

**REPORT TO:** Corporate & Inclusion Policy and Performance Board

**DATE:** 3 June 2025

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Director of Finance

**PORTFOLIO:** Corporate Services

**SUBJECT:** Household Support Fund – Progress Update

**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 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 and to report the spending plan for the Household Support Fund for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDED That:**

- (i) **The final spend position regarding the Household Support Fund for the period 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 shown in Appendix A, be noted;**
- (ii) **The spending plan for the Household Support Fund for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026 shown in Appendix B, be noted.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **Household Support Fund (Tranche No.6)**

- 3.1 A report was presented to the Board on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2024 detailing the spending plan for the period 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 for the Household Support Fund (6). This report provides an update setting out the final spend position for the six month period.
- 3.2 The final spend position for the Household Support Fund for the period 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 is as follows:
- Vulnerable pensioner households, those entitled to Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction, have been awarded a payment of £130. This payment was made in November 2024, and 3,999 pensioner households received this award representing a total value of £519,870.
  - The Discretionary Support Scheme has paid out £51,052 which covered emergency support and community support.
  - Expenditure on free school meal vouchers for all eligible pupils during the school holidays was £353,532, which covered four weeks of school holidays.

- Public Health have spent £39,729 helping vulnerable residents who wouldn't otherwise have met the above criteria.
- Halton Citizens Advice Bureau have spent £69,989 on a range of support for vulnerable residents such as fuel vouchers, food vouchers, and kitchen equipment.
- Children's Services have spent £42,349 relating to 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 (6) for the period 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

### **Household Support Fund (Tranche No.7)**

- 3.3 On 4<sup>th</sup> March 2025 the Government issued guidance and announced the allocation of £2.3m, for the continuation of the Household Support Fund for a further twelve months from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.
- 3.4 The Fund has operated since October 2021 in either six or twelve month tranches, however, this latest allocation covers a twelve 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, with a focus on vulnerable pensioner households, vulnerable households with children, and 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 £100,000 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 all the school holidays in the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026.

- 3.10 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 meal vouchers during all of the six holiday periods.

### **Pensioner Households on Council Tax Reduction**

- 3.11 To support vulnerable pensioner households, it is proposed that all pensioner households currently receiving council tax reduction (CTR) will be provided with a one-off award of £120.
- 3.12 It is estimated that 4,200 pensioner households on CTR will benefit from this award, at a total cost of £504,000.

### **Public Health and Care Leavers**

- 3.13 Public Health will be allocated £50,000 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 £50,000 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 areas: 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 £60,000 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 HSF support to residents for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026. Allocations are being made for the twelve month period, to Citizens Advice, Food Banks, Affordable Warmth etc. Each organisation will provide a detailed proposal of how it intends to utilise the funding, and throughout the year they will provide the Council with quarterly 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's residents and ensure it is fully utilised, discussions have been held with colleagues from 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 twelve 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 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026.
- 3.19 If the grant is not fully spent by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026 and/or is not spent in accordance with the grant guidance, it will be clawed back by the DWP. Initially, a balance of £24,101 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 Easter 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**
- 5.2 **Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**
- 5.3 **Supporting Children, Young People and Families**
- 5.4 **Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**
- 5.5 **Working Towards a Greener Future**
- 5.6 **Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

The delivery of support from the Household Support Fund is targeted towards the Borough's most vulnerable households, and has the potential to support a number of the Council's 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<sup>st</sup> March 2026, 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**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
Household Support Fund 2025 Allocations	DCBL Stadium Lowerhouse Lane Widnes	Paul Garnett

## APPENDIX A

### Household Support Fund (Tranche No.6) Actual Spend for the Period 1<sup>st</sup> October 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025

<b>Total Grant Allocation</b>	£ 1,297,880
Less Administration Costs (5%)	64,894
<b>Available Grant Funding</b>	<b>1,232,986</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>	
<b>1. Vulnerable Households with children</b>	
Free school meal vouchers provided for 4 weeks.	353,532
<b>2. Vulnerable Pensioner Households</b>	
Paid £130 to 3,999 pensioner households in November 2024.	519,870
<b>3. Discretionary Support Scheme</b>	
Spend for period 1 <sup>st</sup> October 2024 – 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025	51,052
<b>4. Public Health</b>	
Spend for period 1 <sup>st</sup> October 2024 – 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025	39,729
<b>5. Public Health – pre-school age</b>	
Spend for period 1 <sup>st</sup> October 2024 – 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025	40,000
<b>6. Care Leavers</b>	
Spend for period 1 <sup>st</sup> October 2024 – 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025	42,349
<b>7. Other vulnerable households</b>	
Citizens Advice Bureau	69,989
Widnes Foodbank	10,000
Runcorn Foodbank	10,000
Holiday Activity Food programme	5,000
Affordable Warmth – Energy Projects Plus	5,491
Halton Voluntary Action	10,000
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>1,157,012</b>

## APPENDIX B

### Household Support Fund (Tranche No.7) Spending Plan 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026

Total Grant Allocation	£ 2,287,475
Less Administration Costs (5%)	114,374
<b>Available Grant Funding</b>	<b>2,173,101</b>
<b>1. Vulnerable Households with Children</b>	1,170,000
Free school meal vouchers for school holidays: Easter holidays 7 <sup>th</sup> – 18 <sup>th</sup> April 2025 (2 weeks) Half term 26 <sup>th</sup> – 30 <sup>th</sup> May 2025 (1 week) Summer holidays 23 <sup>rd</sup> July – 29 <sup>th</sup> August 2025 (6 weeks) Autumn half term 27 <sup>th</sup> – 31 <sup>st</sup> October 2025 (1 week) Christmas holidays 22 <sup>nd</sup> December 2025 – 2 <sup>nd</sup> Jan 2026 (2 weeks) Half term 16 <sup>th</sup> – 20 <sup>th</sup> February 2026 (1 week)  Based upon estimated 7,500 children entitled to FSM Paid for 13 weeks at £12 per voucher per week	
<b>2. Vulnerable Pensioner Households</b>	504,000
Based on 4,200 pensioner households receiving CTR/HB Award of £120 per pensioner	
<b>3. Discretionary Support Scheme</b>	100,000
Accessed by application	
<b>4. Public Health – Other Vulnerable Households</b>	50,000
Contact – Jayne Hardman	
<b>5. Public Health - Pre-school Age Children</b>	50,000
Contact - Matt Hancock	
<b>6. Care Leavers</b>	60,000
Contact – Emma Wright	
<b>7. Other Vulnerable Households</b>	
Halton Citizens Advice Bureau	125,000
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
<b>8. Contingency</b>	24,101
<b>Total Allocated</b>	<b>2,173,101</b>