

Individual Decision



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The attached report will be taken as Individual Portfolio Member Decision on:

Tuesday 2nd May, 2023

Ref:	Title	Portfolio Member	Page No.
ID4356	Household Support Fund Policy	Councillor Lynne Doherty	3 - 18



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Household Support Fund 2023 - 24

Committee considering report:	Individual Executive Member Decisions
Date of Committee:	2 May 2023
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Lynne Doherty
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	20 April 2023
Report Author:	Nick Caprara
Forward Plan Ref:	ID4356

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The Council has received the sum of £1,389,699 from Central Government in respect of the Household Support Fund grant for 2023/24. The purpose of the Fund is to provide crisis support to vulnerable households most in need of support to help with the rise in living costs.
- 1.2 This report provides an update on the Household Support Fund (HSF) and the proposed delivery plan for the operation of the fund for 2023/24. This report provides details of the Council's proposals for the allocation of the HSF within West Berkshire.

2 Recommendations

To approve the delivery plan for the allocation of £1,389,699 Household Support Fund grant for 2023/24 including the following funding allocations:

- (a) Allocates Free School Meal vouchers for eligible children for £3 per day across 7 weeks for 2023/24. This will include 4 weeks in summer 2023, 2 weeks at Christmas 2023 and 1 week at Easter 2024. Provision is being made to cover up to 4,000 children per holiday based on previous years data.
- (b) Set aside £40,000 for targeted delivery with a view to increasing the level of uptake by pensioners. This is intended to be delivered working with charities or registered housing providers subject to demand and deliverability.
- (c) To allocate up to £790,000 to support the main element of delivery of the HSF. It is proposed that of this sum, £50,000 will be set aside for delivery via charitable partners, with a view to increasing uptake and secure additional match funding opportunities.
- (d) Up to 10% eligible administration costs to include funding staff to administer and deliver the scheme. It is proposed that an ongoing communications plan will accompany the scheme in order to promote funds to public and other agencies to ensure that the funds are supporting those most in need.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<p>Financial:</p>	<p>The Council has been awarded Household Support Funds amounting to £1,389,699 for the 2023/24 financial year. The funding is a ring fenced grant to provide support and assistance as set out in this report.</p> <p>The scheme is 100% grant funded and reasonable administration costs of up to 10% may be claimed in order to deliver this scheme.</p> <p>All funds should be spent or committed before 31 March 2024 and cannot be carried forward.</p> <p>The Government communications on this scheme are that it is an <i>extension</i> to the HSF and so there is no guarantee of this funding continuing beyond the 31st March 2024.</p>
<p>Human Resource:</p>	<p>Administration and delivery of the scheme will be delivered via staff within Housing Services. Other services will provide appropriate support as required to ensure the effective operation of the scheme.</p>
<p>Legal:</p>	<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>See: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils/1-april-2023-to-31-march-2024-household-support-fund-guidance-for-county-councils-and-unitary-authorities-in-england#introduction</p> <p>The Guidance requires that local authorities in receipt of a HSF allocation, must submit to the DWP by the 17 May 2023, a proposed delivery plan setting out its proposals for use of the Fund.</p> <p>The delivery plan must include details of the Council's priorities and its approach for use of the Fund, and demonstrate the ways in which the Council intends to allocate their funding</p>

Risk Management:	The fund will not all be committed in 2023/24 using the criteria set out and will need to be returned to Government. However, based on the previous years scheme and its success, the risk is considered low.			
Property:	None			
Policy:	This report sets out the Council's proposals for use of the HSF in West Berkshire.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?	X			Completed – Appendix A
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?	X			
Environmental Impact:	X			Funding to purchase white goods and other energy saving initiatives will assist with reducing energy use longer term for applicants.
Health Impact:	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.

