

Household Support Fund 2023/24

To: Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee

Meeting Date: 23 March 2023

From: Assistant Director for Communities, Employment and Skills, Lisa Riddle

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: Yes

Forward Plan ref: 2023/024

Outcome: For the delivery of the Household Support Fund to continue to target those most in need of financial support between April 2023 and March 2024, for the fund to be delivered in line with the conditions of the fund, and for the full amount of available grant to be utilised.

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

- a) Approve the approach to delivery of the Household Support Fund 2023/24, as set out in Section 2 of the report; and
- b) Delegate further decisions relating to the delivery of the Household Support Fund to the Assistant Director for Communities, Employment and Skills, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee.

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1. Background

- 1.1 The fourth iteration of the Household Support Fund (HSF4) will run from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. The fund is designed to support those most in need, providing help with inflationary challenges and the rising cost of living.
- 1.2 Cambridgeshire's total grant determination for 2023/2024 is £7,162,849. Funding will be reimbursed to the Council following the receipt of a completed, compliant and verified Management Information (MI) return.
- 1.3 Each authority will be required to provide four MI returns outlining their grant spend and the volume of awards:
 - An interim MI return for the period 1 April 2023 to 30 June 2023 will be due by 21 July 2023.
 - A second interim MI return for the period 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023 will be due by 20 October 2023.
 - A third interim MI return for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 December 2023 will be due by 26 January 2024.
 - A final MI return and delivery record for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 will be due by 26 April 2024.
- 1.4 As in previous iterations of the Household Support Fund (HSF), it is proposed for the fund to be used on both the scheme outlined in this paper and the Direct Voucher Scheme (DVS) offered during school holidays. The DVS offers parents of children in receipt of free school meals a £15 supermarket voucher per child for each week of the school holidays.
- 1.5 Final guidance for HSF4 has now been published, including the following key differences from previous iterations of the fund:
 - Authorities must ensure that the mandatory element of application-based support delivered through the scheme is clearly advertised to residents, and is available throughout the majority of the fund period, either continuously or in regular intervals over the course of the scheme.
 - Details of the scheme must also be publicised on a dedicated website page with specific requirements set out in the guidance.
 - Funding for supplementary advice services, including debt and benefit advice, is now considered eligible spend within the HSF scheme. As the primary focus of this grant is on practical support, expenditure on such services is expected to be limited and linked to the provision of practical support.
 - It is mandatory that in any publicity material for the scheme, including via online channels and media releases, authorities make clear that this funding is being provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) or the UK Government.

- The guidance document itself has been reduced in size and there is now separate MI and Delivery plan guidance.
- Delivery plans must be signed off by the Section 151 Officer.

- 1.6 The DVS falls within the remit of the Children and Young People Committee, and requires estimated funding of £4,000,000 between April 2023 and March 2024, although this may vary depending on the number of those receiving free school meals. This would leave an estimated working balance of £3,162,849 for the wider scheme and associated administrative costs.
- 1.7 The anti-poverty hub continues to work in collaboration with partners and stakeholders from across the system to develop a blended system that provides direct financial support to those in need, with an additional focus on financial sustainability and income maximisation. With the change in national guidance now allowing the inclusion of advice services, this presents an opportunity to further strengthen and widen this offer. With an income maximisation project already in place with Citizens Advice for 2023/24, this change in guidance will allow for further opportunities to focus on longer term support.
- 1.8 With a year of funding confirmed, it enables further strengthening of existing processes and longer-term planning. This was not possible previously due to the shorter-term funding allocations and extensions. As a result, a year-long communication and engagement plan will be developed to ensure residents in need are offered the support through direct messaging, but also by ensuring services already supporting these individuals are aware of the support available and how it can be accessed.
- 1.9 The eligibility will remain the same for HSF4.
- 1.10 Work is continuing to grow the trusted partner network, identifying teams both within the Council and across Cambridgeshire that can support residents. The service continues to receive feedback on how accessible the fund is and how it enables support to residents and helps them engage in longer term support.
- 1.11 This report sets out detailed proposals for the delivery of the wider HSF4 scheme in Cambridgeshire.

