

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

8 October 2024

Subject: Household Support Fund 2024 extension 1 October – 31 March 2025

Cabinet Member: Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling - Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities, Leisure, and Libraries

Key Decision: Key

Executive Summary

This report has been updated from the previous Household Support Fund Cabinet Report (16 April 2024) following announcements on 2 September 2024 that the Fund is to be extended, from 1 October for a further 6 months.

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an overview of the announced six-month extension to the Household Support Fund 2024 from 1 October 2024 - 31 March 2025 as the grant exceeds £500,000 as determined by the Council's constitution.

Wiltshire Council has been awarded £2,728,656.41 from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to support households, who would otherwise struggle to buy food or pay essential utility bills or meet other essential living costs to help them with significantly with rising living costs.

Proposals

That Cabinet:

- 1) Notes the content of the report;
- 2) Delegates the payment criteria of the grant to the Director, Finance and Procurement (S151 Officer), and the Director, Public Health in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities, Leisure, and Libraries.

Reason for Proposals

To inform Members of the Household Support Fund extension allocation Wiltshire Council has been awarded by the Department for Work and Pensions.

Lucy Townsend
Chief Executive

Wiltshire Council

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Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an overview of the Household Support Fund 2024 which has now been extended for a further six months (1 October 2024 – 31 March 2025). Wiltshire Council have been allocated £2,728,656.4 from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).
2. The Fund is being provided to support households, who would otherwise struggle to buy food or pay essential utility bills or meet other essential living costs to help them with significantly rising living costs for the following six-month period: 1 October 2024- 31 March 2025.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

3. The proposal is relevant to the following mission statements laid down in the Council's Business Plan 2022 to 2032:
 - Prevention and early intervention
 - Improving social mobility and tackling inequalities
 - Understanding communities
 - Working together

Background

4. Public Health have administered the distribution of HSF4 and HSF5 via 152 schemes spanning internally within the council and externally through third sector partners
5. Across all schemes in HSF5, 25,243 households in Wiltshire have been supported with food provision totalling £1,332,230 million of the total allocation. Within this, families eligible for free school meals have been supported through the school holidays.
6. Through the schemes, households with children, disabled persons and pensioners have been supported. Help has included food and fuel vouchers, housing costs, advice services, white goods, warm packs, furniture poverty and flooring.
7. The Gypsy, Roma, Traveller, Boater community were identified as having missed out on the national energy support given to all households. HSF4 and HSF5 has allowed

the council to support boaters and travellers with fuel, food, energy payments and emergency maintenance to prevent homelessness and debt.

8. £421 million has been made available in this most recent round of funding to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to provide support to households, who would otherwise struggle to buy food or pay essential utility bills or meet other essential living costs or housing costs (in exceptional cases of genuine emergency), to help them with significantly rising living costs. The Government has pledged to allocate the same amount with this new extension.
9. The funding is being provided by The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to County Councils and Unitary Authorities (including Metropolitan Councils and London Boroughs), under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003, to administer the scheme and provide assistance to households most in need.
10. This funding covers the period 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025 inclusive. Local Authorities have discretion on exactly how this funding is used within the scope set out in the accompanying grant determination and guidance
11. The expectation is that the Fund should primarily be used to support households in the most need; particularly those who may not be eligible for the other support government has recently made available but who are nevertheless in need and who require crisis support. The Fund is intended to cover a wide range of low-income households in need including families with children of all ages, pensioners, unpaid carers, care leavers, disabled people. larger families, single-person households and those struggling with one-off financial shocks or unforeseen events.

Main Considerations for the Council

12. The Fund should primarily be used to support energy bills for any form of fuel that is used for the purpose of domestic heating, cooking, or lighting, including oil or portable gas cylinders. It can also be used to support water bills including for drinking, washing, cooking, as well as for sanitary purposes and sewerage. Energy bills may be of particular concern to low-income households during the period of the Fund.
13. The Fund can also be used to support households with the cost of food and essential costs related to energy, food and water such as warm clothing, blankets, the purchase of equipment such as fridges, freezers, ovens, slow cookers or costs associated with obtaining these essentials e.g. delivery and installation. The Fund can additionally be used to support housing costs where existing housing support schemes do not meet this need.
14. The Fund can be used to support wider essential needs not linked to energy and water should Authorities consider this appropriate in their area. These may include, but are not limited to, support with other bills including broadband or phone bills, clothing including uniform, essential transport-related costs such as repairing a car, buying a bicycle, or paying for fuel. It can also include one-off payments to prevent crisis.
15. The Fund may be used to provide supplementary advice services to award recipients, including debt and benefit advice, where Authorities consider this appropriate.
16. Reasonable administrative costs incurred by the council may be funded by the Fund. This includes reasonable costs incurred administering the Fund and will be required to

be reported to DWP as part of the management information and analysis of spend. (see delivery plans section below).

