Information Management Officer via [dp@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:dp@westberks.gov.uk)

Directorate:	Place
Service:	Development & Regulation
Team:	Housing
Lead Officer:	Nick Caprara
Title of Project/System:	Household Support Fund
Date of Assessment:	3/4/2024

#### Do you need to do a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)?

	Yes	No
<p><b>Will you be processing SENSITIVE or “special category” personal data?</b></p> <p><i>Note – sensitive personal data is described as “ data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, and the processing of genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person’s sex life or sexual orientation”</i></p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Will you be processing data on a large scale?</b></p> <p><i>Note – Large scale might apply to the number of individuals affected OR the volume of data you are processing OR both</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Will your project or system have a “social media” dimension?</b></p> <p><i>Note – will it have an interactive element which allows users to communicate directly with one another?</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Will any decisions be automated?</b></p> <p><i>Note – does your system or process involve circumstances where an individual’s input is “scored” or assessed without intervention/review/checking by a human being? Will there be any “profiling” of data subjects?</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

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	Yes	No
Will your project/system involve CCTV or monitoring of an area accessible to the public?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Will you be using the data you collect to match or cross-reference against another existing set of data?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will you be using any novel, or technologically advanced systems or processes?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Note – this could include biometrics, “internet of things” connectivity or anything that is currently not widely utilised</p>		

If you answer “Yes” to any of the above, you will probably need to complete [Data Protection Impact Assessment - Stage Two](#). If you are unsure, please consult with the Information Management Officer before proceeding.