

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 24th January 2023

REPORTING OFFICER: Operational Director – Finance

PORTFOLIO: Leader

SUBJECT: Household Support Fund
1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide a progress update regarding delivery of the Government's Household Support Fund from 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That;

- (i) **Progress with delivery of the latest Household Support Fund, be noted;**
- (ii) **Preparations for administration of the extension of the Household Support Fund and the Energy Bills Alternative Funding Scheme, be noted.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

- 3.1 On 1st November 2022 the Board received a report which provided an update regarding delivery of the Government's latest Household Support Fund between 1 October 2022 and 31 March 2023. The Fund is intended to support vulnerable households with the pressures caused by the significantly rising cost of living.
- 3.2 Halton was awarded grant funding of £1,297,880, and any unspent grant as at 31 March 2023 must be returned to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).
- 3.3 The DWP made a number of changes to its guidance for the latest scheme. The main change was that there will be no ring fence of any proportion of funding for any particular cohort of people. The second key change was a requirement for councils to operate at least part of their scheme on an application basis ie. Residents should have the opportunity to come forward and request support.

Spending Plan

- 3.4 In order to meet the requirement to operate part of the scheme on an application basis, £178,000 was allocated to the Discretionary Support Scheme, which has an existing telephone application process.
- 3.5 The DWP guidance stated that the latest Household Support Fund was intended to cover a wide range of low income households in need, including families with children, pensioners, and people with disabilities.
- 3.6 In order to provide assistance to vulnerable households with children, free school meal vouchers of £12 per week will be issued during the school holidays, which it is estimated will cost approximately £540,000.
- 3.7 To support vulnerable pensioner households, all pensioners currently receiving council tax reduction will be provided with an award of £100. It is estimated that this will cost £430,000.
- 3.8 The Benefits Division are co-ordinating use of the grant on behalf of the Council. In order to maximise the benefit of the grant funding for the Borough and ensure it is fully utilised, discussions have been held with colleagues across the Council. A Spending Plan was prepared as set out in Appendix A, regarding how the grant funding would be utilised via a combination of Council departments and the Voluntary Sector to deliver help and assistance to vulnerable households over the six month period.
- 3.9 The Spending Plan is intended to provide clarity as to what actions are required of the relevant Council departments and partner organisations, with lead officers being identified. It also provides a basis for monitoring spending against the grant, to ensure it is fully utilised in accordance with the grant guidance by 31st March 2023.

Progress Update

- 3.10 At the end of December 2022 free school meal vouchers have been issued for the Autumn half term (24th – 28th October 2022), and for the Christmas holidays (22nd December 2022 – 3rd January 2023) representing a total value of £258,228.
- 3.11 By the middle of December 2022, 4,181 vulnerable pensioners have been awarded a £100 payment, and this represents a total value of £418,000. In addition, for the period 1st October 2022 – 31st December 2022 the Discretionary Support Team have paid £77,785 from the Household Support Fund and this has helped 421 households.
- 3.12 Appendix B outlines the spend for the period 1st October 2022 – 31st December 2022 which includes free school meal vouchers, vulnerable pensioner assistance and Discretionary Support assistance mentioned above. In addition, Appendix B also includes expenditure from partner organisations including Halton Citizens Advice Bureau, Holiday Activity Food programme, Foodbanks & Halton Voluntary Action.

- 3.13 Progress with delivery of the Household Support Fund will continue to be reported to the Board.

Household Support Fund Extension

- 3.14 In the Chancellor's Autumn 2022 statement it was announced that the Household Support Fund is to be further extended from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024. The Government has given no indication of the amount of funding available for individual councils or any guidance as to how the funding can be spent.