2. Main Issues

- 2.1 An extensive coproduction exercise was undertaken during a previous iteration of the HSF. This led to a blended system that enables direct financial support to those in need, with an additional focus on financial sustainability and income maximisation.
- 2.2 This is part of a wider support offer which links families and households with, and helps them to navigate, support mechanisms of which they may not previously have been aware. This approach was outlined in the report on the HSF that was presented to the Committee at its meeting on 21 July 2022.

- 2.3 The principles that guided the design of the existing system were:
- Coproduction of the Council's offer and processes being the core of the fund.
 - The Council's offer being easy to understand and access.
 - Seeking to minimise bureaucracy and administrative spend.
 - Building on existing support networks, joining up local services and not duplicating them.
 - Supporting those in need to navigate the complex systems of support available, rather than simply 'handing off' or 'signposting them'.
 - Sharing learning and intelligence with the Council's partners to help target offers.
 - Working in collaboration with partners across the public and voluntary sectors.
 - Supporting residents of Cambridgeshire.
- 2.4 Ongoing engagement with stakeholders suggests that this remains the correct approach to take. Therefore, it is recommended that HSF4 largely continues to deliver and develop the Council's existing approach.

Eligibility

- 2.5 There are no changes proposed to the eligibility criteria used for HSF3, which were developed using Minimum Income Standards produced by The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Loughborough University. These amounts vary according to the number of children in a household, and reflects that children are significant contributors to financial pressure in households.
- 2.6 The eligibility criteria are:
- (i) Applicants should have a household income level of less than that identified in Table 1 and Table 2. The figures in the tables are calculated using the 2021 Minimum Income Standards. These will be updated as annual changes to the Minimum Income Standards are made.

	No children	1 child	2 children	3 or more children
Single adult	£20,383	£24,883	£29,148	£37,928
Couple/Joint applications	£27,340	£31,902	£35,824	£45,548

Table 1 – Gross Annual Income

	No children	1 child	2 children	3 or more children
Single adult	£325	£527	£698	£883
Couple/Joint applications	£485	£629	£799	£988

Table 2 – Net Income per Week

- (ii) Applicants that live with their spouse or partner must make a joint application for the household, even if the spouse or partner is not applying.

- (iii) Applicants should have no more than £16,000 in money, savings, and investments.

Direct Application Process

- 2.7 There are no changes proposed to the current process. As part of HSF3, the application form was refined to capture relevant evidence to ensure support can be offered to beneficiaries in the most effective way. This direct route will continue in the next phase.

Trusted Partner Network

- 2.8 The Council's 'trusted partner' approach continued throughout HSF3, with 80 organisations and teams now forming part of the network, and new members regularly being identified. Trusted partners can make a financial award to households in need, accessing the fund as part of their broader toolkit of support. Partners are briefed on the eligibility criteria and funding conditions and are trusted to make decisions on whether an award should be made. If an award is deemed to be the right solution, the trusted partner organisation submits details to the Council's Anti-Poverty Hub, which processes the award on their behalf. It is proposed to continue and expand this model, as it both expands the reach of the fund and acts to integrate anti-poverty offers in the wider system.

Identification of Potential Beneficiaries

- 2.9 As well as the previously mentioned routes to accessing the fund, it is important that the Council proactively seeks to identify households that may be eligible for and in need of help and support. The Council will therefore continue to work with partners across the system to directly contact target groups to ensure that they are aware of the support that is available. This approach proved extremely successful during previous iterations of the scheme, using pension credit data from the DWP and council tax reduction data from district council partners. In addition, the DWP is allowing access to housing benefit data to support delivery and targeting of the fund.
- 2.10 The Council is currently working with the NHS to expand the trusted partner network to include discharge teams and others, and to identify data it holds that will enable it to target specific cohorts.
- 2.11 District, city and parish councils, along with councillors from the County Council and other local authorities, will continue to play a vital role in promoting the fund, while providing local intelligence to the Anti-Poverty Hub to enable targeted communications and engagement activity where it is needed.

