

## **CABINET**

<b>DATE</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> November 2021
<b>REPORT OF</b>	Councillor Shreeve, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets
<b>RESPONSIBLE OFFICER</b>	Helen Isaacs, Assistant Chief Executive
<b>SUBJECT</b>	Household Support Grant
<b>STATUS</b>	Open
<b>FORWARD PLAN REF NO.</b>	GENERAL EXCEPTION  Not included on the Forward Plan will therefore be considered under the General Exceptions rules as laid out in the Constitution

### **CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS**

The Household Support Grant is aimed at supporting vulnerable households over the Winter with food and utility costs and as such contributes to our aim of creating Stronger Communities.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Government has awarded the Council just over £1.5M via the Household Support Grant, this report outlines how the Council intends to use the grant in line with the eligibility guidance that the Government has shared in draft format.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Approve the high-level delivery framework as laid out in appendix 1 of this report
2. Delegates authority to the Assistant Chief Executive, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets to effectively govern and administer the fund.
3. Approve the procurement of vouchers for free school meals via the Crown Commercial Services approved list of providers and authorises the Assistant Chief Executive, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Assets to make appropriate award and deal with all ancillary matters.

### **REASONS FOR DECISION**

The Household Support Grant is the latest in a line of welfare grants that have been awarded to the Council to support vulnerable households with food and utility costs. Previous schemes have included the Hardship Grant, Winter Support Grant and Covid Support Grant and we have taken the elements that worked best from those schemes to propose the approach to be taken under the new fund.

## **1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES**

1.1 The Government has awarded all Local Authorities an amount of funding to be used to support vulnerable households over the winter. The allocation to the Council is just over £1.5M and has to be used for food and utility costs and to cover the costs of other essential related to keeping people warm and fed. In exceptional cases housing costs can be considered as eligible expenditure. We have been sent draft guidance and have developed our local framework based on that guidance. Our proposed approach is to fund the following;

- Free school meal costs over the school holidays from Christmas through to Easter
- Small grants to frontline Voluntary and Community Organisations to give to people working with them who are facing hardship
- An application process through trusted referral agencies and frontline public sector service such as social workers to enable households in need of support to receive a grant.

1.2 The money we have will not be able to address all the issues that households are facing. The DWP have said that we should not means test or restrict to people in receipt of benefits so we could have a significant number of people seeking support. We are therefore proposing to implement a maximum grant cap that a household can receive of £250 per household.

1.3 The funding is available from October through to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022.

## **2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

As with the previous grant schemes there is a risk of fraud which we will try to mitigate through the referral route via trusted partners and front line services that are working with households and will know their personal circumstances. There is an opportunity to support households that are in real need and we may be able to prevent some households from going in to crisis.

## **3. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

We are limited by the eligibility criteria but other options include;

- Not accept the grant – we could inform the DWP that we do not want to run the scheme on their behalf. This is not seen as a viable option as vulnerable households in our community would be potentially placed in further difficulty.
- Allocate all the funding to free school meal voucher eligible households – this would disadvantage vulnerable households who do not have children such as single people and elderly residents
- Allocate a different mix of funding with more grants going directly to the VCS – whilst the VCS delivered a significant amount of the previous grants on our behalf it was not without challenge. The administration costs can be onerous and often a household seeking support needs ongoing support rather than a one-off grant. We will liaise with the sector about their capacity and appetite for funding to be awarded directly to the VCS but recognise they may have wider service pressures over the Winter which may limit their involvement.

#### **4. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS**

The previous grant schemes were well received by the local community and we have a number of cases studies to show the difference that the support has made to the lives of members of our community. The new scheme comes at a different time with different pressures arising from increasing fuel and food costs which will mean that more households may be in need of support and the money will potentially have to spread thinner to support more households. This will need to be clearly communicated to people seeking support through Council communications and through briefings to partner organisations completing referrals into the scheme.

#### **5. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The grant is 100% funded through the DWP and ring fenced to the delivery of the Household Support Scheme.

#### **6. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

The project will support utility bills which mean that people may heat their homes more which will have a negative impact on the environment.

#### **7. CONSULTATION WITH SCRUTINY**

No consultation to date, updates on uptake of the scheme will be provided to the Communities scrutiny panel.

#### **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The costs of the scheme are to be fully met from DWP grant.

#### **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

As alluded to in the report there is a degree of conditionality around the utilisation of the funds. The Council is experienced in the delivery of such funding initiatives and will ensure compliance through itself and partner agencies and bodies.

The procurement approach through a framework has the benefits of approved suppliers already meeting certain benchmarks and flagging agreement in advance to appropriate terms and conditions.

There are further advantages of assurance in that any such framework by necessity must be compliant with Public Contracts Regulations 2015. A framework approach is considered good practice and comes with its own efficiencies.

The procurement exercise will be conducted so as to comply with the Council's policy and legal obligations, specifically in compliance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and supported by relevant officers.

Officers should note that an award constitutes a further decision and will be subject to completion of an Officer Decision Record and be subject to call in. Award and implementation timelines should accommodate this.

## **10. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct HR implications

## **11. WARD IMPLICATIONS**

The scheme is open to households in all wards.

## **12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Government announcement:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-launches-500m-support-for-vulnerable-households-over-winter>

Guidance documentation provided by the DWP to Local Authorities.

## **13. CONTACT OFFICER(S)**

Helen Isaacs, Assistant Chief Executive

**COUNCILLOR STAN SHREEVE**  
**DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR FINANCE, RESOURCES  
AND ASSETS**

Area of Funding	Planned Activities	Families with Children		Families without Children		Total	
		Anticipated Volume of Awards	Anticipated spend (£s)	Anticipated Volume of Awards	Anticipated spend (£s)	Anticipated Volume of Awards	Anticipated spend (£s)
Support for Food ...							
... Of which is supporting children eligible for Free School Meals during holidays	We will provide £15 per week per eligible child for the holidays between Christmas and Easter	7,100	550,000	N/A	N/A	7,100	550,000
... Of which is supporting children not currently eligible for FSMs (£s)	We will support local food providers to continue to provide emergency food for people in need - note figures quoted are the number of organisations supported not the number of households.			6	60,000	6	60,000
Support for Energy and Water.	We will set up a referral process so that front line service delivery organisations in the public and voluntary sector can refer households in need for support with household bills	2000	300,000	1,500	225,000	3,500	525,000
Support for Essentials linked to Energy and Water.	The process above includes support across all household energy costs						
Support for Wider Essentials (Please specify in planned activities).	Our referral process will also include support for wider essentials where there is a clear evidenced need. Grants will be available to cover the costs of Winter clothing, white goods and specialist dietary requirements where there is a medical need	300	110,000	500	135,000	800	245,000
Support for housing costs (Please specify in planned activities).	We will only award support for housing in exceptional circumstances so expect there to be minimal activity here	10	20,000	10	20,000	20	40,000
Other spend (Please specify in planned activities).	We will provide grants to trusted partner organisations to provide support within the eligibility criteria of the scheme. This builds on the successful approach adopted for the Winter Grant scheme which worked well. Note numbers quoted are for the number of organisations supported not households.	10	100,000			10	100,000
Scheme Administration.	We will provide support to cover the costs of agencies that agree to refer households in to the scheme						39,650
Not allocated yet.							
<b>Overall.</b>		<b>9,420</b>	<b>1,080,000</b>	<b>2,016</b>	<b>440,000</b>	<b>11,436</b>	<b>1,559,650</b>

Note - if the breakdown between families with / without children is not possible, then please only fill out the "Total" column

Please specify on what basis you have calculated the volumes. E.g. will repeat awards will be made for each school holiday or each week of