

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 5 November 2024

REPORTING OFFICER: Director of Finance

PORTFOLIO: Corporate Services

SUBJECT: Progress Updates regarding the Household Support Fund 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024, and the latest Household Support Fund for the period 1 October 2024 – 31 March 2025

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide the final position regarding delivery of the Government's Household Support Fund for the period 1st April 2024 – 30th September 2024, and to report the spending plan for the Household Support Fund for the period 1st October 2024 – 31st March 2025.

2.0 RECOMMENDED That:

- (i) The final position regarding the Household Support Fund for the period 1st April 2024 – 30th September 2024 be noted;**
- (ii) The spending plan for the Household Support Fund for the period 1st October 2024 – 31st March 2025 be noted.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Household Support Fund No.5

3.1 A report was presented to the Board on 4th June 2024 detailing the spending plan for the period 1st April 2024 to 30th September 2024 for the Household Support Fund. This report provides an update setting out the final spend position for the six month period 1st April 2024 – 30th September 2024.

3.2 Since the last report the final spend position for the Household Support Fund for the period 1st April 2024 – 30th September 2024 is as follows:

- Vulnerable pensioners, those entitled to Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction, have been awarded a payment of £70. This payment was made in August 2024, and 4,079 pensioners received this award representing a total value of £285,530.
- The Discretionary Support Scheme has paid out £53,728, which covers emergency support and community support.
- Expenditure on free school meal vouchers for the school holidays is now £624,324 which represents 7 weeks of school holidays.

- Public Health have spent £39,594 helping vulnerable residents.
- Halton Citizens Advice Bureau have spent £60,000 on a range of support for vulnerable residents such as fuel vouchers, food vouchers, and kitchen equipment.
- Children's Services have spent £40,000 on care leavers.
- Public Health have assisted families with pre-school age children who are flagged on the income deprivation index affecting children by providing food vouchers with a total value of £40,000.

Appendix A details the final spending position for the Household Support Fund for the period 1st April 2024 – 30th September 2024.

Household Support Fund No.6

- 3.3 On 24th September 2024 the Government issued guidance and announced the allocation of £1.3m, for the continuation of the Household Support Fund for a further six months from 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025.
- 3.4 The Fund has operated since October 2021 in either six or twelve month tranches, however, this latest allocation covers a six month period. The Fund is intended to support vulnerable households with the pressures caused by the continuing cost of living crisis.
- 3.5 The Government guidance for this latest allocation of the Fund remains broadly unchanged, requiring that part of the funding must be distributed on the basis of an application process. However, the Council can still proactively target particular groups of households.
- 3.6 Discussions have been held with colleagues in Council Departments and Voluntary Sector Organisations, who previously supported the delivery of the Household Support Fund to residents.

Discretionary Support Scheme – Application Process

- 3.7 In order to meet the requirement to operate part of the scheme on an application basis, it is proposed to allocate £75,000 of the funding to the Discretionary Support Scheme administered within the Benefits Division, which has an existing telephone application process.
- 3.8 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

- 3.9 In order to provide assistance to vulnerable households with children, it is proposed to once again allocate funding to low income families with children, by issuing free school meal vouchers of £12 per week during the Autumn half term, Christmas holidays, and Spring half term holidays.

- 3.10 It is estimated that the free school meals vouchers will cost approximately £360,000 in total. This will provide approximately 7,500 children with free school meal vouchers during the three holiday periods.

Pensioner Households on Council Tax Reduction

- 3.11 To support vulnerable pensioner households, it is proposed that all pensioners currently receiving council tax reduction (CTR) will be provided with a one-off award of £130.
- 3.12 It is estimated that 4,200 pensioner households on CTR will benefit from this award, at a total cost of £546,000.

Public Health and Care Leavers

- 3.13 Public Health will be allocated £40,000 in order to target support to vulnerable households who may fall outside those areas covered by the rest of the Spending Plan. Details of how it is proposed to utilise this funding is being developed.
- 3.14 Public Health are also proposing to 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. It is proposed to allocate £40,000 to Public Health for this particular project.
- 3.15 Colleagues in Children's Services are proposing to continue to provide support for care leavers with the following: energy bill support, household packs to assist with keeping warm, saving energy and cooking, and emergency food and hygiene packs. It is proposed to allocate £40,000 to Children's Services to provide the above mentioned support.

