

Cabinet Member Delegated Decision Form

Decision Title

Household Support Fund

Decision Required

To approve the proposed expenditure, volumes and delivery arrangements for the Household Support Fund in Staffordshire. This allocation has been made by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and has defined conditions of the grant which the proposal meets, and the allocation needs to be fully spent by 31st March 2023.

To approve the contract extensions with Beat the Cold and Community Foundation of Staffordshire on existing terms as set out in paragraph 17.

Decision Date

31/10/2022

Decision Summary

Household Support Fund (HSF):

Member Delegated Function

Specific Delegation to Cabinet Member

Specific Delegation to Cabinet Member

If 'Specific Delegation to Cabinet Member' is selected above, please complete this section.

Cabinet Meeting 18/05/22 "Delegates authority to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, in consultation with the Director for Children & Families, to decide the delivery and eligibility criteria for distribution of the HSF in Staffordshire, and to take all other subsequent decisions to ensure that this support gets to those who need it as quickly as possible. This includes any decisions in respect of extensions to the Scheme or additional funding, ensuring Cabinet are fully briefed on any such extensions or spending".

Public / Exempt

If the decision is exempt, please identify the relevant paragraph number from the list below.

Public

Options Considered

Background:

1. On 26th May 2022, the Chancellor announced as part of a number of measures to provide help with global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living, that the Household Support Fund (HSF) would be extended from 01 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. The Grant which will be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need. The extension to the HSF will run from the 1st October to 31st March 2023.
2. The County Council has the discretion on exactly how this funding is used, targeting support within the scope of the conditions set out by the DWP. The Fund is intended to cover a wide range of low-income households in need including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers, and people with disabilities. The funding needs to be 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.
3. The new HSF will be distributed by County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England. Shire Councils are encouraged to work closely with District & Borough Councils and other local partners to identify a broad range of vulnerable households across their local area. Support is available from the 1st October and Local Authorities should aim to have arrangements in place as quickly as possible to support vulnerable households throughout the Grant period.
4. The County Council has received detailed guidance which has been reviewed, and the outline provided within this report meets the terms of the Grant. The Grant Determination Letter is provided in Appendix A and the Grant Guidance is provided in Appendix B.
5. Staffordshire is anticipated to receive £5,506,547.99 through the HSF. This outlines the plan for the remaining balance having committed £1,590,000 to the Education Support Fund to ensure that those accessing Free School Meals benefit from additional support during the school holidays.

Allocation of the Grant

Professional Referral Route

6. The Household Support Fund grant conditions specify that the scheme needs to have a professional referral route available from 1st October –

31st March 2023 or until the fund is fully spent if this date is in advance of 31st March 2023.

7. Therefore, we propose that we have a professional referral route for residents across Staffordshire, so that anyone facing financial hardship can ask for additional help from those that they are working with.
8. Having a professional referral route will ensure that there has been some review of the extent to which someone is facing financial hardship prior to making an application. We want the professional referral route to help us reach those most in need and so it will include a range of organisations:
 - a. Staffordshire County Council,
 - b. Registered Social Landlord,
 - c. District/Borough Council,
 - d. Health,
 - e. Citizen's Advice Bureau,
 - f. SCVYS,
 - g. Support Staffordshire,
 - h. Job Centre,
 - i. SENDIASS,
 - j. Staffordshire Schools and Nurseries,
 - k. Commissioned Family Support Providers
9. This scheme will only be available for people residing in the county area of Staffordshire (excluding Stoke-on-Trent City Council who administer their own scheme.)
10. This scheme will see eligible people benefit from £65 per household and £20 per additional dependant e.g. child or a person you care for. The anticipated volume and value is calculated by an average household with 2.4 children. This is obviously subject to change in line with the referrals received.
11. This is an open referral route for professional to identify households in most need particularly those who may not be eligible for other government support that has been made available but nevertheless still in need of financial assistance.
12. This may include, but is not limited to, who are entitled to but not claiming qualifying benefits, people who are claiming Housing Benefit (HB) and a range of low-income households in need including children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers and disabled people.

Scheme	Anticipated Volume	Value	Anticipated Expenditure
Professional Referral Route	10,400	£115.00 (average per household)	£1,200,000.00

Financial Assistance for Care Leavers

13. Children Leaving Our Care are more likely to face challenges moving into adulthood and we want to provide them the help and support that they need. This will include access to financial support in the form of a supermarket voucher.
14. The proposal will mean all Care Leavers receive two vouchers with a value of £50. One will be administered prior to Christmas and one in the New Year. This will ensure that 450 children leaving our care receive £100 for food.

Scheme	Anticipated Volume	Value	Anticipated Expenditure
Care Leavers	450	£100.00	£45,000.00

Slow Cookers Scheme

15. Slow cookers are a more affordable means to cook meals, with a reduced usage of electricity this could see residents saving money on fuel bills. Therefore, we plan to work with district and borough councils and registered social landlords to administer a Slow Cooker Scheme.
16. The scheme will target those on housing benefit or on the waiting list for housing as their privately rented properties are unaffordable.
17. This scheme will see residents offered an adult and community learning course to help them learn new recipes and how to cook on a budget, free recipe cards and a slow cooker to support them to prepare and eat healthy slow cooked food.
18. This scheme was run as a pilot in Newcastle-under-Lyme and successfully helped over 35 families access other Early Help Support that meant that they were able to improve their outcomes. This could also be a mechanism for other support from across this scheme e.g. professional referral route.