ICT Impact:		X		The HSF has been facilitated by ICT in the past and will continue to be a largely online application process.
Digital Services Impact:		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.
Council Strategy Priorities:	X			<p>The distribution of the HSF positively enhances the following Council Priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes • Support everyone to reach their full potential <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>
Core Business:		x		<p>Contributes to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes • Support everyone to reach their full potential
Data Impact:		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>

Consultation and Engagement:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Education• Adult Social Care• Housing• Public Protection• Customer Services• Legal• Finance
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4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 This report sets out the key proposals to enable the Council to effectively administer and deliver Household Support Funding for 2023/24.
- 4.2 For 2023/24 the Council have been awarded £1,389,699. This grant is an extension to the three previous HSF schemes, however it is considered to be a new grant with its own specific terms and conditions. As a result the Council is able to use its own discretion how to identify and support those most in need, subject to compliance with the grant determination and Guidance.
- 4.3 The Guidance states that the *“The expectation is that The Fund should be used to support households in the most need; particularly those who may not be eligible for the other support government has recently made available but who are nevertheless in need and who require crisis support.”*
- 4.4 The funding is designed to meet the *“immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford energy and water bills, food, and other related essentials. Authorities can also use the funding to support households who are struggling to afford wider essentials including housing costs where existing housing support does not meet this need.”*
- 4.5 It is proposed that HSF will be delivered to the following target groups:
- Free School Meals
 - Pensioners
 - Disabled applicants or their carers
 - Main element
- 4.6 Up to 10% of the grant provision is eligible to fund administrative costs associated with supporting and delivering the scheme.
- 4.7 Formal monthly monitoring of performance against the delivery of the funds will be undertaken including an ongoing review of progress against delivery targets.

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 Since funding was first provided in October 2021, £1.9M has been distributed by the Council locally. Nearly 4,300 claims have been processed at an average of £263 provided per claim to assist households with support for energy costs, clothing, food and essential household items. In addition the fund has also allowed West Berkshire Council to provide 23,000 vouchers to children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM).
- 5.3 The fund has also allowed West Berkshire Council to provide funding to Age Concern and Age UK to support older residents. A£50k award was made to support the match funded appeal led by Greenham Trust to support local charities and voluntary sector organisations with additional requirements in supporting residents facing challenges as a result of the high cost of living.
- 5.4 During 2022/23 each phase of the fund was issued with specific government criteria over how the funds could be utilised with certain tranches having more restricted conditions attached to them.

Background

- 5.5 For the previous financial year, funding was paid via two tranches. The last tranche amounted to £694K and was awarded as follows:
 - Main element – 44%
 - Free School Meals – 24%
 - Disabled households – 19%
 - Pensioners – 1%

These funds were distributed following an assessment of over 3,000 applications with 1,975 households receiving funds to assist them with costs of utility bills, food, clothing or other eligible items. Households were able to make one claim per tranche and duplicate claims were rejected.

- 5.6 Holiday School Meals vouchers have been paid for using HSF fund during 2022/23. The fund covered payments of £3 per day to up to 4,000 children over 6 weeks of the school holidays. The payments did not cover 100% of the holiday period due to alternative sources of holiday clubs and assistance being able to provide additional assistance to eligible households.
- 5.7 Free School Meal vouchers have been paid at £3 per child per day for 6 weeks per annum across the school holidays under previous allocations. In Tranches 2 and 3 these payments were made to West Berkshire residents only.