Voluntary Sector Partners

- 3.16 It is once again proposed to ask Voluntary Sector Partners to assist the Council with the delivery of this support to residents. The allocations made for the previous six month period, to Citizens Advice, Food Banks, Affordable Warmth etc. have been continued for the coming six months. Each organisation will provide a detailed proposal of how it intends to utilise the funding, and throughout the year will provide the Council with monitoring information for submission to the DWP.

Delivery Co-ordination, Monitoring and Reporting Arrangements

- 3.17 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 and Voluntary Sector Partners. A proposed spending plan has been prepared as set out in the Appendix B, regarding how the grant funding might be utilised via a combination of Council Departments and Voluntary Sector Partners to deliver support to vulnerable households over the six month period.

- 3.18 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 required to the DWP and to ensure it is fully utilised in accordance with the grant guidance by 31st March 2025.
- 3.19 If the grant is not fully spent by 31st March 2025 and/or is not spent in accordance with the grant guidance, it will be clawed back by the DWP. Initially, a balance of £36,986 remains unallocated as a contingency in case of overspends. Once the actual numbers and costs of items are known, the contingency will be re-allocated to provide additional support.
- 3.20 In order to commence delivery of the Household Support Fund, the Spending Plan requires the approval of the Executive Board. However given the urgent need to procure free school meal vouchers for the Autumn half term school holidays, the Chief Executive has approved the plan using delegated urgency powers. Thereafter, it is proposed that regular monitoring reports will be presented to the Corporate Policy and Performance Board.

4.0 POLICY AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

5.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

None identified.

5.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

None identified.

5.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

None identified.

5.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

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

5.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

None identified.

5.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

None identified.

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 31st March 2025, any remaining grant funding will be clawed back by the DWP.

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 2024 Allocations	DCBL Stadium Lowerhouse Lane Widnes	Paul Garnett

APPENDIX A

**Household Support Fund
Spend for the period 1st April 2024 – 30th September 2024**

Total Grant Allocation	£ 1,297,880
Less Administration Costs (5%)	64,894
Available Grant Funding	1,232,986
Expenditure	
1. Vulnerable Households with children	
Free school meal vouchers provided for 7 weeks.	624,324
2. Vulnerable Pensioner Households	
Paid £70 to 4,079 pensioners in August 2024.	285,530
3. Discretionary Support Scheme	
Spend for period 1 st April 2024 – 30 th September 2024	53,728
4. Public Health	
Spend for 1 st April 2024 – 30 th September 2024	39,594
5. Public Health – pre-school age	
Spend for 1 st April 2024 – 30 th September 2024	40,000
6. Care Leavers	
Spend for 1 st April 2024 – 30 th September 2024	40,000
7. Other vulnerable households	
Citizens Advice Bureau	60,000
Widnes Foodbank	10,000
Runcorn Foodbank	10,000
Holiday Activity Food programme	5,000
Affordable Warmth – Energy Projects Plus	10,000
Halton Voluntary Action	10,000
Total Expenditure	1,188,176

**Household Support Fund
Spending Plan 1st October 2024 – 31st March 2025**

Total Grant Allocation	£ 1,297,880
Less Administration Costs (5%)	64,894
Available Grant Funding	1,232,986
1. Vulnerable Households with Children	360,000
Free school meal vouchers for school holidays: Autumn half term, 28 Oct 2024 – 1 Nov 2024 (1 week) Christmas holidays, 23 Dec 2024 – 3 Jan 2025 (2 weeks) Spring half term, 17 Feb 2025 – 21 Feb 2025 (1 week) Based upon estimated 7,500 children entitled to FSM Paid for 4 weeks at £12 per voucher per week	
2. Vulnerable Pensioner Households	546,000
Based on 4,200 pensioner households receiving CTR/HB Award of £130 per pensioner	
3. Discretionary Support Scheme	75,000
Accessed by application	
4. Public Health – Other Vulnerable Households	40,000
Contact – Jayne Hardman	
5. Public Health - Pre-school Age Children	40,000
Contact - Matt Hancock	
6. Care Leavers	40,000
Contact – Emma Wright	
7. Other Vulnerable Households	
Halton Citizens Advice Bureau	50,000
Widnes Food Bank	10,000
Runcorn Food Bank	10,000
Holiday Activity Food Programme	5,000
Affordable Warmth – Energy Projects Plus	10,000
Halton Voluntary Action	10,000
8. Contingency	36,986
Total Allocated	1,232,986