Scheme	Anticipated Volume	Value	Anticipated Expenditure
Slow Cooker Scheme	20,000	£30.00 per household	£600,000.00

Winter Warmth

19. The costs of fuel across all households have increased and for some this is creating a financial pressure. We will continue to work with Beat the Cold and the Staffordshire Community Foundation who will continue to deliver the Winter Warmth Project for 2022/3. Both providers have agreed to extend their contract arrangements for the same administration charges as previously agreed at £68,972 and £57,965 respectively for the 6-month extension.
20. Using the same professional route referral criteria for the referral route we will actively seek out Staffordshire residents who would benefit with financial support for energy. This will be provided via either a top up card credit for those on pre-payment meters or credit paid directly to the energy supplier for those on metered accounts.
21. The payments will be made via the Staffordshire Community Foundation following a triage process that will be administered by Beat the Cold who will also check entitlement for other externally funded energy efficiency products.
22. This will see 3,333 households will benefit from a £450 payment most of which are paid directly to the energy company, although some will be via top up cards.
23. These households will include 2,245 of whom have already had a previous payment. However, they have all been verified 98.7% of these recipients were entitled to benefits therefore this is a good indication that we are getting financial assistance to people in receipt of support from the DWP.
24. That leaves us an additional 1,088 households as new beneficiaries, who won't necessarily need to be entitled to benefits so will see us reaching those who are just about managing. The same professional referral route will be used for these new applications to increase the take up to a broader audience.

Scheme	Anticipated Volume	Value	Anticipated Expenditure
Winter Warmth	3,333	£450.00	£1,499,850.00

Conclusion

These schemes will see over 55,000 households see financial assistance over the Winter months across a range of different schemes. It will ensure that these households benefit from £5,506,547.99 allocated from the

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP.) All schemes outlined are within the terms of the grant.

Consultation Process

Consulted with Cllr Mark Sutton, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Electoral Divisions Affected

N/A all divisions

Name of Cabinet Member Making Decision:

Mark Sutton

Community Impact Assessment

Resource and Value for Money Analysis

25. A summary of anticipated expenditure is as follows:

Scheme	Anticipated Volume	Value	Anticipated Expenditure
Professional Referral Route	10,400	£115.00 (approx per household)	£1,200,000.00
Care Leavers	450	£100.00	£45,000.00
Slow Cookers	20,000	£30.00 per household	£600,000.00
Beat the Cold	3,333	£450.00	£1,499,850.00
Administration of the Scheme			£571,697.99
		Total:	£3,916,547.99

26. To ensure that the objectives of the HSF are being met during the grant and reduce administration costs for all concerned, including the need for DWP to recover underspend, Grant payments will be made in arrears upon DWP being satisfied with the Management Information (MI) returns. This will enable DWP to adjust the amount of the payment based on the MI returns.

27. Payment of the grant from DWP to Authorities will be made in arrears after the interim MI return in January 2023 and the final MI return at the end of grant period in April 2023 after DWP have verified the MI.

28. MI returns must be endorsed by the Section 151 officer in accordance with their statutory assurance responsibility in order for the Grant payment to be made.
29. The HSF allocation includes reasonable administration costs to enable Authorities to deliver the scheme. Authorities should deduct their administration costs from the total allocation to determine the amount remaining.
30. In all cases, Authorities should keep administrative costs to a reasonable level. Administration costs for each Authority will be published on www.gov.uk alongside detail of all spend related to this scheme. The County Council's Administrative Costs will include the payments to the relevant providers.
31. Officers are engaging with Legal Services and Commercial Services to explore how best to implement the proposals in this report. Although the value of the Education Support Fund is significant, the value of the services to be provided by the providers in administering the schemes or providing relevant systems will be relatively low value.

Risk Analysis

32. As with any welfare payment to vulnerable recipients there is a risk of fraud, as recipients might appear to be eligible when they are not. One of the biggest risks for this scheme is fraudulent claims, where a claim could be made for someone not meeting the eligibility criteria set. The County Council is encouraged to mitigate this risk, by cross referencing available data to confirm eligibility.
33. It is for the County Council to decide how payments are made to recipients. However, when making this decision the County Council is encouraged to consider the risks involved. Although vouchers still carry fraud risks, the DWP is suggesting vouchers should be used instead of cash where possible as this helps to mitigate the risk of the money being spent by the recipient on things outside the policy intent, therefore undermining the purpose of the scheme.
34. There is a risk that if the HSF conditions are not met or delivered in time given the short 6-month window to deliver this grant. This would then mean that the County Council may need to repay some or all of the grant back to the DWP.
35. There is a limited amount of funding available across a county and therefore there is a risk that people who feel that they should benefit from the scheme do not meet the identified criteria or that the demand

is significantly higher. A full cost of living page has been developed and this will be used to signpost people to other help and support available in addition.

Implementation

Is any implementation action required?

The implementation of this scheme will be delivered upon approval of this decision.

To be implemented by: Neelam Bhardwaja, Director for Children and Families

Implementation Status

Work to commence on: 1st November 2022
Work completed on date below: 31st March 2023

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