17. Authorities have the ability to deliver the scheme through a variety of routes including providing vouchers or cash to households, making direct provision of food and goods, or issuing grants to third parties.
18. Every area must operate at least part of their scheme on an application basis enabling residents to have the opportunity to come forward to ask for support. Authorities should offer application-based support throughout the duration of The Fund, either continuously over the majority of The Fund Period or in regular intervals throughout the scheme.
19. It is mandatory for Authorities to reference that the grant is funded by Department for Work and Pensions in any publicity material, including online channels and media releases.
20. It is mandatory for Authorities to make public their plans for The Fund, including how and when they intend to deliver the application-based portion of their scheme. This should be through a website page dedicated to the Fund headed with 'Household Support Fund' on their Authority website. This webpage must be easily accessible for residents and outline the Authority's plans for funding, including with details of who is eligible in the area, as well as how and when residents might be able to apply for the application-based element of the scheme. Links to the Government's Cost of Living Hub should be included, as well as a specific reference that the grant is funded by the UK Government.
21. Authorities are required to complete a delivery plan to outline their intentions for The Fund, clearly setting out their priorities and approach for use of the Fund, and to demonstrate the ways in which they intend to allocate their funding
22. Authorities are required to send their delivery plan to DWP by 1 November 2024. At the end of The Fund the authority will be required to provide a summary of spend against the final delivery plan with this due at the same time as the final Management Information (MI).
23. Delivery plans must be signed off by the Section 151 Officer and responsible Cabinet Member before submission to DWP.
24. Authorities are required to make Statements of Grant Usage and Management Information returns outlining grant spend and the volume of awards as detailed in their guidance once released.
25. Grant payments will be made to authorities in arrears on receipt of a fully completed and verified MI return.

Safeguarding Implications

26. There are no safeguarding implications from administering the Household Support Fund 1 October 2024 – 31 March 2025.

Public Health Implications

27. This fund will help to provide support to vulnerable and low-income households in Wiltshire. By utilising data from the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, council data sets and experience and evaluation through administration of previous rounds of Household Support Funding we can ensure that resources are targeted where they are most needed with the aim of reducing inequalities across our population.

Procurement Implications

28. There are no procurement implications from administering the Household Support Fund 1 October 2024 – 31 March 2025.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

29. The equalities impact of the proposed decision is believed to be low against all criteria on the Equalities Risk Criteria Table and, therefore, a full Equalities Impact Assessment is not required.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

30. There are no perceived negative impacts on environment and climate change from administering the Household Support Fund.

Workforce Implications

31. There are no perceived adverse implications on the employees working on the administration of the Fund and it is expected that existing staff will administer the Fund.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

32. The Council must submit a delivery plan to DWP to comply with the conditions of the Household Support Fund. It is, therefore, good practice to provide this report as an overview for Cabinet and to request the delegation included in the proposals for transparency. If the delegation is not approved there could be delays in the administering the Fund and making payments to those households most in need.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

33. The Household Support Fund does not require a decision to be made at this stage. Due to the requirements set out by DWP for reporting and to ensure there is not a delay for administering the scheme and making payments to those in need, the proposal is made for delegation of the payment criteria of the grant to the Director of Finance (S151 Officer), Corporate Director for People and Director of Public Health in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Public Health, Leisure, Libraries, Facilities Management, and Operational Assets.

Financial Implications

34. The DWP set out requirements for reporting, which are included above in the body of the report, As grant payments will be made to authorities in arrears on receipt of a fully

completed and verified MI returns there is a risk that the DWP may consider some of the payments made by the council to not be in line with the criteria and, therefore, may not reimburse the council for these payments. This will be mitigated by setting out the criteria for payment, ensuring the criteria is met and undertaking appropriate control processes, such as validation of any applications made through the application process.

35. As grants payments will be made to the council in arrears the council will lose the interest that would have been earned on the cash value of payments made until the reimbursement is received, however, this is not considered to be significant due to the four reporting periods for the year and the relatively low interest rates and the expected value of the payments.
36. Reasonable administrative costs incurred by the council may be funded by the Fund. It is expected that existing staff will support the administration of the Fund and their costs will be reclaimed and included within the summary of spend and in the Statements of Grant Usage and Management Information returns. It is also expected that any additional administrative costs such as IT costs and the cost of making payments will also be included within the summary of spend and be reclaimed from DWP.

Legal Implications

37. Legal Services have advised on this matter previously and will continue to be involved to ensure compliance with any grant conditions and ensure any subsidy control requirements are met.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

38. The Household Support Fund is a government led scheme with funding criteria set by government. This report to Cabinet provides Members with an overview of round 6 of the Household Support Fund (1 October 2024 – 31 March 2025). There has been no engagement with the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or Select Committees.

Options Considered

39. Due to the nature of the grant requirements of the Household Support Fund, no other options are required to be considered at this stage.

Conclusions

40. It is recommended that the Cabinet notes the contents of this report and delegates the spend of the grant to the Director, Finance and Procurement (S151 Officer), Corporate Director, People, and Director, Public Health in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities, Leisure, and Libraries.

Lucy Townsend - Chief Executive

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Appendices

None

Background Papers

None