Alternative Support for Household Energy Bills this Winter

- 3.15 The Government is already providing support to consumers with their energy costs this Winter. This support is mainly being delivered directly as a credit to electricity bills and as a reduction to the unit cost of gas and electricity. The Government believes there to be around one million households across the UK that will miss out on the above mentioned support as they do not directly contract with a domestic electricity supplier. This group of households will instead qualify via the Energy Bills Alternative Funding Scheme.
- 3.16 The Government is asking local authorities to act as the delivery bodies for the Alternative Funding Scheme. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) will be arranging a delivery model through a single application form on Gov.UK, which should centralise as much of the data gathering and validation as possible. BEIS will then share applications with local authorities, whose primary role will be to verify applicants' addresses once they have passed through the application portal, and to transfer the relevant financial support to successful applicants. The amount of support will be £400 paid direct to an applicant's bank account.
- 3.17 BEIS are expecting to issue guidance to councils in mid-January 2023 and for the scheme to go live from the end of January 2023. No indication has been provided yet of the estimated numbers of households we may need to make payments to.
- 3.18 From the eligibility criteria suggested for the scheme, BEIS would expect most members of the following groups to be eligible:
- Care home residents (provided they in some way pay towards their care);
 - Park home residents;
 - Households in caravans and houseboats on fixed/registered sites;
 - Social and private tenants who get their energy through a commercial supplier (e.g. a landlord);
 - Heat network customers not already covered by main EBSS (private wire/CHP);
 - Farmers in domestic farmhouses, as well as others in domestic residences with a commercial supply;
 - Homes off the grid.

Conclusions

3.19 Good progress is being made with the distribution of the latest Household Support Fund. Of the total £1,297,880 available grant allocation, £785,105 has to date been paid to eligible households.

3.20 Preparations are being made to administer the extension of the Household Support Fund from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 and also the new Energy Bills Alternative Funding Scheme, once Government guidance and grant allocations are received for each.

4.0 POLICY AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None identified.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

5.1 Children and Young People in Halton

None identified.

5.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

None identified.

5.3 A Healthy Halton

None identified.

5.4 A Safer Halton

None identified.

5.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

The delivery of support from the Household Support Fund to the Borough's vulnerable households, has the potential to support all of the Council priorities.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

6.1 If the grant allocation from the Household Support Fund, is not fully utilised in accordance with the DWP guidance by the deadline date of 31 March 2023, any remaining grant funding will be clawed back by the DWP. The Spending Plan presented in the Appendix is intended to ensure that the grant funding is fully utilised by the deadline.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 None.

8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Household Support Fund Allocations and Guidance	DCLB Stadium	Paul Garnett Divisional Manager Benefits

APPENDIX A

Household Support Fund Spending Plan 1st October 2022 – 31st March 2023

Total grant allocation	1,297,880
Less administration costs (5%)	64,894
Available grant funding	1,232,986
1. Vulnerable Households with Children	£540,000
<p>Free school meal vouchers for school holidays: Autumn half term 24th – 28th October 2022 (1 week) Christmas holidays 22nd Dec 2022 – 3rd Jan 2023 (2 weeks) Spring half term 20th – 24th February 2023 (1 week) Easter holidays 3rd – 14th April 2023 (2 weeks)</p> <p>Based on 7,500 children entitled to FSM Paid for 6 weeks £12 voucher per week</p>	
2. Vulnerable Pensioner Households	£430,000
<p>Number of pensioners on council tax reduction = 4,300 Award £100 per pensioner</p>	
3. Discretionary Support Scheme	£177,986
By application	
4. Other Vulnerable Households	£85,000
<p>Distributed via;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAB £40,000 • Widnes Food Bank £10,000 • Runcorn Food Bank £10,000 • Holiday Activity Fund £5,000 • Affordable Warmth – Energy Projects Plus £10,000 • Halton Voluntary Action £10,000 	

Household Support Fund
Spend for the period 1st October 2022 – 31st December 2022

Total grant allocation	£1,297,880
1. Vulnerable Households with Children	
Free school meal (FSM) vouchers provided for:	
Autumn half term 24 th – 28 th October 2022 (1 week)	£86,076
Christmas holidays 22 nd Dec 2022 – 3 rd Jan 2023 (2 weeks)	£172,152
2. Vulnerable Pensioner Households	
4,181 pensioners on council tax reduction Award £100 per pensioner	£418,100
3. Discretionary Support Scheme	£77,785
4. Other Vulnerable Households	
Distributed via;	
• Citizens Advice Bureau (energy/fuel support)	£15,322
• Runcorn Food Bank	£10,000
• Widnes Food Bank	*
• Affordable Warmth	£2,000
• Holiday Activity Fund	*
• Halton Voluntary Action	£3,670
Total spend	£785,105

*Spend figure not available at the time of writing this report.