- 5.8 The funding provided for 2023/24 is an extension to the three previous HSF schemes, however it is considered to be a new grant with its own specific terms and conditions. The Council has been awarded £1,389,699 for 2023/24 financial year.
- 5.9 Subject to the grant award and Guidance, the Council is able to use its own discretion on how to identify and support those most in need. The purpose of the funding provided for 2023/24 is to *“meet immediate needs and help those who are struggling to afford energy and water bills, food, and other related essentials. Authorities can also use the funding to support households who are struggling to afford wider essentials including housing costs where existing housing support does not meet this need.”*
- 5.10 The Guidance provided by government sets out that assistance with energy bills should be prioritised as these are recognised as being of particular concern to low income households during the period of the Fund.
- 5.11 Support relating to energy should not just be focussed on assistance with the household's bills but should look at how this can enable a sustainable impact on a households energy costs through initiatives such as improved draught proofing, replacing energy inefficient appliances or light bulbs.
- 5.12 The guidance also advises that the support to disabled people or their carers should be prioritised and these payments will continue to be monitored. For 2022/23 Tranche 3 payments less than 20% of payments were made to a household with a disability in West Berkshire.

Proposals

- 5.13 It is proposed that applications for HSF assistance will be limited to one application per household. This situation will continue to be monitored based as part of the regular quarterly monitoring.
- 5.14 Main element claims will be administered through an application process. The payments per household will remain at the rate for Tranche 3 which was set at:
- Families (1-2 children) - £250
 - Families (3+ children) - £300
 - Singles - £150
- 5.15 Applications are required to provide proof of benefits in order to evidence need and be eligible for a payment through the fund. Acceptable evidence includes Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payments, Housing Benefit, Pension credit and other benefits that evidence need.
- 5.16 Where a household is requesting assistance with utility costs one month's bank statement is required to evidence all payments including utility transactions along with copies of the specific bills which are to be assisted with.
- 5.17 The proposal for 2023/24 is for the daily rate for holiday school meals to be at the same rate as 2022/23 at £3 per day but to increase the number of weeks to be supported from 6 to 7 weeks. The breakdown would be to provide support in each school holiday over

1 week in length. The proposal is to provide payments in respect of the following periods:

- 4 weeks summer 2023 holiday
- 2 week Christmas 2023 holiday
- 1 week Easter 2024 holiday

5.18 It is further proposed to offer a reciprocal arrangement with Oxfordshire CC to support the holiday school meal holiday payment for eligible children who attend schools in their respective local authority areas. Currently Oxfordshire CC are funding this support to WBC residents who attend schools in their area. Where no reciprocal arrangement is agreed (Reading BC) it is proposed that households are able to submit claim for payment through the application process which will not affect any subsequent claims through the Fund.

5.19 In Tranche 3 only 1% of all claims were made to pensioners. The proposal for 2023/24 is to seek to increase the support provided to this client group. This will be achieved through targeted delivery of up to £40,000 funds which will be set aside to work with specific charities (Age Concern and Age UK received payments in Tranche 2) or registered providers of social housing.

5.20 One aspect of this targeted delivery will focus on working in partnership with Sovereign Housing Association. Sovereign currently manage c500 units of Housing for Older People in scheme specific accommodation in addition to any pensioners in general needs stock.

5.21 Targeting this delivery working with charities and registered housing providers, can help address any potential digital divide which may reflect the low take up for this client group in 2022/23.

5.22 Working with registered housing providers to target delivery can also help assist with tackling fuel poverty or other housing costs such as the increase in service charge element associated with many of these schemes which may be a cause of significant concern for residents. In the event that assistance is needed with matters that may improve the fabric of the property these would be expected to be funded through the registered providers own financial support schemes and not the HSF.

5.23 In Tranche 3, 19% all payments were made to disabled households. Adult Social Care has assessed that there are in the region of 1,200 clients who provide some form of care for household members (10% of the total estimated carers based on census data). It is proposed that a bespoke communications programme will be developed to engage with carers in order to ensure that these funds meet this specific client group.

5.24 Up to £50,000 of the main element funds will be set aside for delivery via local charities such as Greenham Trust, subject to evidence of demand and delivery of previous tranche payments which have been made in compliance with the 2022-23 funding conditions.

