

Individual Decision



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

Tuesday 7th November 2023

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Household Support Fund 2023 - 24

Committee considering report:	Individual Executive Member Decisions
Date of Committee:	7 November 2023
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Lee Dillon
Report Author:	Sean Murphy
Forward Plan Ref:	ID4463

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 ID 4356 agreed the allocation of the fund in compliance with the guidance issued by the Department of Work and Pensions. That allocation included up to £50k for the purpose of voluntary sector provision as part of the main element allocation.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to propose the increase of this allocation by £20K to £70K.

2 Recommendations

To **APPROVE**

- (a) That the allocation to support the main element of delivery of the HSF remains at £790K of which £70,000 will be set aside for delivery via charitable partners, with a view to increasing uptake and secure additional match funding opportunities.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	<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>This report considers an increase in voluntary sector contribution to £70K.</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>
Human Resource:	<p>There has been a lead seconded to the Housing Service to administer and oversee the distribution of the fund.</p>
Legal:	<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 are required to notify DWP how the funds are to be utilised. Should this recommendation be approved that notification will require updating.</p>
Risk Management:	<p>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 the risk is considered low. The situation with any grant funding would need close monitoring,</p>
Property:	<p>None</p>
Policy:	<p>This report sets out the Council's proposals for use of the HSF in West Berkshire.</p>

	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"> • Housing 			

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 On the 18th April 2023 Corporate Board received a report on the proposed allocations for the Household Support fund for 2023/24. This report was considered by Operations

Board and was subsequently signed off by the then Leader as Individual Decision on the 2nd May 2023.

- 4.2 By way of background, 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.”*
- 4.3 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.”*
- 4.4 The West Berkshire approved scheme was designed to deliver for the following target groups:
- Free School Meals
 - Pensioners
 - Disabled applicants or their carers
 - Main element

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 £1,389,689 for 2023/24.
- 5.3 On the 2nd May 2023 it was determined by an Individual Member Decision that the allocation would be as follows:

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

Working with the Voluntary Sector

- 5.4 West Berkshire Council has a close and effective working relationship with the Voluntary Sector. This has been particularly demonstrated through the responses to Covid, Homes for Ukraine and the effects of the increases in the cost-of-living. A feature of the latter two responses has included an allocation of funds to a match funded appeal with Greenham Trust. In respect of the cost-of-living the allocation was £50K and came from the 2022 HSF allocation.
- 5.5 Another feature of the joint ‘cost-of-living’ response was the Cost-of-Living Hub and regular meetings with the voluntary sector to discuss existing and emerging pressures facing the local communities.
- 5.6 The most recent meeting of West Berkshire Council with Greenham Trust and the voluntary sector took place on the 29th September. Almost all local organisations were in attendance as was the Portfolio Holder for Housing. The meeting identified a range of challenges and emerging issues which included:
- Significant increases in demand across all sectors – West Berkshire Homeless indicated that increase to be around 100%. The Community Resource Project (Furniture Project) highlighted a significant increase in the demand for replacement appliances.
 - Significant rise in running costs for charitable organisations including vehicle costs.
 - 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-to-day living costs.
 - The Council was identified as one of the major sources of referral to the voluntary sector – the Community Resource project has indicated this is over 60% with many being for appliances which they are having to buy in from charitable funds

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

5.9 The outcome of the meeting was fed back to the Health and Wellbeing Board on the 3rd October 2023 – the Board being the body tasked with overseeing the co-ordinated cost-of-living response..

5.10 Subsequently, discussions have taken place with Greenham Trust about the possibility of extending the match funded contribution to £70K. This funding would be used to support the voluntary sector to extend their role as part of the delivery of the HSF priorities. The distribution of funds in this way is specifically permitted under the scheme. If granted the funded would be able to be used by charities to deliver a quicker and more cost effective response around appliances as well as food, energy bills and other financial support.

5.11 It is recommended that having considered the representations of the voluntary sector and Greenham Trust that the contribution be increased to £70K for 2023/24. This would be linked to agreement of grant criteria and agreement around for example the provision of elements of support such as that for appliances, food, energy costs etc. This amounts to 5% of our total allocation.

6 Other options considered

6.1 The option to continue with the previous means of delivery was considered. However it has to be acknowledged that certain elements of practical delivery of the aims of the scheme are better and more cost-effectively delivered by the voluntary sector acting on self-referrals and referrals from the Council.

7 Conclusion

7.1 There has been some excellent innovation in the delivery of the objectives of the scheme. There is also acknowledgement that a blended approach is needed. This proposal develops that approach by increasing capacity in the voluntary sector.

7.3 Regular monitoring will take place to ensure grants are being allocated against the HSF criteria and the funding is getting to where it is most needed.

8 Appendices

APPENDIX A – Equalities Impact Assessment

APPENDIX B – Data Protection Assessment

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: X 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:

Name: Nick Caprara
Job Title: Service Lead – Housing
E-mail: Nick.Caprara1@westberks.gov.uk

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:	Sean Murphy
Date of assessment:	30/10/2023
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 X

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	None	
Marriage and Civil Partnership	None	
Pregnancy and Maternity	None	

Race	None	
Religion or Belief	None	
Sex	None	
Sexual Orientation	None	
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.

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