

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 7 November 2023

REPORTING OFFICER: Operational Director – Finance

PORTFOLIO: Corporate Services

SUBJECT: Household Support Fund 2023/24

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide an update regarding delivery of the Government's Household Support Fund allocation of £2.6m from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

2.0 RECOMMENDED That:

- (i) Progress with delivery of the Household Support Fund, as outlined in the report, be noted;**
- (ii) A further progress report be brought to the next meeting of the Board.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

- 3.1 On 20th April 2023 the Executive Board approved a Spending Plan regarding how the £2.6m grant allocation might be utilised, and this was reported to the Board on 6th June 2023.
- 3.2 The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has issued guidance that includes 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.

Spending Plan

- 3.3 A spending plan was prepared, as set out in the Appendix A, regarding how the grant funding might be utilised via a combination of Council departments and voluntary sector partners, to deliver help and assistance to vulnerable households over the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.
- 3.4 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.

- 3.5 To assist vulnerable households with children, free school meal vouchers of £12 per week will be provided to approximately 7,500 eligible pupils during the school holidays. It is estimated that the free school meals vouchers will cost approximately £1,170,000 in total.
- 3.6 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. It is estimated that 4,181 pensioner households on CTR will benefit from this award, at a total cost of £501,720.
- 3.7 Public Health have been allocated £100,000 to target support at vulnerable households who may fall outside those categories covered by the rest of the spending plan. In addition Public Health will also provide support to families who have pre-school age children, and are flagged on the Income Deprivation Index affecting children. Public Health have been allocated £82,126 for this particular project.
- 3.8 An allocation of £82,127 has been made to Children's Services 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.
- 3.9 The remaining grant funding has been allocated to a number of Voluntary Sector Partners to assist other vulnerable households as detailed in Appendix A.

Progress Update

- 3.10 At the end of September 2023 expenditure from the Household Support Fund is relatively low because the £120 payment for pensioners is not being paid until October 2023, and it is estimated the spend will be £501,000. In addition assistance for pre-school age children will be made in the winter as will the support to be provided for care leavers.
- 3.11 Seven weeks of free school meal vouchers have been issued for the summer half term and the summer holidays totalling spend of £616,104. The Discretionary Support Scheme have also made awards to the value of £87,053.
- 3.12 Appendix B details the spend for the period 1st April 2023 – 30th September 2023 that also includes expenditure from partner organisations including Halton Citizens Advice Bureau, Runcorn Foodbank, Widnes Foodbank, Affordable Warmth, Holiday Activity Food programme, and Halton Voluntary Action.
- 3.13 A further progress report regarding delivery of the Household Support Fund will be presented to the Board on 23rd January 2024.

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 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 31st March 2024, any remaining grant funding will be clawed back by the DWP. The Spending Plan presented in the Appendix A 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 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 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
Spending Plan 1st April 2023 – 31st March 2024**

Total grant allocation	£ 2,595,761
Less administration costs (5%)	129,788
Total 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
<p>To make cost of living awards to recent care leavers and to those</p>	

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 Planned Spending	2,465,973

APPENDIX B

Household Support Fund

Actual Spend for the period 1st April 2023 – 30th September 2023

Total Available grant allocation	£ 2,465,973
1. Vulnerable Households with children	
Free school meal vouchers provided for: Summer half term and summer holidays	616,104
2. Vulnerable Pensioner Households	
To pay in October 2023	0
3. Discretionary Support Scheme	
Spend	87,053
4. Public Health	
Spend	6,529
5. Public Health – pre-school age	
To commence spend in the winter 2023	0
6. Care Leavers	
To commence spend in the winter 2023	0
7. Other vulnerable households	
Citizens Advice Bureau	14,219
Widnes Foodbank	20,000
Runcorn Foodbank	11,126
Holiday Activity Food programme	8,709
Affordable Warmth – Energy Projects Plus	4,100
Halton Voluntary Action	7,018
Total Actual Spend to 30th September 2023	774,858