

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 6th June 2023

REPORTING OFFICER: Operational Director – Finance

PORTFOLIO: Corporate Services

SUBJECT: Household Support Fund

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update regarding delivery of the Government's Household Support Fund from 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 and spending plans for the Fund during 2023/24.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That;

- (i) **The actual delivery of the Household Support Fund for the period 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023, as outlined in the report, be noted;**
- (ii) **The Spending Plan for the Household Support Fund for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 as presented in Appendix 2, be noted.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Household Support Fund 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023

- 3.1 On 24th January 2023 the Board received a progress report regarding delivery of the third tranche of the Government's 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 For this six month period Halton was awarded grant funding of £1,297,880, with any unspent grant as at 31 March 2023 being 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 would 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 via an application basis ie. Residents should have the opportunity to come forward and request support.

Actual Expenditure

- 3.4 In order to meet the requirement to operate part of the scheme on an application basis, £167,314 was awarded by the Discretionary Support Scheme, through its 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 were issued during the school holidays, and spend in this area was £536,592.
- 3.7 To support vulnerable pensioner households, all pensioners currently receiving council tax reduction were provided with an award of £100, and a total of £405,500 was spent.
- 3.8 The Benefits Division co-ordinated use of the grant on behalf of the Council, and Appendix A details how the grant funding has been utilised via a combination of Council departments and the Voluntary Sector.

Household Support Fund 2023/24

- 3.9 In the Chancellor's 2022 Autumn Statement it was announced that the Household Support Fund would be further extended from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024. On 20th February 2023 it was confirmed that Halton had been allocated grant funding of £2.6m for 2023/24.
- 3.10 The Government have once again included the requirement that part of the funding must be distributed via an application process. However, the Council can still proactively target particular groups of households.
- 3.11 On 20th April 2023 Executive Board approved a Spending Plan regarding how the £2.6m grant allocation might be utilised, in order to ensure that arrangements could be put in place in time for the Summer half term school holidays.

Discretionary Support Scheme – Application Process

- 3.12 In order to meet the requirement to operate part of the scheme on an application basis, it was agreed to allocate £356,000 of the funding to the Discretionary Support Scheme within the Benefits Division, which has an existing telephone application process.
- 3.13 The DWP guidance once again states that the Household Support Fund is intended to cover a wide range of low income households in need, including families with children, pensioners, and people with disabilities.

Free School Meal Vouchers

- 3.14 In order to provide assistance to vulnerable households with children, it has been decided to once again allocate funding to low income families with children, by issuing free school meal vouchers of £12 per week during all of the school holidays.
- 3.15 It is estimated that the free school meals vouchers will cost approximately £1,170,000 in total. This will provide approximately 7,500 children with free school meals throughout all of the school holidays over the coming twelve months.

Pensioner Households on CTR

- 3.16 To support vulnerable pensioner households, it has been decided that all pensioners currently receiving council tax reduction (CTR) will be provided with a one-off award of £120.
- 3.17 It is estimated that 4,181 pensioner households on CTR will benefit from this award, at a total cost of £501,720. A number of pensioners have previously been unwilling to provide their bank details to receive payment. In these cases they will instead be sent Paypoint vouchers, with full instructions as to how they can be used at any Paypoint outlet across the Borough.

Public Health and Care Leavers

- 3.18 It has been agreed to allocate £100,000 to Public Health who will target support at vulnerable households who may fall outside those covered by the rest of the Spending Plan.
- 3.19 Public Health will also target support to families who have pre-school age children and are flagged on the Income Deprivation Index affecting children. In addition, families who have disabled pre-school age children will be targeted for support. Public Health have been allocated £82,126 for this particular project.
- 3.20 Children's Services currently have 135 recent care leavers and up to 50 young people in care who will become 18 years old over the next 12 months. An allocation of £82,127 has therefore been made to Children's Services in order to assist care leavers with the following; energy bill support; household packs to help with keeping warm, saving energy and cooking; and emergency food and hygiene packs.

Voluntary Sector Partners

- 3.21 Once again Voluntary Sector Partners will be asked to assist the Council with the delivery of this support to residents. The grant allocations made for the previous six month period to Citizens Advice, Food Banks, Affordable Warmth etc. have been doubled for the coming year. Each organisation will provide a detailed proposal of how they intend to utilise

the funding and throughout the year they will provide the Council with monitoring information for submission to the DWP.

