


Portfolio Holder Decision

Approval for Household Support Fund

Portfolio Holder	Leader of the Council
Date of decision	12 May 2022
	Signed 

1. Decision taken

That the Leader of the Council:

- i. Approves the Household Support Fund Offer proposed in section 3.1, and
- ii. in the event that the Secretary of State makes additional funding available to be expended before 30 September 2022, authorises the Strategic Director for Resources, acting in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate & Culture, to determine the allocation of that funding between the categories of the Household Support Fund Offer as now approved

2. Reasons for decisions

2.1 The Department for Work and Pensions requires urgent submission of the Council's Household Support Fund (HSF) delivery plan, following and announcement in late March 2022 that the HSF would be extended to 30 September 2022. .

2.2 The proposal has been developed based on the following assumptions and criteria:

- building on what has worked well over the last 18 months,
- success of the Huggs supermarket vouchers and redemption rates (currently at circa 93%)
- ensuring we have accurate data and robust governance arrangements that will satisfy Internal and External Audit and allow us to sign off the management information returns
- minimising fraud risk and duplication of awards
- ensuring awards are issued in accordance with the framework

2.3 The key criteria for the grant has changed from previous funding rounds, and now requires at least one third of the funding to be spent on households that include those of state pension age.

2.4 The request to delegate the allocation of future funds to the Strategic Director for Resources in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment Climate and Culture is intended to allow an agile and efficient response to future funding allocations so as to enable support to reach vulnerable households quickly and efficiently

3. Background information

3.1 On 23 March 2022, the government announced in the Spring Statement that the Household Support Fund (HSF) would be extended from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022. As previously, the fund will be made available to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need.

The HSF should primarily be used to support households in most need with food, energy and water bills. Housing related support may be provided but only in exceptional cases of genuine emergency where it is evidenced that all other available government funding has been exhausted.

Warwickshire's HSF allocation is £3,472,997 to cover the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022. These funds should be spent or committed before 30 September 2022 and cannot be held over for future use.

As noted above, the key criteria for the funding now requires that at least one third of the total funding must be spent on families with children and at least one third must be spent on pensioners. The remainder of the fund can be used for other households genuinely in need of support. This may include households not currently in receipt of DWP welfare benefits. HSF funding can also be used to support households with essential costs related to those items and with wider essential costs.

Grant payments will be made to authorities in arrears on receipt of a fully completed and verified management information return.

Warwickshire will be distributing its allocation using the well-established Local Welfare Scheme as the primary vehicle for using the grant and targeting most of the funding at food and fuel vouchers, as we have done successfully with the predecessor grants. Authorities have the flexibility within the scheme to identify which vulnerable households are in most need of support and apply their own discretion when identifying eligibility. The offer is described in more detail below.

Warwickshire's Household Support Fund Offer

1) Enhanced Welfare Support (by application)

- **food support** - supermarket vouchers or food bank referrals
- **energy support** – award rates have been increased in line with rising energy costs
- **warm clothing allowance**
- **personal hygiene support**
- **water bill** - one off payment at the average monthly cost.
- **purchase of essential equipment** e.g., fridge, freezer and/or a means to cook, where it directly effects a household's ability to afford or access food, energy, and water.
- on a discretionary basis, **other essential bills** will be considered dependent on the individual's need.

2) Free School Meal school holiday food support and support to those in receipt of pension credit (automatic and by application)

- £1.7 million funding prioritised to provide food support to vulnerable families and residents in receipt of pension credit
- Huggo supermarket vouchers will be automatically issued to parents/carers of children eligible for benefits related free school meals and residents in receipt of pension credit

- May half term and summer school holidays included, valued at £3 per day.
- Eligible children not on a school roll, in early years settings or attending college continue to be able to apply for the same level of support.
- Over the Easter, the Local Welfare Scheme supported over 17,000 children and expectation is that this will increase over the period of this grant.

3) Utilities voucher promotion (automatic and by application)

- During March/April 2022, supported over 10,500 vulnerable households through the fuel voucher campaign funded by the Household Support Grant.
- The extension to the Household Support Fund will support a further utilities voucher campaign in June/July to support vulnerable households with the cost of energy.
- Combination of award by application and a targeted automatic voucher to families/carers eligible for benefits related free school meals and residents in receipt of pension credit.
- Estimate £1.6 million spend for 21,000 vulnerable households over the campaign.

4) Welfare Grants

- Building on the successful process used for the initial Household Support Fund Scheme:
 - The Council will work with District and Borough Council's Localities team to identify specific community projects and initiatives that can be supported within the scheme's food and energy parameters.
 - Applications will be open in July 2022 (in line with DWP's reporting requirements).
- Link into charities and organisations that work with hard to reach groups to understand their needs and how best to offer support through the Local Welfare Scheme.

3.2 As the framework for the allocation of awards has changed, we are asking for urgent approval of the proposal for the distribution of funds, especially as we need to prepare in time to get much needed support out to families ready for May half-term.

3.3 In the event that the Secretary of State makes additional funding available under the Household Support Fund, authorises the Strategic Director for Resources, acting in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate & Culture, to determine the allocation of that funding in line with the final criteria determined by the Department for Work and Pensions.

4. Financial implications

4.1 Subject to the submission of a delivery plan acceptable to the Department of Work and Pensions, the Authority will receive a Household Support Fund allocation of £3.473m. The grant is to be committed by 30 September 2022, with any funding uncommitted by this time potentially needing to be returned.

4.2 The Service will put in place arrangements to ensure all spend is consistent with terms and conditions of the grant and that no spending is committed in excess of the grant to ensure there are no finance implications for the Authority.

5. Environmental implications

None

Report Author	Paula Thompson paulathompson@warwickshire.gov.uk
Assistant Director	Sarah Steer, Assistant Director, Business & Customer Services sarahsteer@warwickshire.gov.uk
Strategic Director	Rob Powell, Strategic Director for Resources robpowell@warwickshire.gov.uk
Portfolio Holder	Leader of the Council

Urgent matter?	Yes
Confidential or exempt?	No
Is the decision contrary to the budget and policy framework?	No

List of background papers
N/A

Members and officers consulted and informed
Portfolio Holder – Councillor Isobel Seccombe Corporate Board – Rob Powell, Strategic Director for Resources Legal – Sioned Harper and Nic Vine Finance – Andy Felton and Virginia Rennie Democratic Services – Isabelle Moorhouse and Andy Carswell Other members – Heather Timms, Portfolio Holder for Environment, Climate & Culture