

<b>DECISION-MAKER:</b>	Cabinet Council
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Household Support Fund: September 2024
<b>DATE OF DECISION:</b>	<b>17 September 2024 (Cabinet)</b> <b>18 September 2024 (Council)</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>COUNCILLOR LAMBERT</b>  <b>CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES &amp; SAFER CITY</b>

<b><u>CONTACT DETAILS</u></b>			
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<b>STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY</b>		
Not applicable.		
<b>BRIEF SUMMARY</b>		
<p>The Government announced on 2 September 2024 its intention to extend Household Support Fund for an additional six months. The funding is provided to County Councils and Unitary Authorities in England to support those most in need to help with the cost of living. Southampton City Council is awaiting confirmation of the funding amount for the period from 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025, it is anticipated the amount will be in line with previous tranches of Household Support Fund and is estimated it will be in the region of £2.2 million.</p>		
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS:</b>		
Having complied with paragraph 15 of the Council's Access to Information Procedure Rules:		
<b>Cabinet</b>	(i)	To approve in principle for Southampton City Council to participate in the delivery of the next phase of Household Support Fund from 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025.
	(ii)	To delegate authority to the Executive Director Community Wellbeing to finalise the details of the local Household Support Fund scheme following consultation with the Executive Director Enabling Services and S151 Officer and the Cabinet Member for Communities and Safer City and to administer funding in accordance with that scheme.

<b>Council</b>	(i)	To approve and accept Household Support Fund for the period 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025.
	(ii)	To approve and accept future tranches of the Household Support Fund
<b>REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS</b>		
1.	This report is submitted for consideration as a General Exception under paragraph 15 of the Access to Information Procedure Rules in Part 4 of the City Council's Constitution, notice having been given to the Chair of the relevant Scrutiny Panel. The matter requires a decision under this regulation due to its urgency (that it is impracticable to defer the decision until 28 clear days' notice has been given on the Forward Plan). This is due to the timescales given between the Government announcement of funding being made available on 2 September 2024 and the period within which the scheme must be delivered between 1 October 2024 and 31 March 2025.	
2	This pledge of funding for Household Support Fund 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.	
3.	Local Authorities are yet to receive the final guidance and confirmation of actual amount of funding allocated. However, as a guide, the total allocation for Southampton City Council for the last phase of Household Support Fund (1 April to 30 September 2024) was £2,222,676.23. If the amount allocated is below £2m Council approval will not be required but a delegation to accept future funding may be considered prudent to save further last minute reports to Cabinet or Council for approval.	
<b>ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED</b>		
4.	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 and to be complementary to the Government's wider package of 'Help for Households' - cost of living support.	
<b>DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)</b>		
5.	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 'Cost of Living' crisis. This support was previously directed to Local Authorities through the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Winter fund, and the Covid Local Support Grant. This finished on 30 of September 2021 and was superseded by the Household Support Fund (HSF).	
6.	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. Locally, this funding has been used to support some of our most vulnerable households.	

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 some discretion on exactly how the funding has been used - but this has to be within the scope set out in the grant determination and guidance.
8.	<p>Previous announcements of Household Support Fund have been made at quite short notice and requirements of scheme have changed significantly between phases. These requirements can have a significant impact on how and what local authorities are able to deliver.</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30 September 2021-31 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.</li> <li>• 1 April 2022- 30 September 2022 required Local Authorities to ensure that at least one third of the available funds was made available to pensioners.</li> <li>• 1 October 2022 – 31 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.</li> <li>• 1 April 2023-31 March 2024 continued to require Local Authorities to operate at least part of their scheme on an application basis i.e. residents should have the opportunity to come forward (self-referral) to ask for support and was also extended to being able to use the funding for advice service provision - where advice was linked to HSF practical support.</li> </ul>
9.	<p>For the most recent phase (1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024), we received £2.2million and have delivered a mixed model of support to residents including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vouchers for Free School Meal eligible pupils in school holidays.</li> <li>• Self-Referral Online scheme for supermarket vouchers</li> <li>• Agency Referral Scheme for supermarket vouchers, white goods and prepayment utility top-ups.</li> <li>• Increased capacity in local projects offering practical support to tackle fuel &amp; food poverty and welfare advice provision.</li> <li>• Help with housing costs via increased funding for Discretionary Housing Payments and rent deposits.</li> </ul>
10.	We are awaiting guidance from Central Government for Household Support Fund (1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025). We will design and deliver our scheme in line with the requirements and in consultation with key stakeholders, and in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities and Safer City. A delivery plan will be submitted to the DWP and will be signed off by the Authority's Section 151 Officer.
<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>	
<b><u>Capital/Revenue</u></b>	

11.	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.
<b><u>Property/Other</u></b>	
12.	None.
<b>LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</b>	
<b><u>Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:</u></b>	
13.	Localism Act 2011 ('General Power of Competence').
<b><u>Other Legal Implications:</u></b>	
14.	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. On receipt of the guidance we will consult with our Procurement Services to ensure our delivery plan complies with PCR requirements.
15.	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.
<b>RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS</b>	
16.	Southampton City Council has experience of administering previous Household Support Fund resources to residents. The timescales between receiving confirmation of the funding allocation and the new guidance and the delivery period of the scheme 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 October 2025.
17.	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.
<b>POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS</b>	
18.	The recommendations of this report are entirely consistent with and not contrary to the Council's policy framework.

<b>KEY DECISION?</b>	<b>Yes</b>
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<b>WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:</b>		ALL
<u>SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION</u>		
<b>Appendices</b>		
1.	ESIA	
<b>Documents In Members' Rooms</b>		
1.	None	
<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>		
<b>Do the implications/subject of the report require an Equality and Safety Impact Assessment (ESIA) to be carried out.</b>		<b>Yes</b>
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>		
<b>Do the implications/subject of the report require a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) to be carried out.</b>		<b>No</b>
<b>Other Background Documents</b>		
<b>Other Background documents available for inspection at:</b>		
<b>Title of Background Paper(s)</b>	<b>Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)</b>	