Delivery Co-ordination, Monitoring and Reporting Arrangements

- 3.22 The Benefits Division will once again co-ordinate 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 has been prepared as set out in Appendix 2, regarding how the grant funding will be utilised via a combination of Council Departments and the Voluntary Sector to deliver help and assistance to vulnerable households over the twelve month period.
- 3.23 The Spending Plan is intended to provide clarity of what actions are required of the relevant Council Departments and Partner Organisations, with lead officers being identified. It will also provide a basis for monitoring spending against the grant, with periodic submissions to the DWP and to ensure the funding is fully utilised in accordance with the grant guidance by 31st March 2024.
- 3.24 Progress with delivery of the Household Support Fund during 2023/24 will be reported regularly to the Board.
- 3.25 If the grant is not fully spent by 31 March 2024 and/or is not spent in accordance with the grant guidance, it will be clawed back by the DWP.

4.0 POLICY AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

5.1 Children and Young People in Halton

None.

5.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

None.

5.3 A Healthy Halton

None.

5.4 A Safer Halton

None.

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 2024, any remaining grant funding will be clawed back by the DWP. The Spending Plan presented in the Appendix 2 is intended to ensure that the grant funding is fully utilised by the deadline and will be monitored closely throughout the year.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 None.

8.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None.

9.0 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 1

**Household Support Fund
Final Expenditure 1st October 2022 to 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	536,592
Free school meal vouchers for school holidays: Autumn half term 24 th – 28 th October 2022 (1 week) Christmas holidays 22 nd Dec 2022 – 3 rd Jan 2023 (2 weeks) Spring half term 20 th – 24 th February 2023 (1 week) Easter holidays 3 rd – 14 th April 2023 (2 weeks)	
2. Vulnerable Pensioner Households	405,500
Award £100 per pensioner	
3. Discretionary Support Scheme	167,314
By application	
4. Other Vulnerable Households	94,722
Distributed via; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Halton CAB £49,977 • Widnes Food Bank £10,000 • Runcorn Food Bank £10,000 • Holiday Activity Fund £5,000 • Affordable Warmth – Energy Projects Plus £9,745 • Halton Voluntary Action £10,000 	
Total	1,204,128

**Household Support Fund
Spending Plan 1st April 2023 – 31st March 2024**

Total grant allocation	£ 2,595,761
Less administration costs (5%)	129,788
Available grant funding	2,465,973
1. Vulnerable Households with Children	1,170,000
<p>Free school meal vouchers for school holidays: Summer half term 29th May 2023 – 2nd June 2023 (1 week) Summer holidays 20th July 2023 – 1st September 2023 (6 weeks) Autumn half term 30th October 2023 – 3rd November 2023 (1 week) Christmas holidays 22nd Dec 2023 – 2nd Jan 2024 (2 weeks) Spring half term 12th – 16th February 2024 (1 week) Easter holidays 29th March 2024 – 12th April 2024 (2 weeks)</p> <p>Based on estimated 7,500 children entitled to FSM Paid for 13 weeks £12 voucher per week</p>	
2. Vulnerable Pensioner Households	501,720
<p>Based on 4,181 pensioner households receiving CTR/HB Award £120 per pensioner</p>	
3. Discretionary Support Scheme	356,000
<p>By application Based on HSF3 allocation for 6 months of £178,000.</p>	
4. Public Health	100,000
<p>Awards to vulnerable residents who do not qualify under any other categories, to include; prescription charges, electrical medical equipment costs, targeted healthy eating sessions, bus passes to get to work for those who do not qualify for benefits, and budgeting workshops.</p>	
5. Public Health	84,126
<p>To make awards to families who have pre-school age children who are flagged on the Income Deprivation Index affecting children. In addition families who have pre-school age children who are disabled will be supported.</p>	
6. Care Leavers	84,127

To make cost of living awards to recent care leavers and to those young people who will become care leavers in the next 12 months.	
7. Other Vulnerable Households – HSF3 amount doubled	
Halton CAB	80,000
Widnes Food Bank	20,000
Runcorn Food Bank	20,000
Holiday Activity Food programme	10,000
Affordable Warmth – Energy Projects Plus	20,000
Halton Voluntary Action	20,000
Total	2,465,973