

DECISION-MAKER:	Cabinet Council
SUBJECT:	Household Support Fund April 2023– March 2024
DATE OF DECISION:	14 March 2023 15 March 2023
REPORT OF:	COUNCILLOR KATARIA CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

<u>CONTACT DETAILS</u>			
Executive Director	Title	Executive Director Wellbeing & Housing	
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STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY		
Not applicable.		
BRIEF SUMMARY		
This report concerns the Household Support Fund. The Government has pledged additional funding to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need to help with global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living. This pledge of funding covers the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.		
RECOMMENDATIONS:		
Cabinet	(i)	To approve in principle for Southampton City Council to participate in the delivery of the next phase of Household Support Fund from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.
	(ii)	To delegate authority to the Executive Director Wellbeing & Housing to finalise the details of the local Household Support Fund scheme following consultation with the Executive Director - Finance, Commercialisation and S151 Officer and the Cabinet Member for Communities and Customer Engagement and to administer funding in accordance with that scheme.
Council	(i)	To approve and accept Household Support Fund for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.
REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS		
1.	This pledge of funding is to be provided to County Councils and Unitary Authorities and forms part of the Government's wider package of support for	

	those most in need, to help with the cost of living. This funding can be used to support some of our most vulnerable households.
2.	Local Authorities received the final guidance and confirmation of actual amount of funding allocated for the period of 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024, on the 20 th February 2023. Funding has been confirmed as £4,445,352 for a 12 month period.
ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED	
3.	The Council may consider not accepting this funding. This is not recommended as the fund is designed to assist local authorities to help residents experiencing financial hardship linked to the global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living and to be complementary to the Government's wider package of Cost of Living support.
DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)	
4.	Since December 2020, the Government has provided funding to Local Authorities to provide hardship support for residents who have been affected by the pandemic and its recovery and the current cost of living crisis. This support was previously directed to Local Authorities through the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Winterfund, and the Covid Local Support Grant. This finished on the 30th of September 2021 and was superseded by the Household Support Fund (HSF) to support those most in need to help with global inflationary challenges and the significantly rising cost of living.
5.	Household Support Fund has been provided to County Councils and Unitary Authorities since October 2021 and forms part of the Government's wider package of support for those most in need, to help with the cost of living. This funding has been used to support some of our most vulnerable households.
6.	Based on the total amount of funding announced and the period it will cover, it is anticipated the allocation for Southampton for 2023/24 could be in the region of £4.4 Million. We will need to mobilise quickly once the funding and guidance has been confirmed.
7.	In previous phases, Household Support Fund could be used to support households with the cost of food and water bills, essential costs related to energy, food and water, and with wider essential costs. Local Authorities have had discretion on exactly how the funding has been used within the scope set out in the grant determination and guidance.
8.	Previous announcements of Household Support Fund have been made at quite short notice - for the scheme to be funded for an additional 6 months, with revised guidance issued. However, it is anticipated that the next phase, will be for 12 months. Requirements of scheme have changed significantly between phases. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 30th September 2021- 31st March 2022 allowed Local Authorities to spend up to 80% of their allocated funding on households with children and the remaining 20% on those without.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st April 2022- 30th September 2022 required Local Authorities to ensure that at least one third of the available funds was made available to pensioners. • 1st October 2022 – 31st March 2023 required Local Authorities to operate at least part of their scheme on an application basis i.e. residents should have the opportunity to come forward to ask for support.
9.	<p>For the current phase (1st October 2022 – 31st March 2023), we received £2.2 million and have delivered a mixed model of support to residents including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vouchers for Free School Meal eligible pupils for October, Christmas and February half-term. • ‘Mini -HAF’ (Holiday Activities & Food) style programme during February half-term. • Self-Referral Online scheme for supermarket vouchers • Agency Referral Scheme for supermarket vouchers, white goods and prepayment utility top-ups. • Increased capacity in local projects offering practical support to tackle fuel poverty.
10.	<p>New guidance was issued to Local Authorities on the 20th February 2023. Included in the guidance are several requirements on Local authorities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authorities must make sure 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 or the UK Government • the guidance document itself has been reduced in size and there is now separate MI and Delivery plan guidance. <p>We will design our scheme in line with the guidance and in consultation with key stakeholders, and in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities and Customer Engagement.</p>