5.25 Total anticipated expenditure

Support	Proposal	Costs
Free School Meal Vouchers	7 weeks support per annum at £3 per day per child. Estimated support c4,000 children	£420,000
Pensioners	Targeted funding in partnership with registered providers or other identified charities	£40,000
Main element	Family claim – Max £300 Single person claim – Max £150 per claim	£740,729
Main element	Set aside funding for distribution through local charities and match funded projects	Up to £50,000
Admin	Max eligible 10%	£138,970
Total		£1,389,699

- 5.25 Once approved the updated Household Support Fund details will be updated on the web pages and a communications plan developed in accordance with the Guidance and in order to ensure that customers are able to access clear information regarding the HSF and the application process.
- 5.26 A dedicated staffing resource has been secured for the 12 months of the fund to focus on the delivery of the scheme. This post will be managed by the Housing Operations Manager and received additional administrative support from the Housing Service.
- 5.3 Monthly reporting to Portfolio Holder and through Operations Board will be undertaken to track performance of delivery of the scheme.

6 Other options considered

- 6.1 The option to continue with the previous means of delivery was considered. However only 1% of the funds have been successfully paid to pensioners. Without a targeted intervention there is a risk that the uptake would remain at the previous low levels.
- 6.2 Alternative means of delivery of school meal holiday vouchers to those eligible for free school meals were explored including increasing the daily rate or looking at providing one off payments as other neighbouring authorities have provided. The latter option was excluded as it did not provide sufficient guarantees that the funds would be utilised during the holiday periods.

- 6.3 Not providing school meals holiday vouchers was also considered but discounted due to the importance of ensuring that children have guaranteed food provision when they are both in school and during extended holidays. There are alternative food providers available however these could not meet the capacity of assisting up to 4,000 pupils over these periods.
- 6.4 Making provision for costs of school uniforms was considered. However clothing costs are an eligible cost through the main element of the funding and this can contribute towards meeting these specific needs for households. There is existing charitable support which can be accessed to support to provide uniforms and this will be addressed during the application process.
- 6.5 Doing nothing was not an option which was considered.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 Based on recent demand there is a need to ensure that the Council effectively utilises this grant to support residents in the district most in need of assistance.
- 7.2 The amendments to the 2023/24 funding are aimed at targeting gaps in previous provision whilst meeting specific needs for the most vulnerable clients.
- 7.3 The scheme will enable the Council to support more children to receive food during the holiday periods and take steps towards alleviating child poverty. It will also deliver targeted support to pensioners including those in social housing where rising costs of service charges and cost of living and utility costs are of significant concern and a continued focussed delivery to disabled residents and their carers.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A – Equalities Impact Assessment
- 8.2 Appendix B – Data Protection Impact Assessment

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 Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months
 - Item is Urgent Key Decision
-

Report is to note only



Officer details:

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Appendix A

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) - Stage One

What is the proposed decision that you are asking the Executive to make:	To approve an updated Household Support Fund to replace the policy which was used to administer funds for 2022/23.
Summary of relevant legislation:	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.
Does the proposed decision conflict with any of the Council's priorities for improvement? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes • Support everyone to reach their full potential • Support businesses to start develop and thrive in West Berkshire • Develop local infrastructure including housing to support and grow the local economy Maintain a green district • Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships 	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If yes, please indicate which priority and provide an explanation
Name of Budget Holder:	Nick Caprara
Name of Service/Directorate:	Place/ Development & Regulation
Name of assessor:	Nick Caprara
Date of assessment:	18/4/23
Version and release date (if applicable):	1.0

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

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

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

Group Affected	What might be the effect?	Information to support this
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		
Further Comments:		

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

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>.

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

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

Directorate:	Place
Service:	Development & Regulation
Team:	Housing
Lead Officer:	Nick Caprara
Title of Project/System:	Household Support Fund
Date of Assessment:	18/4/23

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

	Yes	No
<p>Will you be processing SENSITIVE or “special category” personal data?</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>Will you be processing data on a large scale?</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>Will your project or system have a “social media” dimension?</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>Will any decisions be automated?</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"/>

	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.