Financial Support

- 2.12 The current flat rate paid by the fund is £110.
- 2.13 Individuals can apply twice and therefore may receive £220 in total.

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

3.1 Environment and Sustainability

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.2 Health and Care

The fund provides immediate relief for households in crisis, and the scheme sits alongside a broader range of opportunities to provide support, coupled with the Council's ability to identify households in need that may not yet be known to us, will ensure a focus of support on those most in need.

3.3 Places and Communities

Cambridgeshire HSF4 will work closely with local councils and a wide range of trusted partners at a community level, enabling a localised approach to be taken to support a household in need where appropriate.

3.4 Children and Young People

Alongside the direct voucher scheme, the Council will be identifying families in need and encouraging them to apply to the fund.

3.5 Transport

There are no significant implications for this priority.

4. Significant Implications

4.1 Resource Implications

There are no direct resource implications for the Council, as they are covered by the grant.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

Any procurement activity undertaken will follow the Council's contract procedure rules, and the Procurement Team will be engaged to provide support. Procurement and contract procedure rules will need to be followed when commissioning the new services described in the report. The fund will be managed through the local authority and staff employed through the Council.

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

The Council is required to provide management information as a condition of the funding as outlined in Paragraph 1.3 of this report.

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

The fund is made widely available to all households that may be in immediate or urgent need and who meet the eligibility criteria.

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

Communicating this fund to residents, as well as engaging with district councils, parish and town councils and other trusted partners, is essential to ensure help reaches those people most in need.

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

Local Members play a vital role in helping to promote the scheme, identifying households who may need to apply to the scheme, and supporting those households with their applications.

4.7 Public Health Implications

The fund is a potential source of support for community members experiencing hardship. However, many of the challenges affecting their health and wellbeing are structural and require a wider approach. The fund's impact is greater, more sustainable, and preventative if it is part of a package of interventions that lever in different types of support within the system for community members through a co-ordinated pragmatic approach.

4.8 Environment and Climate Change Implications on Priority Areas

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.8.1 Implication 1: Energy efficient, low carbon buildings.

Status: neutral

Explanation: There are no significant implications within this category.

4.8.2 Implication 2: Low carbon transport.

Status: neutral

Explanation: There are no significant implications within this category.

4.8.3 Implication 3: Green spaces, peatland, afforestation, habitats and land management.

Status: neutral

Explanation: There are no significant implications within this category.

4.8.4 Implication 4: Waste Management and Tackling Plastic Pollution.

Status: neutral

Explanation: There are no significant implications within this category.

4.8.5 Implication 5: Water use, availability and management:

Status: neutral

Explanation: There are no significant implications within this category.

4.8.6 Implication 6: Air Pollution.

Status: neutral

Explanation: There are no significant implications within this category.

4.8.7 Implication 7: Resilience of our services and infrastructure, and supporting vulnerable people to cope with climate change.

Status: neutral

Explanation: There are no significant implications within this category

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes

Name of Financial Officer: Clare Andrews

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the Head of Procurement and Commercial? Yes

Name of Officer: Clare Ellis

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or Pathfinder Legal? Yes

Name of Legal Officer: Linda Walker

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your EqIA Super User? Yes

Name of Officer: Lisa Riddle

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?

Name of Officer: Christine Birchall

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes

Name of Officer: Lisa Riddle

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health? Yes

Name of Officer: Val Thomas

If a Key decision, have any Environment and Climate Change implications been cleared by the Climate Change Officer? Yes

Name of Officer: Emily Bolton

5. Source Documents

- 5.1 [1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024: Household Support Fund guidance for county councils and unitary authorities in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/1-april-2023-to-31-march-2024-household-support-fund-guidance-for-county-councils-and-unitary-authorities-in-england)