11.	Our local Household Support Fund scheme will be designed to keep within the funding provided by Central Government and will be robustly monitored accordingly to ensure no overspend occurs and that the appropriate returns to government to draw down funding are accurate.
12.	Although this fund is designed to assist Local Authorities to help residents experiencing financial hardship linked to rises in the cost of living, there will be restrictions in the type of support that can be provided to residents. It may also be difficult to predict levels of need and demand, and residents' expectations of support available. The funding is finite and therefore must be viewed as being part of the Government's wider package of Cost of Living support and local efforts to support residents through this period.
13.	Any requirement for changes to the administration and/or targeting of the scheme, may present practical challenges in order to mobilise internal and external resources to be fully operational. This may lead to a delay to full implementation, but officers will review the guidance and requirements and seek to implement a full scheme, following consultation with the cabinet member, as soon as is practical - once draft or full guidance has been made available.
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	
<u>Capital/Revenue</u>	
14.	Our local Household Support Fund scheme will be designed to keep within the funding provided by Central Government and will be robustly monitored via regular reports to the Household Support Fund Steering Group to ensure no overspend occurs and that appropriate returns to government to draw down funding are accurate.
15.	Reflecting on the volume of referrals received during the current phase (October 2022- March 2023), we are currently recruiting for an additional member of staff to be based in the Customer Team to take enquiries and process applications from residents who have applied for assistance through the Household Support Fund. This will be on a one year, fixed term contract at a cost in the region of £28,000, funded from the grant.
<u>Property/Other</u>	
16.	None.
LEGAL IMPLICATIONS	
<u>Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:</u>	
17.	Localism Act 2011 ('General Power of Competence').
<u>Other Legal Implications:</u>	
18.	The Council must act in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 ("PCRs") when procuring services from third parties to enable delivery of scheme objectives.
19.	The Scheme must be designed having regard to the provisions of the Equalities Act 2010 and in particular the Public Sector Equality Duty ('PSED') as set out in s.149 of the Act (the need to exercise functions having regard to the need to eliminate harassment, victimisation and

	discrimination on the grounds of protected characteristics). An Equalities Impact Assessment will be undertaken when designing the Scheme to ensure compliance with the PSED.
RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS	
20.	Southampton City Council has experience of administering previous Household Support Fund resources to residents. The new guidance brings some practical challenges and may lead to a delay to full implementation, but officers will review the guidance and requirements and seek to implement a full scheme, following consultation with the cabinet member, as soon as is practical after the 1 April 2023.
21.	Although this fund is designed to assist local authorities to help residents experiencing financial hardship linked to rises in the cost of living, there will be restrictions in the type of support that can be provided to residents. It may also be difficult to predict levels of need and demand, and residents' expectations of support available. The funding is finite and therefore must be viewed as being part of the Government's wider package of Cost of Living support and efforts to support residents through this period.
POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS	
22.	The recommendations of this report are entirely consistent with and not contrary to the Council's policy framework.

KEY DECISION?	Yes/No
WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:	ALL
<u>SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION</u>	
Appendices	
1.	Final Household Support Fund (2023-2024) Guidance
2	Equality and Safety Impact Assessment (ESIA)

Documents In Members' Rooms

1.	None
Equality Impact Assessment	
Do the implications/subject of the report require an Equality and Safety Impact Assessment (ESIA) to be carried out.	Yes
Data Protection Impact Assessment	
Do the implications/subject of the report require a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) to be carried out.	No
Other Background Documents	
Other Background documents available for inspection at:	
Title of Background Paper(s)	Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)

1.	None	
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