

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 20 April 2023

REPORTING OFFICER: Operational Director – Finance

PORTFOLIO: Leader

SUBJECT: Household Support Fund No.4 2023/24

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To seek approval for a proposed Scheme and Spending Plan, regarding how the £2.6m grant allocation for the 2023/24 Household Support Fund might be utilised.

2.0 RECOMMENDED That:

- (i) The Scheme and Spending Plan for the 2023/24 Housing Support Fund, as outlined in the report and appendix, be approved;**
- (ii) Regular progress reports be presented to the Corporate Policy and Performance Board;**
- (iii) Any subsequent revisions to the Spending Plan be approved by the Operational Director, Finance in consultation with the Leader.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Household Support Fund No.4

3.1 On 20th February 2023 the Government issued guidance and announced a grant allocation for Halton of £2.6m. This is to provide for the continuation of the Household Support Fund, for a further twelve months from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

3.2 The Fund has operated since October 2021 in six-month tranches of £1.3m, however, this latest allocation covers a twelve month period. The Fund is intended to support vulnerable households with the pressures caused by the rapidly rising cost of living.

3.3 The Government have changed the requirements for this latest allocation, such 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 vulnerable households.

Discretionary Support Scheme – Application Process

- 3.4 In order to meet the requirement to operate part of the scheme on an application basis, it is proposed to allocate £356,000 of the funding to the Discretionary Support Scheme within the Benefits Division, which has an existing telephone application process.
- 3.5 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

- 3.6 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 all of the school holidays. The Easter holidays 2023 will be provided for from the current Fund allocation.
- 3.7 It is estimated that the provision of 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 Council Tax Reduction (CTR)

- 3.8 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 £120.
- 3.9 It is estimated that 4,181 pensioner households on CTR will benefit from this award, at a total cost of £501,720.

Public Health and Care Leavers

- 3.10 It is proposed 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.
- 3.11 In addition, Public Health will also target support to families who have pre-school age children, and are flagged on the Income Deprivation Index affecting children. Families who have disabled pre-school age children will also be targeted for support. It is therefore proposed to allocate a further £84,000 to Public Health for this particular project.
- 3.12 Children's Services currently have 135 recent care leavers and up to 50 young people in care who will become 18 years old in the next twelve months. It is proposed to assist these two vulnerable groups

during the cost of living crisis 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 £84,000 to Children's Services to provide the above mentioned support.

Voluntary Sector Partners

- 3.13 It is once again proposed to ask Voluntary Sector Partners to assist the Council with the delivery of support to residents. The allocations made previously for six month periods, 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

- 3.14 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 proposed Spending Plan has been prepared as set out in the Appendix, regarding how the grant funding might 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.
- 3.15 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.
- 3.16 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.
- 3.17 The Spending Plan must be submitted to the DWP by 17 May 2023. It is proposed that any subsequent revisions to the Plan are approved by the Operational Director, Finance in consultation with the Leader. Regular monitoring reports of spending and outcomes against the Plan, will be presented to the Corporate Policy and Performance Board during the year.

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 is intended to ensure that the grant funding is fully utilised by the deadline and in accordance with the grant guidance.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 None.

8.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no implications.

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

APPENDIX1

**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
<p>1. Vulnerable Households with Children 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 Nov 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 an estimated 7,500 children entitled to FSM, paid for 13 weeks with a £12 voucher per week</p>	1,170,000
<p>2. Vulnerable Pensioner Households Based on 4,181 pensioner households receiving CTR/HB Suggested award £120 per pensioner</p>	501,720
<p>3. Discretionary Support Scheme Delivered upon application. Based on HSF3 allocation for 6 months of £178,000.</p>	356,000
<p>4. Public Health 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>	100,000
<p>5. Public Health 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>	84,126
<p>6. Care Leavers Cost of living awards for recent care leavers and to those young people who will become care leavers in the next 12 months.</p>	84,127
<p>7. Other vulnerable households – HSF3 amount doubled Halton Citizens Advice Bureau Widnes Food Bank Runcorn Food Bank Holiday Activity Food programme Affordable Warmth – Energy Projects Plus Halton Voluntary Action</p>	80,000 20,000 20,000 10,000 20,000 20,000